Revisionist Westerns in Canadian and U.S. American Literature

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1. Excavating the Western

"Someone is always trying to bury the Western," Jim Kitses remarked in what certainly constitutes the greatest first sentence of any academic study of the Western. Indeed, burying the Western is a favorite pastime with academics and journalists alike, more popular even than resurrecting it. Consequently, according to Kitses, "[i]f a marker had been erected every time the genre's end had been proclaimed [...], the Western's gravestones would now overflow even Tombstone's cemetery, 'the biggest graveyard West of the Rockies'" ("Post-modernism" 15). Indeed, as early as 1913, decades before what we now recognize as the Western's heyday, one producer informed the then unknown cowboy actor, William S. Hart, that "movie houses were surfeited with [Westerns], and besides, they were on their way out" (Mitchell, *Westerns* 257). When critics put coffins and spades aside, they seem to enjoy another favorite activity, however, and that is writing studies of great length and detail about the recently deceased. Whereas earlier critics of the genre usually began their exploration of the Western with the observation that despite the genre's popular appeal very little had been written about it in the scholarly community, today the reverse seems the case. Compared to the mid-twentieth century the genre has lost popularity with the general public, but its appeal to critics seems unbroken. In 1977 already, Philip French in a new afterword to his study *Westerns* slyly commented on this trend:

> Professor C. Northcote Parkinson might well argue that the production of academic treatises on any given subject is in inverse ratio to the subject's continuing social importance. A sign of an area's declining importance, therefore, would be the interest taken in it by universities. Unquestionably as the number of westerns has steadily decreased so the number of books and articles about them has grown. My own is part of this flood. (126)[1]

Why then write another study of the Western?

There are several reasons to add to the large body of scholarship on the Western. To begin with, the focus of the majority of studies lies on film. In this field numerous monographs, not to mention countless articles, have been published. Among the most influential monographs examining Western films are the classic studies by Kitses,

[1] Cf. also Nachbar, Donath, and Foran's introduction to their bibliography of Western film criticism from 1974 until 1987: "during the last few years articles and books about Westerns have thrived. The first volume of this bibliography contained just under 400 entries that covered almost 75 years of Western film scholarship. This second volume covers just over twelve years of scholarship but includes more than 700 entries, almost double the amount in the first volume" (x).

French, Wright, and countless others, as well as the more recent studies by McGee, Lusted, Weidinger, and literally dozens of other critics. Especially when read alongside one another, these studies are so insightful and extensive that they leave little to add – which is one of the reasons I take film only as a cultural background in this study, drawing on a number of the aforementioned scholars' findings.

Other critics have been more interested in a more universal concept of the Western, following Henry Nash Smith's approach of "myth criticism": Richard Slotkin's monumental trilogy on the symbolic use of frontier imagery in American history immediately comes to mind, as do Cawelti's seminal studies *The Six-Gun Mystique* and his broader *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*, as well as a number of his articles, many of them collected in *Mystery, Violence, and Popular Culture*. More narrow, but no less important studies considering both film and novels have been undertaken by Jane Tompkins and Lee Mitchell, with Tompkins examining the novels of Owen Wister, Zane Gray and Louis L'Amour, Mitchell examining in more detail Cooper, the paintings of Albert Bierstadt, once again Wister's *Virginian* and Grey's *Riders of the Purple Sage*, before shifting his attention to films. Forrest G. Robinson in *Having it Both Ways* similarly reexamines classic Western novels: once again we find Cooper, Wister, Grey, and Schaefer, this time alongside Jack London's *The SeaWolf*. The general thrust seems to go in the same direction in all of these studies: a rereading of works, enshrined, so to speak, in the canon of most influential Western novels. These foundational authors are also the focus of a number of monographs, not to mention countless articles. Wister and Cooper have attracted their fair share of biographies and in-depth analyses, as have more popular writers such as Zane Grey or Eugene Manlove Rhodes.

Mitchell and Cawelti represent a trend in Western studies. They present a narrative exemplified by Jim Hitt's title *The American West from Fiction (1823-1976) into Film (1909-1986)*.[2] The story goes something like this: Westerns started out as novels, with Cooper and/or Wister laying the foundations of the genre, and writers like Zane Grey and Max Brandt cementing them into a formula. For a while other popular writers put out novels which added little to the Grey-Wister formula and more serious writers such as Vardis Fisher, Frederick Manfred or Walter Van Tilburg Clark molded the same material into a more serious art form. But somewhere along the way film took over and essentially made the Western novel superfluous through its larger public

[2] I am somewhat hijacking Hitt's title, as his focus is on adaptations of Western novels into films and the dates in his title refer to the works he examines in his study. In fact Hitt decidedly does *not* promote the vision that film has superseded the Western novel. On the contrary, he believes that "[t]he western continues to be a viable form of literature" (293) whereas he sees the Western's potential as a source for films spent or transferred to other genres like science fiction and action films, whose violence the Western cannot compete with (294).

appeal. The only notable exception seems to be Louis L'Amour, "the last of the breed" (Tompkins, *West* 205). While Western films thrived until 1970s and after a hiatus recuperated somewhat in the early 1990s, the Western genre in literature has been left moribund and at the mercy of hack writers of ever dwindling importance since the 1960s. These writers drove it to ultimate stagnation in their strictly formulaic writing (Bold, *Selling* 155-56) or in their capitalization on base instinct in the porno and ultra-violent Western (cf. Tuska and Piekarski 264-65; Marsden 56, 59; Sonnichsen, *Hopalong* esp. 22-39 and 157-75).

While many critics have a slight bias towards film, especially when looking at the last 50 years of the Western's existence, there are nevertheless a significant number of studies on the Western novel. Starting with James K. Folsom's *The American Western Novel* (1966), several writers have dedicated monographs to the Western in literature. John R. Milton, Christine Bold and most recently Jeffrey Wallmann have written general studies on the Western as literature focusing on different traditions: the 'literary' Western in Milton's case, broader aspects of its changing history and aesthetics in Wallmann's, or its role as a commodity in Bold's case. With the exception of one unpublished dissertation on parody and satire in the Western novel, Michael Cleary's "Saddlesore," and parts of Robert Murray Davis' insightful and entertaining but slightly erratic essay collection *Playing Cowboys*, there are, however, no book length criticism of revisionism in Western novels. This is more than a bit surprising, for while revisionism in Western films is a fairly well-studied field, the revisionist Western novel has attracted much less critical attention. It would be a bit of an overstatement to claim that it has escaped notice in the field; after all there are a few articles and one or two book chapters on the subject, yet the existence of revisionism in the Western novel has generally been relegated to the end of broader studies, or mentioned only in passing in overview articles on the genre. Bold and Wallmann each devote a short chapter to the Western after 1960, mentioning and briefly discussing a number of novels, Hitt has a chapter on Revisionists and one on the Modern West (though his categorization sometimes seems peculiar),[3] and Sonnichsen mentions a number of revisionist texts and writers, and Leslie Fiedler's *Return of the Vanishing American*, while supposedly a study of the Western, discusses few texts that anybody but Fielder would classify as Westerns. Richard Etulain seems to have expressed a general assumption in his article "Westerns" when, after mentioning a few Western satires in films and novels, he writes: "interest in this approach to the popular genre had fallen off during the last decade [i.e. the late 1970s and 1980s]" (331). The one field

[3] *Little Big Man* and a number of other revisionist Westerns, for instance, are discussed in a section entitled "Shadow Warriors," a chapter which starts out with Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* and includes Zane Grey's *The Vanishing American*.

where revisionism is frequently recognized and addressed with regard to Western literature is in the study of individual texts or authors such as Larry McMurtry or Cormac McCarthy. The broader connections between the various novels and their revisions of the Western genre as examined in this study, however, have previously remained nearly unexplored.

This is all the more surprising since critics have for some time now focused on revisions of the Western myth.[4] Noreen Groover Lape, for instance, in *West of the Border* does not examine the "canonical" authors mentioned above, Wister, Grey, Schaefer, Fisher, Clark etc., but rather writes a different history of the West informed by a theory of "contact zones" (following Mary Louise Pratt) and the Borderlands/frontera discourse shaped by Gloria Anzaldúa, rather than by the Eurocentric interpretation of a Westward movement of the frontier. Her focus lies on mostly lesser known minority writers. Sarah Spurgeon, Carlton Smith, and Neil Campbell have similarly tried to redirect the field while remaining informed by a myth of the frontier, broadening the area of Western studies to a wider textual corpus (in Campbell's and Smith's case a transmedial as well as a transnational corpus). By focusing on issues of the frontier, these studies examine a wide range of texts, rather than those which fall into the narrower field of the Western proper as I do in my study.[5] Thomas J. Lyon seems to

[4] Throughout this study reference is occasionally made to the Western "myth." In contrast to sociologists such as Will Wright I have no particularly strong investment in the term, however. In this thesis I am more interested in the attack of generic commonplaces in revisionist texts than in the exploration of the Western myth *per se*, a set of narrative about the West which is similar not only in films and novels, but also runs through culture more generally. It enters cultural products, such as music, advertisements, and scholarly writing, and shapes the self-perception of people living in the West. While myths are traditionally defined as narratives which explain the world as it is, or, in the sense that Murdoch and others use it, "act out conflicts [in a society] symbolically" (15; more broadly 12-23), in this thesis I use the term simply as denoting a group of assumptions held about the West as expressed in the various forms and media which (in)form the Western genre (Früchtl 20-27 explores the problems of clearly defining myth from a philosophical perspective, since most common definitions derive from an a priori assumption accrding to Früchtl). This myth has some basis in reality, but does often not represent it "objectively." While the Western myth certainly overlays and influences people's readings of the West and of themselves as Westerners or more broadly members of a Westering American nation, I do not necessarily use the term in as strong an ideological sense as Roland Barthes, who has equated myth with "depoliticized speech" (142) and explained its function as follows:

> Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact. (143)

[5] Sarah Spurgeon, for instance, describes her goal as wanting to "trace the development of various forms of the frontier myth in the works of three contemporary writers, [...] to assess its power in shaping the life, thoughts, and politics both of the nation that produced it and the rest of the world that must live with its ubiquitous, colonizing presence" (3). Similarly, Carlton Smith's study attempts "to explore the ways in which the very idea of the frontier and the West has been contested by a range of contemporary fictions" (151), and Campbell wants to explore "texts that remove us from the dominant center so that we might glimpse alternative, critical, transformative, 'virtual' (unthought/unseen)

have hit the nail on the head when in 1997 he summarized recent critic's approach in his Epilogue to the massive update of the Western Literature Association's more "traditional" *Literary History of the American West*:

> The common denominator in the new western writing and the new, revisionist western criticism is that an alternative to the frontier mentality is finally beginning to be created. The frontier mind is dualistic and casually exploitative in its attitudes toward nature, invidiously hierarchical in its approach toward women and minorities, and above all, resolutely un-self-critical. […] The frontier mind gave us the shibboleth that we had "won" the West, and also gave us an unending stream of subliterary, fantasy-fulfilling, formulaic texts. But today, western literature moves much more decisively, much more as a majority phenomenon, toward post-frontier maturity. (963)

In the face of such dismissive words and the pronouncement of a New Western criticism, how do I dare to write what must seem an almost "classic" study of revisionist Western texts, one reading literature selected on the basis that it can easily be recognized as generically Western, and one which includes for the most part texts written by white men?

The idea behind what must now seem an almost conservative selection of my corpus is not at all to return the focus of scholars to the "good old times" when the Western was still a Western. Instead my goals in this study are much humbler, and much less backward: I am happy to let Western criticism go the way it has been going, riding drag and gathering in the stray texts that have been lost on the trek, before catching up with the rest of the herd. Nevertheless, I believe it worthwhile to focus on a number of works written within the more narrowly defined generic boundaries of the Western – works which for the most part very consciously evoke the Western and its generic codes and patterns as a framework in which they undertake the revisions of such patterns. In this study I want to draw the larger lines connecting such texts, connections which, as I will show, often reach beyond national borders, examine their ideological concerns, and analyze the different approaches authors take in their revisions, looking at their successes as well as their shortcomings.

After all, if critics have long recognized the Western's ideological pitfalls and limitations, so too have authors, and one could claim with some justification that they have done so for almost as long as the genre has existed. Some writers have attacked the Western from the outside, sometimes just dealing it a blow in passing, others, women, Native Americans, and "ethnic" writers, have long attempted to write their own stories of the West, ignoring or bypassing those myths that would eventually inform the Western genre as far as they could. These texts in particular are now the

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perspectives that help reshape and question persistent grids of representation" (*The Rhizomatic West* 40).

focus of much excavation and re-examination by scholars and historians, who sometimes read them as attacks on the myth of the frontier, or the West, or even, in a stance that can only be called anachronistic, revisionist rewritings of the Western *avant la lettre*. A third group of writers, however, those whose texts form the subject of this study, have attacked, redirected or revised the Western from within the genre, often but not necessarily through parody, satire or pastiche, disguising themselves – sometimes too effectively – as Westerns in order to unmask or rewrite the genre's more troubling ideologies; ideologies which still inform American and global culture in ways which make their critical examination, as well as the examination of those texts which unmask them through parody or revision, of central concern to the cultural critic.

The existence of such works has in the past often been admitted only grudgingly. At first they seemed a nuisance to those who tried to narrowly define the traditional Western or appeared only a peculiarity to those writing a history of popular Western literature. Now they are dismissed on account of not going far enough for academics who want to transcend the classic formula-inspired Western, sometimes throwing out the baby with the bath water. To Arnold Davidson, for instance,

> even the few "good ones" [the Westerns by Clark, Waters, Guthrie, and Manfred, which Milton studies, and texts which, with the exception of Clark, are more interested in literariness than revisionism; J.F.] are still close to the formula Western largely because that cowboy still rides through them. [...] In short both forms occupy very much the same American frontier. Neither do recent parodic Westerns substantially controvert the Western formula. (*Coyote Country* 11-12)

This seems too casual a dismissal considering the vast breadth of revisionist Western novels of varying radicalism that have been written within the past 50 years, and indeed there is more to be gained from their critical study than the realization that they remain connected to the frontier and the cowboy.

A reading of Canadian and American western texts through a transnational approach as defined in the next chapter shows both "local" / national concerns in Canadian literature and trends in revising the Western which are transnational, i.e. surface across borders and thus seem to reflect concerns and attitudes about the Western and its classic ideology that transcend an American "working through" its "own" genre.

Finally, the examination of the revisionist Western closes a gap in critical discourse on the work of postmodern authors. It is remarkable how many major American authors wrote at least one revisionist Western attempting to target the formula from within in the second half of the 20th century, yet such works are seldom the source of extended critical study, and they have yet to be connected. The list of those non-Western writers who have approached the genre includes William Burroughs, Robert Coover, Richard Brautigan, E.L. Doctorow, Donald Barthelme,

Ishmael Reed, James Welch, Rudolph Wurlitzer, and Sam Shepard, who has not only dabbled in the genre in his plays *True West* and *Fool for Love* but has also acted in Westerns such as *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, the chicana comedy Western *Bandidas*, the Cormac McCarthy adaptation *All the Pretty Horses*, as well as Wim Wenders' *Don't Come Knocking*, and a number of TV Westerns. Cormac McCarthy and Larry McMurtry, both recognized as major American authors, even write predominantly within the Western genre. Even Canadian authors such as Michael Ondaatje, bpnichol, George Bowering, Guy Vanderhaeghe or most recently Patrick deWitt, have used the genre for their purposes, despite the genres American origin, a key ingredient in both the genre itself and its Canadians transnational borrowings.

1.2. The Prevalence of the Myth of the West in American and Global Culture

> Almost every American of whatever age, sex and station in life likes a good western and always has. (Luke Short, quoted in Estleman 121)

Whether or not Luke Short's quote was true at some point, it certainly does not hold true in the 21st century. While certainly many devotees to the genre remain, a major part of America seems largely blasé to it, and many academics, particularly scholars and writers of regional western literature, have long openly despised the genre proper, or at least been deeply ambiguous, trying to dissociate themselves from this unloved child, which defines "their" region in the popular imagination. They regard the generic Western with a deep ambivalence, as a narrative forced upon them by Eastern writers, yet strangely also their own. "What can you say," ironically laments Blake Allmendinger on behalf of western literature, "about a tradition that has dwindled rather than developing in artistic stature – that begins with James Fenimore Cooper and ends with Louis L'Amour?" (*Ten Most Wanted* 2).

Yet the Western not only burdens Western American writers and critics, but also America as a whole. In 1954, around the height of the Western's popularity, Horace Gregory remarked:

> As all the world knows well there is a huge, brightly colored plastic figure, large as the Thanksgiving Day puppets in a department-store street parade, which answers to the name "American Culture." It is a cowboy: it wears a ten-gallon Stetson, a red bandana around its neck, grey fox-haired chaps, a checkered shirt, and five-inch heeled boots with iron spurs, around its waist a holster dangles; it carries guns, two horn-handled, silver-mounted, sixshooters, and slung across its back a Spanish guitar; it drinks and dances, fires its guns and shouts and sings; it never copulates and seldom feeds upon its diet of griddle cakes, salt pork and beans. (Gregory 289)

Twenty years later Jack Nachbar claimed: "Westerns, especially Western movies, are thus far the single most important American story form of the twentieth century" (*Focus* 2), and almost sixty years after Gregory, there remains in Neil Campbell's estimation "a continued presence of the Western itself, a haunting presence in American culture – always resonant, contradictory, fascinating" ("The Western" 46). As the title of Richard Slotkin's *Gunfighter Nation* suggests, the figure of the cowboy still personifies American culture in a way that no other cultural icon can lay claim to. Although Slotkin argues towards the end of his trilogy that the frontier has – after hundreds of years of being the leading cultural myth of the U.S. – finally lost its power and significance to explain contemporary America, he sees at present no other myth ready to replace it: America is he claims "in a 'liminal' moment of [its] cultural history. We are in the process of giving up a myth/ideology that no longer helps us see our way through the modern world, but lack a comparably authoritative system of beliefs to replace what we have lost" (*Gunfighter Nation* 654).

In the meantime the image of the Western (in television, advertising, political rhetoric, and so on) continues, as does its deconstruction. Indeed, not everybody might like a good Western anymore, as Short claimed, but certainly everybody still recognizes one – good or bad, and the ideological reaches of the Western are still strong. Despite the genre's wane in popularity, Jim Kitses recently opined "the genre remains a strong competitor in the semiotic marketplace, de-centered but nevertheless accessible as a style and form, its iconography a rich resource" ("Post-modernism" 17), and Christine Bold and Victoria Lamont even more recently expressed the belief that the Western still "clearly dominates collective psyches in and beyond the United States, so we had better keep taking its measure" (117).

There also remains a pervasiveness of the symbols of the mythic West in American literature, which perhaps helps to explain why so many postmodern authors have turned to the genre. In Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, for instance, Kerouac's literary alter-ego Sal Paradise is obsessed with the notion of the West as a space for revelation and the essence of America:

> All winter I'd been reading of the great wagon parties that held council there before hitting the Oregon and Santa Fe trails […]. Then Omaha, and, by God, the first cowboy I saw, walking along the bleak walls of the wholesale meat warehouses in a ten-gallon hat and Texas boots, looked like any beat character of the brickwall [sic] dawns of the East except for the getup. (17)

In Kerouac's account the Beat generation, it seems, makes up America's latest frontier, even if a number of its representatives are to be found in the East. The West, however, carries a specific place in Kerouac's narrative of self-exploration and the quest for

freedom, continuing to resurface throughout the novel as the mythic space of regeneration it has represented for so long in the American imagination.

Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men* is even less a Western than Kerouac's novel, yet when the life of its narrator Jack Burden starts to fall apart, he turns not only to the road, but to the mythic West, fleeing and recounting his journey in wonderful poetic language:

> Then, after a while, the sun was in my eyes, for I was driving west. So I pulled the sun screen down and squinted and put the throttle to the floor. And kept on moving west. For West is where we all plan to go someday. It is where you go when the land gives out and the old-field pines encroach. It is where you go when you get the letter saying: *Flee, all is discovered*. It is where you go when you look down at the blade in your hand and see the blood on it. It is where you go when you are told that you are a bubble on the tide of empire. It is where you go when you hear that thar's gold in them-thar hills. It is where you go to grow up with the country. It is where you go to spend your old age. Or it is just where you go. (405-06; emphasis in original)

In Burden's narrative the West reveals many of the meanings it has carried throughout American cultural history: it is a utopian space and a place of freedom, a place of escape, as well as a place of national becoming, and history, as Burden's further ruminations reveal:

> I was moving West at seventy-five miles an hour, through a blur of million-dollar landscape and heroic history, and I was moving back through time into my memory. They say the drowning man relives his life as he drowns. Well, I was not drowning in water, but I was drowning in West. I drowned westward through the hat brass days and black velvet nights. It took me seventy-eight hours to drown. For my body to sink down to the very bottom of West and lie in the motionless ooze of History, naked on a hotel bed in Long Beach, California. (408)

In his self-exploration, Jack Burden, like so many (fictional and real) Americans, searches for regeneration in the West. His narration also reveals the ideological reaches of the narrative of the West, a universalizing meta-narrative of America, which makes the genre such a natural target for writers who see themselves as not represented in the Western's sphere, often writers – American or Canadian – who are critical of its political or ideological implications.

The myth of the West or the Western are not limited to America, however, as a writer such as Kurt Vonnegut ironically hints at. So prevalent is the genre as an image of America that when Vonnegut's protagonist Billy Pilgrim in *Slaughterhouse Five* is abducted by the Tralfamadorians and caged in a zoo, modeled after his "natural surroundings," the typical American apartment is described as follows: "There was a stereophonic phonograph. The phonograph worked. The television didn't. There was a picture of one cowboy killing another pasted to the television tube. So it goes" (81). In

Vonnegut's story the myth of the West pervades not only American culture but is so all pervasive that it has made it to outer space.

No wonder then that the genre has reached other national literatures. In Alfred Andersch's novel *Winterspelt* the chapter "Zwölf Uhr Mittags" [High Noon], begins:

> Diese Erzählung macht sich nichts daraus, zu erzählen, ob und wie es dem Major Dincklage gelingt oder mißlingt, ein nahezu kriegsstarkes deutsches Battalion den Amerikanern zu übergeben. Obwohl sie sich als Schauplatz einen zu jener Zeit wirklich wilden Westen gewählt hat, kann sie sich nicht entschließen, zum *Western* zu geraten. Kein finsterer Engel wird am Schluß auf einen metaphysischen Schurken zugehen und seine Smith & Wesson eine halbe Sekunde früher ziehen als jener. (63; emphasis in original)

Andersch's novel in its emphasis that it is *not* a Western makes an important distinction, which, curiously, critics of the West sometimes overlook: while the West as lawless / violent space can be anywhere, even on the western front of the Second World War in the 1940s, a story of the West or one of violent conflict does not automatically become a Western, nor does the appearance of a cowboy in a book or film immediately turn it into a Western, although it might well play with this allusion to the Western. There are other elements that make a story of the frontier a Western, elements such as Andersch's "dark angel" and his "metaphysical villain," elements which I define in chapter 2.

While the American invention of the Western impacts many national cultures, including contemporary American culture, Canada has a special relation to the genre, because it has a special relation to America as a whole. Even more so than other parts of the world, Canada has for the longest time lived in America's cultural shadow. While the Canadian West shares much of the same geography and some of the history with the American West, as I will explore in chapter 2, Canada does not have a Western tradition. As I will argue, the Canadian Western exists as a transnational borrowing in a postmodern interchange of cultures. It frequently becomes part of the larger trend in Canadian postmodernism to borrow from U.S. culture in order to rewrite American texts for a Canadian environment and thus set Canada off from the U.S., often in the form of a specifically Canadian "Mild West" myth which stands in opposition to America's Wild West, as explored in chapter 3. Despite this rhetoric, as well as Canadian critics' continued attempts to set off Canadian literature of the West from American texts (e.g. Sherrill Grace's "Northern" or Davidson's examinations in *Coyote Country*), Canadian authors do not necessarily create texts radically different from those written in the United States, but share some of the same ideological concerns which also lead American authors to rewrite the Western. A transnational approach as undertaken in this thesis can highlight such contingencies.

1.3. Central Goal and Organization of this Thesis

The central interest of this thesis is to examine which elements of the Western are revised in (postmodern) literary works, how this revision is undertaken, and what the effects of such revisions are. The corpus consists of both American and Canadian texts, most of them part of a "highbrow" culture, which appropriates the Western as part of the turn to popular genres in postmodernism.

While critics have recently highlighted revisionist or dissenting voices in alternative frontier narratives, as well as in classic Westerns (e.g. Robinson's *Having it Both Ways*), the Western as a whole still remains associated with much less progressive thought. As Patrick McGee writes,

> the Western has often been described as a conservative film genre, one that stresses extreme versions of masculinity and individualism and that is certainly one of the inspirations for the cowboy mentality of the Reagan White House and now the second Bush Family White House. (*From Shane* xiv)

McGee continues to point out that there is another more progressive side to the Western, a point critics like Philip French have upheld for a long time. Yet the classic ideology associated with the Western is that of a backward genre which informs American imperialism, racism, patriarchy, homophobia, and other reactionary and / or aggressive mindsets. The laying bare and attacking of such ideologies within the Western is one of the central aspects revisionists North and South of the border are interested in. Their revisions allow them not only to transform the genre, but also to direct their critique at similar trends and mindsets within the larger complex of American or Canadian culture, or aspects of historiography which have not received adequate attention.

In examining the texts I focus on, I am interested in the subversive potential of revisionist Westerns, and one of the guiding questions of this thesis is how successfully the genre can be "turned against itself" or rewritten within its own generic regime. It will become apparent that there are limits to the degree of revisionism possible when an author stays within the Western genre. Ultimately the Westerns I examine always work in the area of conflict Robert Murray Davis describes when he discusses Ishmael Reed's novel *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down*:

> Whether or not in practice it is possible to use myth at all and not be in some sense bound by and to it, theoretically it is possible, and obviously it is possible to loosen the bonds and play with them, even to do rope tricks like Loop or Reed in *Radio*. Whether or not the method works, and it is difficult to make any method work in or out of literature, depends upon its embodiment in the individual work. ("Scatting" 420)

The revision of the Western in the second half of the 20th century should not be understood as a progressive history. Many texts from roughly the same time are vastly different in the ways they function or in their principal targets and concerns, while they share similarities and in some instances intertextual connections with texts from an earlier or later period. In examining the texts under discussion I have chosen to organize this thesis around key concerns, rather than temporally. Often the connecting lines between texts transcend national boundaries in an effort to reclaim or unmask similar ideologies underlying the West of myth. The approach I take is thus transnational, comparing the appropriation and rewriting of the Western within U.S.-American literature to the rewriting of the Western in Canadian literature, which is always transnational, as I argue in chapter 2.

I start my examination with a chapter in which I explore the basis of the Western as a narrative of the American frontier and define both the classic "formula" Western, which as an archetypal text lies at the center of a model of family resemblances modified by genre theorists such as John Frow, and the revisionist Western as related to this "ideal" Western through family resemblances. Uncovering a history of revisionist Westerns, which is almost as old as the genre itself, helps to clarify that revisionism is a mode of writing rather than the last step in the evolution of a genre as which it has often been seen, even if revisionism as a dominant mode only fully arrives in the 1960s. I end this chapter by exploring the theoretical basis of a transnational approach which informs this thesis and its study of revisionist Westerns from the U.S. and Canada, as well as the different history and mythology of the Canadian West, which informs the critical distance with which Canadians approach the genre.

For the remainder of my thesis I examine in more detail four areas central to the Western myth, areas of ideology which many of the texts analyzed in this study engage. The areas revised are the construction of a national identity in the Western (chapter 3), the exclusion of non-whites, as exemplified by African American characters (chapter 4), the construction of Native Americans as a savage "Other" (chapter 5), and the construction of a heroic male protagonist (chapter 6). I finally draw a brief conclusion and provide an outlook for the further study of the revisionist Western in a larger transnational framework (chapter 7).

CHAPTER 2
APPROACHING THE (REVISIONIST) WESTERN

2.1. Defining the Western

> The Old West is not a certain place in a certain time, it's a state of mind. It's whatever you want it to be.
>
> Tom Mix.

Almost everybody feels they have a clear understanding of what makes a Western. The Western has at some point in the twentieth century become an omni-present narrative and its spell is not yet broken, although the heyday of the classic Western has passed. Philip Loy claims that "Westerns were significant in the socialization process of youngsters and adults in the middle quarter [sic!] of the twentieth century. Westerns reflected, reinforced and helped to shape values, attitudes and behavior patterns" (3). What Loy says is certainly correct (at least from a non-mathematical perspective), and holds true even beyond the time period he studies. The Western myth, although not celebrated as uncritically as it has been in the past, is still a concept that in its various forms is universally recognized in the 21st century, and will likely continue to have an impact for quite a while. The Western has been a major presence in many media. These media have mutually influenced each other, not only in their production but also in the public's perception, as Jane Tompkins mentions:

> The media draw on each other: movies and television programs are usually based on novels and short stories; conversely, when you read *Hondo*, you're likely to think of John Wayne. So when I say "Western" I mean everything from a comic book or a fifteen-minute radio show to a feature film or a full-length novel. What matters is not the medium but the identity of the imaginative world. (7)

I share a similar understanding. Although my thesis is limited to written texts, the background against which the texts I study set themselves off is very much a transmedial construct, the Western myth / narrative, expressed in a given text which refers back to an earlier group of texts in multiple media: novels, (radio) plays, television, cinema, comics, advertising, and so forth.

Contrary to what one might assume the iconicity and omni-presence of the genre has not resulted in an uncontested or universally accepted definition of the Western in the scholarly community. As countless critics have remarked, the genre is much harder to grasp than it might seem at first. Part of the reason is certainly the genre's long history during which it has remained fairly stable in some respects while changing significantly

in others. Before trying to reach a workable definition of the Western it is thus helpful to recount its origin and evolution.

2.2. Origins and Evolution of the Western as a Mythic Narrative of the American Frontier[6]

When it comes to the origins of the Western and its formula there are two major beliefs, which could be called the "Wister school" and the "Cooper school." While many critics agree that *The Virginian* (1902) is to be considered the basis of modern formula Westerns,[7] it seems to make sense to combine the two approaches and go back further to the works of James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking novels to find the basic setup of the frontier story, while paying particular attention to the changes in Cooper's setup that were implemented around 1900, the time of the Western's inscription into popular culture in its "Wister" form through countless films and popular novels inspired by The Virginian. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that neither Cooper nor Wister, nor any other single person, can lay claim to having "invented" the Western. While both Wister's novel *The Virginian* and Cooper's novels, particularly his Leatherstocking novels, *The Pioneers*, *The Last of the Mohicans* and *The Prairie*, had an immediate impact in terms of their commercial success, wide reader base and the number of

[6] In criticism that concerns itself with non-generic Western literature, the term frontier is very much contested. Most critics, e.g. Annette Kolodny in her article "Letting Go of Our Grand Obsession," have heavily criticized the concept of a frontier as ethno- or even Anglo-centric and simplistic. The concept does not do justice to a more multi- or transcultural America, and ignores many instances of first contacts, e.g. between Native tribes, non-English settlers and Natives, etc. It thus implies a onesidedness which does not adequately reflect the mutual influence taking place during the historical settlement of North America. Most critics therefore prefer Marie-Louise Pratt's concept of a contact zone as a site of transculturation, in Pratt's words, "the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish on-going relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (6).

Such a transfer of methodology and terminology is certainly necessary for a transcultural exploration of (early) American literature as undertaken by Kolodny. The frontier as a concept is, however, so deeply ingrained in the Western genre's oppositions and ideology that a change of terminology would not only seem inadequate, but could indeed be seen to obliterate the Western's colonial legacy. From its inception, the Western is almost always concerned with a frontier society in the Turnerian sense with all the ideological baggage that term carries. It constructs the colonial contact zone exactly as the meeting point between "savagery" and "civilization" as which Frederick Jackson Turner defined it, even if the frontier that defines the society depicted is not necessarily Turner's westward moving line; more loosely defined, "frontiers" exist in the texts I examine between corrupt civilization and "pure," "untouched," regenerative nature outside it, as in the case of Edward Abbey's elegiac Western *The Brave Cowboy*, which is set in a 20th century populated by cars, or on the extraterrestrial frontier of Jonathan Lethem's *Girl in Landscape*.

[7] Cf. for example: Cawelti's claim in *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel*: "[W]e can begin the history of the modern Western with Owen Wister's novel *The Virginian*" (2). Norris Yates disagrees, stating that Mary Hallock Foote's *The Led-Horse Claim* (1883) could "with some justice […] be labeled the first formula Western." (11). Mitchell claims that it was less Wister's novel than its adaptation into a stage play that formed the basis of the Western formula, as explored below.

imitators they inspired when they were first published the "invention" of the Western should be regarded as a gradual and transmedial development with a number of milestones and influential popularizers, a fair number of whom worked in media other than literature. Among the most influential shapers of the myth were authors such as John Filson, James Fenimore Cooper, Bret Harte, Ned Buntline (Edward Zane Carroll Judson), Edward Wheeler, Owen Wister, Zane Grey, Max Brand (Frederick Faust), and others, actual frontiersmen turned public spectacles in semi-fictional accounts or stage dramas of their lives, such as Daniel Boone, Kit Carson and Buffalo Bill, cowboy / frontier painters such as Frederic Remington and Charles Russell, as well as landscape painters such as Albert Bierstadt, historians and public figures Frederick Jackson Turner and Theodore Roosevelt, and finally, at the beginning of the 20th century, countless film makers and actors. In the following I want to mention some of the most important figures in this process.[8]

Jon Tuska and Vicki Pieckarski claim:

> The opening of the American West was heralded in two pseudo-epic poems, *The Mountain Muse* (1813) by Daniel Bryan and *The Backwoodsman* (1818) by James Kirk Paulding. These were followed by the first three novels in James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking saga, *The Pioneers* (1823), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), and *The Prairie* (1827). (240)

Despite their innovation and centrality, Cooper's novels, however, did not come out of a cultural void. Cooper's reliance on the Scottish novelist Sir Walter Scott as a literary model has been widely discussed, and as far as his equally important frontier origins are concerned Richard Slotkin has stressed Cooper's reliance on earlier (female) models as diverse as the captivity narrative and the domestic novel (Slotkin, "Introduction" xx and *Fatal* 86-100), as well as accounts of earlier heroic pioneer stories such as Filson's account of Daniel Boone's exploits. Elsewhere Slotkin has traced the development of the myth of the frontier, a central ingredient of the Western, back to colonial times (*Regeneration*). Denise Mary MacNeil recently reiterated the by now well-established line of authors to develop the frontier hero from Mary Rowlandson's famous autobiographical captivity narrative, *The Soveraignty & Goodness of God, Together, with the Faithfulness of His Promises Displayed; Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restauration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, to John Ford's Ethan Evans over Cooper and some of his predecessors, Unca Eliza Winkfield and Charles Brockden Brown.[9]

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[8] My account will have to be brief and exclude or only mention in passing a number of important figures. A more in depth discussion can be found in Richard Slotkin's monumental frontier trilogy and David Murdoch's short but stimulating *The American West: The Invention of a Myth*.

[9] Why exactly MacNeil chooses Brown over John Filson's account of Daniel Boone, which for most critics since Henry Nash Smith remains the more central text, remains a bit of a mystery. Cf. H. N. Smith 51-58; Wallmann 11 and elsewhere. Slotkin identifies as the probable source of the rescue of Alice and Cora "the rescue of Daniel Boone's daughter in 1776, as related by John Filson and others"

The importance of his sources and predecessors notwithstanding, Cooper certainly presents a better starting point for a brief exploration of the Western's origins than most. According to Richard Slotkin,

> [f]ew writers have so deserved the name of literary pioneer, and few have had his influence on the mythological vocabulary and generic structure of their culture's literature. He was not the first to call for a national literature drawing on American materials and values – Charles Brockden Brown preceded him by a quarter of a century. But no American writer before Cooper made so extensive use of the materials of American history, none created works that enjoyed equal popularity and respectability, and none sustained so large and thematically coherent a body of work. (*Fatal* 81)

Cooper's novels bring together many of the ingredients of the classic Western formula. Cooper's works feature a frontier hero who walks between two oppositional worlds, "wilderness" and "civilization," and protects the latter. Nevertheless he refuses to become a part of this world, and eventually and elegiacally brings about the end of the purer, but at the same time more savage and dangerous, wilderness, a world represented by his companion, the tragic vanishing Indian, Chingachgook, the "last of the Mohicans."[10] Looking for the origins of the Western in Cooper's rather than Wister's work has several further benefits: the tradition of the dime novels, which is too often left out in accounts of the 20th century Western or presented as a primitive pre-Western, can be incorporated into its history. As Christine Bold remarks: "From about 1860, imitations of Coopers fiction appeared with such frequency and popularity that the pattern [of the competing forces of wilderness and civilization] became established as a formula" (*Selling* xii). Even in this early and highly conventionalized environment the formula is not set in stone, however – a fact which as long troubled those trying to closely define such a formula. Changes reflect not only individual author's treatment of their subject matter, as Bold shows, but more broadly serve to keep the Western up-to-date, upsetting the direct and simplistic equation of one formula with one (conservative) ideology that was popular with cultural critics for a while. Careful examination shows the mutual influence of the Western on society and vice versa:

> Details of time, place, and character receive different emphases in different cultural milieux. For example, when the Western region came to be seen as an alternative to the industrialized

(„Introduction" xx). In *Fatal* Slotkin discusses both Brown and Filson. MacNeil, however, curiously mentions neither Filson nor Smith.

[10] Like most authors writing on Westerns, I will use the term Indian rather than the often prefered terms Native American / First Nations when talking about Native characters in the white imaginary. Most characters of Native American or First Nations descent portrayed in Westerns fulfill a stereotyped function as either a threat to white society or noble sidekicks. This function is more closely connected to an Other constructed by white writers / film makers in Natives than to actual First Nations tribes or peoples whose tribes supposedly provide the basis for their depiction. To use the term Native Americans for these stock characters would seem inappropriate at best (cf. for instance Berkhofer and Francis, *Imaginary Indian* who also draw this distinction).

> East at the end of the nineteenth century, the fictional West changed from Cooper's untamed wilderness into a virile, healthy society. Later, when the actual West did not seem to be living up to its promise, the fictional scene became a symbolic, fantastical West in which heroic characters enforce traditional morality. Later still, as modern corporatism was seen to be erasing traditional values, popular fiction came to emphasize the elegiac quality of a West in which individualism has been destroyed by the powerful social forces of modern life. (*Selling* xii)

When seeing Cooper as the father of the Western, other "peculiarities" are explicable, too. In a transnational perspective, Karl May's Teutonic Westerns of the late 19th century, many of them predating Wister's *Virginian*, become explicable, as do Stephen Crane's parodic Western short stories.[11]

The dime novelists take an interesting role in the popularization of the West, and the transformation of the "Cooper formula." Their importance to the Western lies not so much in their writing, which, according to most critics, provided no real development, but rather simplified Cooper's models by removing willful ambiguity, relying on "a kind of cultural shorthand, legible thanks to the popularity of Cooper and his imitators" (B. Brown 33), but in their wider role within culture. In fact, as Brown suggests, the dime Western does not rest easily in a purely formal and textual history of the Western as a narrative of America, and could instead be read as a "hick up" in Cooper's and Wister's attempts to create a uniquely American narrative. According to Brown, the dime Western

> disengaged the story of the West from the story of the nation. Turner's frontier thesis, along with novels like Owen Wister's *The Virginian* and Theodore Roosevelt's history of the West, can thus be reread as efforts to repair the dime novel's damage to the Leatherstocking tradition and, in the name of official history and dominant culture, to reclaim the West from the pages of the Western. Phrased somewhat differently: though we can write a coherent history of the Western that begins by jumping quickly from Cooper's *The Pioneers* to Wister's *The Virginian*, it is by reading the mass market fiction between those novels that we begin to see how fragile that coherence was. (14)

Dime novels can not only be held responsible for the creation of another major popularizer and shaper of the Western myth, Buffalo Bill, the protagonist of Ned Buntline's dime novel *Buffalo Bill, King of the Border Men*, and his later stage shows as well as the mythologization of several recurring characters in later Westerns, Wild Bill Hickok, the James brothers, Billy the Kid, etc., they also contributed significantly to the entanglement of the Gordian knot of fact, myth and fiction that is the American West of the late 19th century by mythologizing a number of historical Westerners during their lifetime. The interrelation between life and fiction became so confusing that even

[11] Elsewhere I have discussed Crane's short stories "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" and "The Blue Hotel" as Westerns *avant la lettre* ("Stephen Crane's Westerns.").

Kit Carson, one of the dime novel's early heroes, supposedly could not tell his life apart from the myth surrounding it, a peculiarity occasionally also used in the revisionist Western for comic effect (cf. chapter 6). According to Murdoch, when Carson was shown the cover of a novel dealing with his fictional exploits, Carson is supposed to have stated: "That thar might be true but I hain't got no reckerlection of it" (34).

The Western's ascension from the pages of the dime novel to its status as a national narrative rested on what Richard Etulain has called one "of several cultural strains in American history surrounding 1900" ("Historical Development" 718/76). According to Etulain, Brown and others, the West worked as projection space for Eastern anxieties, a place of freedom and meaning in the face of a number of rapid changes after the end of the Civil War. These anxieties resulted from countless factors: industrialization, urbanization, an increasing awareness of immigration, and the consolidation of a full-scale capitalist society with an unequal distribution of wealth, labor conflicts as well as an agricultural depression, resulting in political protest from farmers in the West and elsewhere. According to Murdoch, "[t]o the paranoia which lurks never too far beneath the surface of American political thinking, the Republic of Virtue was under siege from within, the American dream was turning into a nightmare" (Murdoch 20). As a reaction, a number of artists turned to the West "[t]o recapture a past that was less coercive and less dominated by the city, the immigrant, and the worker" (Etulain, "Historical Development" 719/77). The West worked as a window to a seemingly simpler and purer national past. Furthermore it seemed like an area where an individual could "make a difference," where traditional values were upheld and so forth. According to Etulain,

> [c]onfronted with a present and future that conjured a diminished individualism, they embraced instead, a region in popular literature that was the last opportunity for democracy, individualism, and decency. The West, to these Americans, was more than a satisfactory symbol; it was an attractive emotional experience. ("Historical Development" 719/77)

Around the turn of the twentieth century, the stage was set for a major transformation of the image of the West. This transformation was pivotal in the establishment of the Western as a major genre in the first decades of the twentieth century. Around the turn of the century, the time period the Western takes as its setting is significantly shortened; the Western now becomes linked to the latter half of the nineteenth century, the time of the vanishing frontier. Around the 1890s the West seemed to come to a turning point, an "end" even, an idea expressed most clearly by the Census's declaration of an end of the frontier, which Frederick Jackson Turner based his Frontier speech on. "The chilling conviction that a West, a land linked with fredom [sic], space, and opportunity was rapidly vanishing, nourished further the interest that earlier writers and thinkers had engendered" (Etulain, "Historical Development"

718/76-77), adding nostalgia to the mix of emotions associated with the West. As Bill Brown remarks,

> [t]he commercial value of the West – for fiction and film – resides in the movement between proclaimed absence and textual presence, in the nostalgic portrayal of an image and era marked as passing if not passed. In other words, while an authentic West is reported absent, its authenticity remains insistently present, to the point of being internalized within the visual and literary culture of the East – indeed, seemingly internal and central to America itself. (3)

During this time, the prototypical Western hero changed from Cooper's trapper and his numerous clones to a set of characters associated with a closing frontier, foremost among them the chivalrous cowboy, a relatively late arrival among dime novel heroes. The setting is similarly transformed from Cooper's woods to the vast plains, deserts, mountains or islands of civilization of the trans-Mississippi West (cf. B. Brown).[12]

Most important, however, was the West's transformation in the 1890s and 1900s from a cultural backwater to a space defining the American nation, a point I will explore in more detail in the next chapter. In most cultural historian's accounts of this transformative process looms a triumvirate of mythmakers, who mutually informed and reinforced each other's vision. These are the painter Frederic Remington, the novelist Owen Wister, and the historian and politician Theodore Roosevelt. A look at an early version of Wister's *The Virginian* perfectly serves to illustrate the close connection between literature, painting and broader culture: it was dedicated to Roosevelt, and ten years later rededicated to "the greatest benefactor we people have known since Lincoln" (5), and the first illustrated edition was graced by a number of paintings by the "other cowboy painter" Charles Russell (Murdoch 89), whereas Theodore Roosevelt's *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail*, and Wister's earlier stories in *Harper's* were illustrated by Remington. Much ink has been spilled on these three "dudes" and their journeys West, their subsequent reinvention of both the West they encountered and their own personals. Neil Campbell draws the connection between Roosevelt, Remington and Wister, and their reliance on the "Cooper model":

> Turner and his contemporaries Roosevelt, Frederic Remington, and most significantly for fiction Owen Wister, develop[ed] tropes that circulated across disciplinary boundaries [...] reinforcing the nation's creation story with patterns already active in dime novels and Fenimore Cooper, ready-made for countless future fictions: civilization versus savagery; an intermediate hero working between these opposites; regenerative violence involving capture, flight and pursuit; inevitable progress; struggles over judicial law and "moral" law; the industrial and agricultural; past and future; and all taking place within spectacular landscapes with an all-pervasive masculinity at its center. ("Western" 38)

[12] Jane Tompkins has discussed the significance of the desert in *West of Everything* (72-83).

Cooper proved a major influence not only on writers like Wister, but also on mythmakers in other media. As Slotkin writes,

> Roosevelt was imaginatively engaged by the literary mythology of the Frontier, especially Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*, and he favored historians like Francis Parkman, who portrayed history in Cooperian terms as a real-life "romance" in which heroes representing national virtues test and vindicate the character of their people in "savage war." While Turner went east to think about frontier economics, Roosevelt went west to his Dakota cattle ranch to escape personal grief and disappointment by living out his Hawkeye fantasies as a frontier hunter. (*Gunfighter* 33)

In his writing, Roosevelt casts "men who know Indians," to borrow Slotkin's term, such as Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, and Kit Carson into the role of "winners" of the West. His contemporary Frederick Jackson Turner by contrast reserved this role for more ordinary "heroes": the valiant Jeffersonian yeoman farmers.

Another key ingredient in both Roosevelt's and Wister's account of the West which would later have a lasting influence on the Western is the perception of its inhabitants as Anglo-Saxon (cf. also chapter 4). Roosevelt, Remington and Wister, as well as their contemporaries Turner and Remington, saw the West in terms heavily informed by Social Darwinism. Especially Wister and Remington were involved in recasting the cowboy, as Dieter Rünzler puts it in his monograph's title, "vom Rinderhirten zum amerikanischen Helden." The cowboy thus becomes – in contradiction to many of the historical facts surrounding his existence – the essential American in the eyes of an anxious Eastern audience: self-reliant, valiant, individualistic, manly and particularly in Wister's account white and Anglo-Saxon, a veritable knight of the range. In Roosevelt's, Wister's and Remington's accounts, the winning of the West is portrayed as a struggle between individuals and races with the fittest coming out victorious. With a rhetoric of action such as, "[i]t is the doer of deeds who actually counts in the battle of life, and not the man who looks on and says how the fight ought to be fought" (quoted in Boatright 165), Roosevelt, although by no means a nineteenth century Arnold Schwarzenegger, reinvented himself as a doer and real man. Roosevelt – like his friend Wister – found the image he strived for in the cowboy.[13]

[13] In his amusing opinion piece "Theodore Roosevelt: An American Sissy" Gore Vidal comments on Roosevelt's childhood as a "sissy" suffering from asthma attacks and poor health. "Unlike the sissies who now make violent movies celebrating those who kill others, Theodore was a sissy who did not know he was one until he was able to do something about it" (789). His attempts to do something about it, in Vidal's accounts, included not only putting on weight but also shooting every creature unlucky enough to cross his parh: "Give a sissy a gun and he will kill everything in sight. TR's slaughter of the animals in the Badlands outdoes in spades the butcheries of that sissy of a later era, Ernest Hemingway. Elks, grizzly bears, blacktail bucks are killed joyously while a bear cub is shot, TR reports proudly, 'clean through ... from end to end'" (793; ellipses in original). Like Mussolini and Churchill, the writers / politicians he most closely resembles, according to Vidal, Roosevelt was "a sissy turned showoff." All followed the path of "Napoleon Bonaparte, whose eagerness to do in *his* biological superiors led to

At the time his friend and Harvard classmate Roosevelt was playing cowboys, Owen Wister, another "dude" with an Ivy League education, more carefully stayed away from too much actual "manly" activity (or too much travel in the less civilized parts of the West) on account of his poor health. Wister, the observer, nevertheless further contributed to the image of the cowboy as a national hero by elevating the Western from its dime novel ghetto into the realm of "serious" literature. Bill Brown states: "Owen Wister's *The Virginian* (1902) demonstrated how elements of the genre could be reconfigured into 'serious' fiction, as though the West's new historical centrality, certified by Turner and Roosevelt, required a less marginal (and marginalized) medium for its novelistic depiction" (40).

Like Roosevelt, Wister was a firm believer in a white, Social Darwinist West. This attitude is especially blatant in his 1895 article "The Evolution of the Cowpuncher" in which he glorifies the West, paints the cowboy as the true American hero, and frets about an East which, in his view, has been corrupted by Jewish brokers and "encroaching alien vermin, that turn our cities to Babels and our citizenship to a hybrid farce" (331).[14] The West in contrast is kept pure through the "joyous battle of self-preservation" (335), which keeps both rider and pony healthy, and saves the Anglo-Saxon cowboy from degenerating into something as "small" and "deceitful" as his original, the South American *vaquero*. "Seventy-five dollars a month and absolute health and strength were his wages," moons the sickly Wister (Ibid). Such ideas also inform Wister's most famous and influential creation, his cowboy novel, *The Virginian*, a novel which by 1938 had sold more than 1.5 million copies (Durham and Jones 225). Although the novel's ambiguities, complexities, its slow development and episodic nature are often overlooked or explained away by critics who read the novel to find elements of subsequent Westerns in it, as recent scholarship has tended to stress (e.g. the essays in Graulich and Tatum, Mitchell's *Westerns* 95-119, and Robinson's *Having* 41-54), it nevertheless remains pivotal in the establishment of the Western genre. Mitchell has remarked upon an often overlooked cultural historical detail, which he sees as more central to the Western genre's further development than the novel itself. This was the almost immediate stage adaptation of Wister's novel, which, according to Mitchell,

> avoids ambivalence and simplifies plot, in the process highlighting the very conventions for which Wister's novel would be considered prototypical. The novel, in other words, raised expectations for a genre it did not actually quite define, prompting readers to exceed the text in their own reconstructions. (*Westerns* 96)

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such a slaughter of alpha-males that the average French soldier of 1914 was markedly shorter than the soldier of 1800" (796).

[14] In light of such and similar proclamations it seems more than a bit ironic that Wister's ravings over the corrupt East should – like his early short stories – first appear in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, published in New York City, perhaps the most Eastern of cities.

Consequently, what the novel "seemed to say" was more important for the further development of the genre than what it actually says, according to Mitchell (Ibid. 97-98).

The last of the group, Frederic Remington, "shared many of Roosevelt's and Wister's biases and commitments" (Slotkin *Gunfighter* 95). Among these were his contempt for "Jews, Injuns, Chinamen, Italians, Huns – the rubbish of the earth" (quoted Ibid 97). Like Roosevelt and Wister, Remington, too, seems to have had "a weakness for murderers," as one of Roosevelt's friends remarked on the politician (quoted in Boatright 169). In his writings, Remington held the "moral law" of saving civilization over petty institutions like civil law or the Law of War (Slotkin, *Gunfighter* 100). In fact, Remington not only illustrated publications of texts by both Roosevelt and Wister, Wister and Remington also mutually inspired each other in their art and world views during the 1890s:

> For a few years after their meeting Wister and Remington stimulated each other, each reinforcing the other's views about the threat of immigrants, the decline of America, and their hopes for the West as an alternative to the labour strife and "mongrelization" they saw in the East. (Shulman xxiii; cf. also Tatum "Pictures")

Remington's most lasting contribution, however, is not in his political writings, but in his paintings, with their emphasis on action and adventure. Here, too, the emphasis lies on aspects that appeal to the Social Darwinist. Consequently, in Remington's paintings the battle between men or between man and nature, as well as nostalgic depictions of Native life, take center stage. Unlike Wister, however, Remington did not, according to Peter Hassrick, accept the notion "that the cowboy was the noble descendant of the Anglo-Saxon knight." Hassrick adds: "[W]hile many of Remington's cowboys fit Wister's prototype, just as many did not. In his paintings and stories Remington included *vaqueros* (Hispanic cowboys) and also paid tribute to the black soldiers of the U.S. Cavalry" (140).

The views expressed in their various media and genres by Wister, Roosevelt, and Remington were complimented by another central document pondering and celebrating the frontier around the turn of the 20th century, Frederick Jackson Turner's speech at the 1893 World Congress of Historians during the Chicago World's Columbian Exhibit, which saw the first expression of his now famous "Frontier Thesis." In the long run, as influential in its domain as the work of Wister, Remington and Roosevelt, Turner's speech and later article, originally delivered to a rather unenthusiastic audience, proclaimed the frontier as central in American history and culture, and suggested the creation of a new American character on and by the frontier.[15] Of course the idea of a

[15] For an extensive discussion of the historiography of the Turner debate see Matthias Waechter's *Die Erfindung des amerikanischen Westens*.

frontier shaping America was not particularly original even at the end of the 19th century, popular culture had toyed with many of the ideas expressed by Turner for years. Henry Nash Smith, for instance, reads Turner's thesis as an expression of the myth of the garden (250-60). New Western historian Richard White likewise reads Turner's statements less as a revolutionary historical proclamation than an expression of a common sentiment: "Theodore Roosevelt, wrong about so many things, was correct enough when he credited Turner with having 'put into shape a good deal of thought that has been floating around rather loosely'" ("When Frederick Jackson Turner" 48; cf. also Ridge 81 and Slotkin *Gunfighter* 29). Nevertheless, Turner's thesis is remarkable for its impact on historiography, as well as other academic disciplines, and American thought in general, as Martin Ridge upholds: "Frederick Jackson Turner's brief essay 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History,' is the most logical choice for the most influential piece of historical writing" (74). After Turner's theory "escaped the academy and entered the marketplace of ideas," it was embraced by the public, since

> it made sense to the average citizen because it elevated the achievement of ordinary settlers [...]. It provided a usable history for a people who were increasingly aware of their emerging role in world leadership and equally self-conscious of the brevity of their national identity. (82)

Despite his lack of cowboys and adventure, Turner, just like Roosevelt or Wister, offered a national mythology, "a reason for national uniqueness" (83).

Wister's literary success, Roosevelt's influence as a politician, public cowboy and historian, Remington's and Russell's impacts as painters, and Turner's rise to the top of his profession notwithstanding, the most influential popularizer of the West at the end of the nineteenth century, inside as well as outside the U.S., was perhaps Ned Buntline's invention, "Buffalo Bill" Cody (cf. Murdoch 22-23). Cody's "Wild West" mixed historical characters who were past their heyday and significance in reality, such as Sitting Bull, the leader of the Sioux in their defeat of General Custer, with invented frontier characters like Annie Oakley, a trick shooter from Ohio who had rarely been to the West except to perform there. The show included reenactments of historical battles and put them next to fictional, generic episodes straight out of the pages of a dime novel, such as a stagecoach pursued by Indians. This mix became in Buffalo Bill's Wild West a heroic and mythic narrative of a Wild West.

The show produced "a master narrative of the West as finished and culturally significant as Turner's own," according to Richard White ("When Frederick Jackson Turner" 47). In his version of the winning of the West, Cody put a central emphasis on the "Indian threat," a stereotype also present in dime novels and early Westerns, giving

America's history his own peculiar slant, slightly different from Roosevelt et.al.'s triumphalist Social Darwinism:

> Indians were everywhere in Buffalo Bill's Wild West. […] The role of the Indians in the show was to attack. […] Buffalo Bill offered what to a modern historian seems an odd story of conquest, for it is an account of Indian aggression and white defense, of Indian killers and white victims, of, in effect, badly abused conquerors. These reenactments open a window onto a particularly interesting aspect of the American iconography of the frontier. […] The great military icons of American westward expansion are not victories, they are defeats: the Alamo and the Battle of the Little Big Horn. We do not plan our conquests. We just retaliate against massacres. (Ibid. 52-53)

While Buffalo Bill's version of history in his "Wild West" is fascinating, an apologetic version of Roosevelt's Social Darwinist frontier thesis, his autobiography is even more so. In David Murdoch's words, "Buffalo Bill" Cody "has the unique distinction of being invented by a dime novelist and then re-inventing himself" (36). Not only did Buffalo Bill become an actor, entrepreneur and showman in his Wild West, he also went back and forth between his shows, the dozens of dime novels featuring him as a character, his decidedly dime novelistic autobiography and his exploits as an army scout, a connection that has fascinated scholars at least since Smith's time:

> [I]n the summer of 1876, when Cody fought his much publicized duel with Yellow Hand and took "the first scalp for Custer" under the eyes of newspaper correspondents, he wore a costume that must have been taken from the wardrobe of his theatrical company. It consisted of black velvet, slashed with scarlet and trimmed with silver buttons and lace. These costumes, fictional and actual, illustrate the blending of Cody with his theatrical role to the point where no one – least of all the man himself – could say where the actual left off and where dime novel fiction began. (H. N. Smith 108)

In Jane Tompkin's words Cody, "spent the last half of his life playing out the first half theatrically" (*West* 7).

Buffalo Bill's Wild West, better than any other version of the West, exemplifies a central aspect of the West as presented in the Western: the inextricable link and mutual influencing between myth, reality and history, which countless authors have commented on, and which recently has also reached historians' accounts (cf. Robinson's "Clio Bereft of Calliope"). The idea of a clear separation between history and myth in either account seems to lose currency,

> because the West has become so overlaid with legend, it is popularly assumed that a stripping of its mythic veneer would reveal the "real" West. Nothing could be less true [...]. The West surely created myths, but myths themselves just as surely created the West [...] and it is for this reason that the real West can be seen as what Archibald MacLeish called "a country in the mind." (Bergon and Papanikolas, quoted in Rio "Challenging" 69)

Indeed this "country in the mind" and the dissolution of the boundaries between "truth" and "fiction" it relies on was promoted not only in autobiographies, newspaper accounts, and dime novels about famous frontier characters, as well Buffalo Bill's Wild West, but can also be traced in the early film industry, a central distributor of the Western myth and genre. As Bill Brown has argued,

> [t]he early history of motion pictures is inseparable from the Western genre. Thomas Edison filmed acts from Buffalo Bill's Wild West show in the 1890s; for Edison, Edwin S. Porter directed and photographed *The Great Train Robbery* in 1903, demonstrating the power of editing to produce melodramatic narrative. By 1920 the cinema had produced new Western heroes (Broncko [sic] Billy [Max Aronson], Tom Mix, William S. Hart), while the Western had attracted the most powerful producers and directors (Thomas Ince, D. W. Griffith, Cecil B. De Mille). (39)

Murdoch similarly stresses cinema's importance to the Western genre's success: "Above all the Western myth had the cinema. The film industry seized on the myth, amplified it and added to it" (23). While I cannot go into detail in the framework of this thesis, cinema's impact as a carrier and shaper of the Western myth should be noted. It significantly contributed to the intermingling of history and fiction in the form of hiring former frontier characters or performers in Wild West shows, such as Tom Mix, as advisors and actors, a notion sometimes explored in the revisionist West, e.g. Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Englishman's Boy* or Richard Slotkin's *The Return of Henry Starr*.

While the impact of cinema on the Western in fiction is certainly large, the mutual influence of fiction and film in the genre's early years remains yet to be fully explored. For fiction two other key actors should be mentioned, since they turned the strands of myth into a formula which would be produced and reproduced countless times. Whereas Owen Wister "provided all of the western heroes to come with the secret basis of their authority and glamour" (82) as Marcus Klein has claimed, another writer, Zane Grey and his successor as king of the purple page, Max Brand, cemented the Western hero, his connection to the land and his action-packed adventures into their most popular packaging, becoming the genre's "systemizers": "While Wister chose not to repeat the successful pattern of *The Virginian*, Grey used the formula again and again in his numerous Westerns" (Etulain, "Historical Development" 719/77). Particularly Grey's 1912 novel *Riders of the Purple Sage* "firmly established the shape of the modern formula Western" (Mitchell, Introduction x). Grey thus played an equally pivotal role to Cooper and Wister in the shaping of the genre in its popular literary form, as Mitchell argues:

> At issue here is not the birth of separate genres. Doyle cannot be credited with the invention of detective fiction, any more than Grey can be charged with having thrust the Western upon us (it is enough that both authors adapted elements from their predecessors to fix the separate genres into shapes by which we know them best today). (x)

Until the frontier narrative became the Western as we recognize it in the first decade of the 20th century, it has certainly come a long way, from its late 18th century predecessors, over Cooper's early 19th century novels, its countless imitations and popularizations in the dime novels and traveling shows, to its refocusing into a national narrative in Turner's, Roosevelt's, Remington's, and Wister's accounts and its formalization in early Hollywood movies as well as Grey's and Brand's pulp novels.

2.3. Defining the Western Genre and the "Formula Western"

As countless critics have remarked, accurately defining the Western is nearly impossible. In one of the more poetic moments in the history of this intellectual struggle, Richard Etulain commented on this frustrating task: "Attempting definitions of the Western is like trying to shovel fleas through a barn door – more escape than are captured" (Etulain, "Historical Development" 717/75). Even John Cawelti, who has shoveled fleas for years, eventually becoming the academic to most persistently attempt to define the genre, had to admit what comes close to defeat in the latest edition of his classic *The Six-Gun Mystique*:

> Defining the Western is a complex process […]. [Some] would argue that there is no single way to define a Western and that the genre consists of works that are connected by resemblances between elements rather than overall patterns. I'm more and more inclined to agree with the "family resemblance" school. (*The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* 9)

Other influential critics such as Jim Kitses and Philip French have suggested that the genre is so broad and open to reinterpretation that there can be no sufficient definition of the Western per se. The Western according to French does not constitute "a consistent body of mythology" but is "a great catch-all arena" (Rev. of *Six Guns* 126). Kitses similarly is wary of a strong definition and expresses his idea of a definition rather vaguely: "The model we must hold before us is of a varied and flexible structure, a thematically fertile and ambiguous world of historical material shot through with archetypal elements which are themselves ever in flux" (*Horizons West* 16). His conclusion is reminiscent of Cawelti's suggestion:

> Attempts to define the genre usually involve a futile erection of fences, attempts to designate the ins and outs. Increasingly, a notion of genre as an extended family of shared tendencies and resemblances, although inevitably at the mercy of normative models, family law, as it were, seems attractive. ("Post-modernism" 19)

A major problem for those trying to establish a genre definition is the relative ease with which most attempts at a definition of the Western genre – or for that matter any

large and diverse genre – can be frustrated. Skeptics argume that specific definitions are prescriptive or informed by prior assumptions, flawed by the ignorance of certain texts, or based on other texts which have been proclaimed, more or less arbitrarily, as key texts in the genre, and canonized within, in this case, Western studies. The objection that the genre is just too large and diverse seems especially popular among those who refers to postmodern heterogeneity and postmodernism's disbelief in clear boundaries and distinctions, including the oft-quoted collapse of the distinction between "high" and "low" culture, which postmodernism, in a somewhat arrogant "view from the top," claims to have achieved.

Such problems and objections are by no means singular to the Western. They are problems genre theorists have struggled with for the longest time. It is thus helpful to look at the problems these theoreticians have seen and the solutions they have suggested.

2.3.1. Problems of a Genre Definition

In one of the most influential attacks on the concept of genre, Jacques Derrida called into question what he refers to as "the law of genre." In his essay Derrida targets structuralist critics' attempts to "scientifically" lay down the rules or laws of genre, exemplified by Gérard Genette, whom Derrida uses as a straw man for the first parts of his argument. The argument he makes applies equally well to a narrow approach to defining the Western genre.[16] According to Derrida,

> [a]s soon as the word "genre" is sounded, as soon as it is heard, as soon as one attempts to conceive it, a limit is drawn. And when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind: "Do," "Do Not" says "genre," the word "genre," the figure, the voice, the law of genre. (56)

This, of course, does not bode well with the poststructuralist agenda of targeting supposedly fixed concepts. Indeed, what Derrida engages in for the first part of his essay is what David Duff has described as "dramatising – in order to subvert – the authoritarian undertones that attach to traditional critical discourse about genre, while simultaneously parodying modern structuralism's quest for the 'laws' of literature" (219). Unsurprisingly, Derrida finds that there is always an impurity in "the law of genre," an observation which leads him to coin the phrase of a "participation without belonging,"

[16] Although not immediately relevant to the present discussion, it should be mentioned that Derrida has a much broader understanding of genre than most of his contemporaries. He understands genre not only as describing printed matter, but mentions also, for instance, "a biological *genre* in the sense of *gender*, or the human *genre*" (56), a notion that – owing in part to the French word *genre* as denoting both genre and gender – has attracted some interest in the study of gender in genre studies. For Derrida genre seems to be a stand-in for all types of (strict) classification, it "concerns delimitations, the drawing of lines of demarcation and separation, forming types, kinds, classes or categories in general" (Collins 56).

a concept he explains as "a taking part in without being part of, without having membership in a set" (59).

There is a second part of Derrida's argument in which he assumes that "genre," like other classificatory systems, needs an "identifiable recurrence of a common trait by which one recognizes, or should recognize, a membership in a class" (63). He continues: "[I]f a genre exists [...], then a code should provide an identifiable trait and one which is identical to itself, authorizing us to determine, to adjudicate whether a given text belongs to this genre or perhaps to that genre" (64). Not only does Derrida's "search" for such an "essence" of genre in a shared trait bring to mind Wittgenstein's similar thoughts about the nature of language, discussed in more detail below, it also leads Derrida to a deconstruction of the category of genre by focusing on what he calls the "re-mark." This "re-mark" is a mark, such as the word "novel," Derrida's example, which often appears under the title of novels published in France or Germany. According to Derrida this is where the "law of genre" is selfdefeating and contradictory, as David Duff explains, "because the textual signals which indicate membership of a genre cannot themselves be part of that genre" (219), being at the same time on the inside and the outside.

Since its publication Derrida's critique has invited equal amounts of applause and criticism. John Frow sums up a common critique when he states: "For all its productive ambivalence, Derrida's argument participates in a familiar post-Romantic resistance to genre" ("Reproducibles" 1627). David Duff makes a similar point, putting Derrida in a line of critics who violently reject genre in order to "free" the individual text (15). This line starts with Romanticism's rejection of the strict Neoclassical laws of genre, and runs through the 20th century in the work of such critics as Benedetto Croce or Maurice Blanchot, whose *La folie de jour*, a text written specifically to upset common classifications of genres, is the example Derrida uses as the basis for the second part of his article (cf. Duff 5-6, 15).

As noted, Derrida's treatment of genre tends to overemphasize staticness and prescriptive approaches, while ignoring more flexible approaches. As Ralph Cohen argues in his article "History and Genre," Derrida's criticism of the authoritarianism and inherent paradoxes of genre does not hold water if one adopts an evolutionary model of genres. Such evolutionary approaches have been proposed by the Russian formalists in the early 20th century, and have more recently been the favored approach of most genre theorists, including Cohen. According to this school of thought genre is not so much a question of law as a process: "Genres are open categories. Each member alters the genre by adding, contradicting or altering constituents, especially those of members most closely related to it" (88).

The idea of an evolution within the Western genre is as old as Western studies themselves. From Robert Warshow's classic 1954 article "Movie Chronicle: The Westerner" onwards, critics have time and again tried to point out an evolution within the genre. Their pitfall has always been that of setting off an earlier "classic" group of films against more contemporary Westerns. In his article "Shoot-Out at the Genre Corral," Tag Gallagher has attacked the evolutionary models proposed by Warshow and Andre Bazin, and taken over by John Cawelti, Philip French, Jack Nachbar, Thomas Schatz, Will Wright, Frank McConnell, and Leo Braudy as too simplified and not based sufficiently in an empiric viewing of earlier films. Gallagher remarks:

> It is a curious testament to the continuing vitality of the western that Warshow back in 1954 found differences between early-1950s and pre-war westerns almost identical to those which critics like Schatz and company detect a quarter-century later between westerns of the 1970s and early 1950s. Perhaps older westerns, like olden times, will always strike the modern mind as less complex, less amoral, and above all less vivid. (247)

As Gallagher argues, as early as 1907 "people thought that the western was too much a parody and concerned only with its own conventions" (250); the genre was, in other words, showing generic self-awareness, a trait that evolutionary critics tend to attribute to a post-classic stage of an increasing sophistication after the genre's forms have been sufficiently mastered.[17] Despite their shortcomings, however, such studies have contributed to an awareness within Western studies that the genre is always changing and evolving, even if this evolution is more complex and less linear than most critics have suggested.

Cohen likewise points out the lack of definitiveness of generic classifications, and the critic's role in establishing them. Texts are ordered into genres by critics "for specific purposes," and a text can thus belong to different genres, contrary to Derrida's polemics. Cohen writes: "Considerations of purposes are historical; different authors, readers, critics have different reasons for identifying texts as they do. But this inquiry does not interest Derrida. Rather, he wishes to demonstrate that generic traits *cannot* belong to genres" (89-90). In light of Cohen's refutation of Derrida's critique and more flexible models of genre studies which have recently gained more and more acceptance (although having, as mentioned, been around in one form or another since at least the early 20th century), Derrida's remarks should perhaps be taken not so much as an ultimate deconstruction of any generic classification (at least not a deconstruction to end

[17] Heeding Gallagher's warning against an understanding that is teleological and linear, it thus makes more sense to see the revisionist Western as a sub genre or mode of writing of the Western rather than a stage in its historical evolution, as I will propose below.

all subsequent constructions), but rather as a corrective to the structuralist discourse Derrida witnessed in a 1970s French environment.

The model in genre studies which both Cawelti and Kitses put their stakes in is not an evolutionary model, as suggested by Cohen, but one derived from Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of family resemblances. It does indeed seem the most useful model to define the genre as a whole, being equally open to additions or evolutions, although in the present study I adopt a more hierarchical modification of Wittgenstein's model to define a generic "core," defined as a "formula," a set of typical generic elements and clichés the revisionist texts I study refer back to.

Introduced into genre studies in the 1960s, the model of family resemblances has the benefit of being open enough to encompass a flexible and diverse genre such as the Western much more convincingly than a traditional model of hard rules and narrow borders. The idea of "family resemblances" was developed by Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations*, a book directed in part against his own earlier *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. In examining the nature of speech and categorization Wittgenstein now saw himself faced with the impossibility of finding a characteristic common to all aspects of a seemingly simple and obvious concepts like games, one of the examples he chooses in § 66 (Wittengenstein's other prominent example are numbers). Unable to find a common trait in games as diverse as card games, ball games, and fighting games, he developed the concept of "family resemblances" ("Familienähnlichkeiten"). Wittgenstein explains his problems as follows:

> Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all, – but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all "language." (Wittgenstein § 65, emphasis in original)[18]

Wittgenstein goes on to explain that looking at the possible definitions of the various games "we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing" (§ 66),[19] and concludes:

> I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than "family resemblances;" for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, feature, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc., etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way. (§ 67)[20]

18 Statt etwas anzugeben, was allem, was wir Sprache nennen, gemeinsam wäre, sage ich, es ist diesen Erscheinungen gar nicht Eines gemeinsam, weswegen wir für alle das gleiche Wort verwenden, – sondern sie sind miteinander in vielen verschiedenen Weisen verwandt. Und diese Verwandtschaft, oder dieser Verwandtschaften wegen nennen wir sie alle "Sprachen."

19 Wir sehen ein kompliziertes Netz von Ähnlichkeiten, die einander übergreifen und kreuzen.

20 Ich kann diese Ähnlichkeiten nicht besser charakterisieren, als durch das Wort „Familienähnlichkeiten"; denn so übergreifen und kreuzen sich die verschiedenen Ähnlichkeiten, die zwischen den Gliedern einer Familie bestehen: Wuchs, Gesichtszüge, Augenfarbe, Gang, Temperament, etc. etc.

In Garth Hallett's words, Wittgenstein thus "exorcises the myth of uniformity," and instead dwells "on the fluidity and freedom of language" (140). A genre concept informed by family resemblances has obvious benefits or, depending on the critic's position, weaknesses: It circumvents strict – and ultimately unsustainable – genre boundaries informed by thinking patterns such as Derrida's "law of genre," but it also blurs the sharp borders between genres which genre theorists are interested in.

As a consequence of its lack of definitiveness and ability to draw sharp definitions, the shares of the concept of family resemblances seem to have fallen within genre studies. Its opponents always decried it as the lazy man's solution, charging its proponents with not even trying to find a suitable definition of a given genre (cf. Fishelov 124). Recently, however, even its supposed proponents seem to have grown wary of the fuzzy borders and denial of uniformity deriving from an acceptance of family resemblance in genre studies. As in other fields, followers of "cognitive" approaches have taken over for the time being and, according to John Frow, "refined" the "family resemblance" model into a model of classification by prototype (cf. Fishelov as an example):

> Rather than having clear boundaries, essential components, and shared and uniform properties, classes defined by prototypes have a common core and then fade into fuzziness at the edges [...]. This is to say that we classify easily at the level of prototypes, and with more difficulty – extending features of the prototype by metaphor and analogy to take account of non-typical features – as we diverge from them. [...] The judgement we make ("is it like this, or is it more like that?") is as much pragmatic as it is conceptual, a matter of how we wish to contextualise these texts and the uses we wish to make of them. (*Genre* 54)

This approach, while appearing to Frow as a refinement of Wittgenstein, to me seems more like a return from Wittgenstein's philosophical model to an earlier more structuralist model, although a refined and less rigid model. The notion of a prototype, an original text at the center of a generic cluster, seems like a return to the Platonic ideal, in the form of a pure and original generic text. This school's belief in certain archetypal or original texts, e.g. *The Iliad* as the prototype of the epic, whose rules *The Aeneid* follows, while the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is so far from the original that it could also be read as a religious narrative (Frow, *Genre* 54), seems untroubled that it transfers institutional hierarchizations made by critics and readers to supposedly cognitive processes. It ignores, if it stays within such a narrow paradigm, more flexible and politically conscious approaches which take into account fluctuations and modifications over time to reflect a society's tastes, mutual influencing of genres, etc.

Despite these caveats, for the present study a model of classification by prototype as outlined above seems useful, considering that I am interested not in the evolution of

a single genre or in establishing an all-encompassing definition of the genre's present status, but rather in examining texts which very self-consciously write against what is in essence already a meta-textual construct: "the Western," an abstract set of rules and conventions, an archetype in fact, rather than a concrete sample or an exhaustive collection of texts.

In this context I believe it feasible to assume that both writers and readers have not concrete texts in mind, but rather a number of archetypal or stock plot situations, settings, characters, props and so forth which have become associated with the typical Western. Such situations, characters, props, etc. have frequently been discussed under the label of the genre's "formula" by critics of the Western. What distinguishes the present study's interest in genre or the "Western formula" from earlier studies' interests is its focus on the functions of genre not as a prescriptive sets of "laws" for producers of texts in the Neoclassical sense, but as part of a discursive structure that focuses on its function as part of a "generic contract" between text / producer and reader. It is central for an examination of revisionism to consider the use an author can make of this knowledge of the "rules" of a genre by including generic cues to communicate to the reader that a text is of that genre, then subverting traditions and expectation resulting from these cues and the generic knowledge they invoke. In a way radical revisions of a genre always position themselves in an area where they wilfully function according to what Derrida has called "participation without belonging" (59; quoted above), i.e. they participate in that genre without being swallowed by it. As Neil Campbell explains:

> Derrida suggests generic forms like the Western do not have to destroy their precursors in order to function critically, since the generic process "interrupts the very belonging [to a genre] of which it is a necessary condition" (in Kamuf 1991:259). From within the genre, as the post-Western I am defining here, form folds outward whilst maintaining a vital connecting tissue to its "inside", allowing relation, reflection, *and* critical interaction simultaneously. ("Post-Western Cinema" 3-4)

On top of acknowledging this Derridean participation without belonging, or an appropriation of the genre which makes the genre "stammer," in Deleuzian terms, as outlined below, my interest in genre is in keeping with Alistair Fowler's questioning of genre. In his influential study *Kinds of Literature* Fowler inquired after the role of genre: "If genre is of little value in classification, what then is it good for?," then answered his own rhetorical question as follows: "it is a communication system, for the use of writers in writing, and readers and critics in reading and interpreting" (256).[21] This is in fact a central consideration when a text explicitly marks or even markets itself as a Western,

[21] Jonathan Culler in his *Structuralist Poetics* seems to have a similar understanding of genre, identifying it as one of the means of "naturalizing" a text. According to Culler, genre makes texts understandable by accessing previous generic knowledge.

and a number of its effects rely on it being read and understood as a Western. This is the case for the majority of the revisionist texts I discuss, many of which very self-consciously place themselves within, while simultaneously setting themselves off against, the genre they participate in without wholly belonging to it.

2.3.2. Defining the Western

The Western's high iconicity and the easy recognizability of many of its key elements outlined below (2.3.3.) make it one of the genres easiest to evoke. While its frequently recurrent action patterns, characters, settings and so forth seem to make it easy to define at first, closer inspection of actual texts usually frustrates common sense definitions intended to delimit the genre's boundaries. Despite the amount of scholarly work devoted to the Western in its various aspects and forms there is, therefore, very little consensus about a final definition of the Western. While everybody seems to agree that there is a Western genre, the question of how to define the genre (and if one should attempt to at all) is much more contested.

Much of the work of defining the Western has been done by critics examining Western films. As in other fields, film critics have overall been more ready to embrace genre as a concept. Film theorist Barry Langford, for instance, has expressed the belief that "genre remains an essential critical tool for understanding the ways that films are produced and consumed, as well as their broader relations to culture and society" (vii). In dealing not only with texts which are openly generic in their appropriations of a popular genre, but also target a myth which has for most of the 20th century been highly transmedial and found many of its most iconic representations in Western films, the present study draws on the thoughts of Western scholars, even if they have focused exclusively on films. These film critics have often targeted the genre with approaches that are at once focused, concrete, and broad enough to be able to encompass the production of cross-medial generic codes.

In literary studies, in contrast, writers and critics have often run into problems resulting from a lack of clear terminological distinction between regionally and generically Western texts, a confusion relating in part to the overlap between and mutual influence of the two fields. Peter Bischoff goes as far as arguing that the popular and literary Western genre are so inextricably linked that it is impossible to clearly distinguish them. Nevertheless, a number of writers and critics, particularly in the years of an emergence and self-discovery of non-popular Western literature, have tried to dissociate themselves methodically from the popular Western, a genre which unfortunately shares name, region and history with the West's newer "serious"

literature. Wallace Stegner in 1967 attempted to draw a distinction between the popular Western and

> another kind of western story-telling which is not mythic but literary. This literature is western with a small *w*, and only the fact that it all takes place west of the 100th meridian permits us to put it under one rubric, or to put this class of writing beside the Western. ("History" 61)

Etulain similarly distinguishes "writers of *Westerns*" from "authors of *western novels*" ("Historical Development" 717/75; emphasis in original), and John R. Milton, seemingly unaware of Stegner's or Etulain's earlier attempts, came up with the same idea, only with reverse capitalization, differentiating "a novel of the West which can be called, simply, a western, [...] from another kind of novel, also of the West, which is more literary and which deserves a separate name such as the Western (capitalized) novel, or the Western regional novel" (2). The Western Writers of America similarly gave out its annual price, the Spur Award, in various categories, differentiating in the years from 1988 to 2006 between one award for "Best Western Novel" (originally "best novel") and one for "Best Novel of the West" (originally "Best Historical Novel").[22] None of these suggestion stuck and the terms are as confused as ever.

In this study I will focus on the Western in a narrower sense. It seems telling, however, that most of the revisions I examine are illustrations of the blurring of the boundaries between "high" and "popular" culture, which has caused critics so much frustration. Most are appropriations of the popular Western by non-Western authors – often authors who in most their works are Western neither in the generic nor the regional sense.

Contemporary critics have for the most part abandoned detailed attempts to define and classify the Western. Instead many now favor a very wide (sometimes vague) understanding of the genre or, more frequently, give no definition at all. Jim Kitses contrasts Bazin's and Warshow's earliest, narrow definitions of the classic Western with recent critical attempts: "Those who claim that all Eastwood films are essentially Westerns suggest just how far the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction" (*Horizons West* 3). Indeed, such approaches are commonplace. Patrick McGee for instance reads Quentin Tarrantino's *Kill Bill* as a Western, and Arnold Davidson reads a number of Canadian novels such as Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* and Thomas King's short story "The One about Coyote Going West" as Canadian new / not quite Westerns based primarily on the fact that they were written by Western authors and take place in the West. Similar ventures into the exploration of texts that deal with the

[22] It seems an indication of Western writer's new comfort with the popular Western that these awards are now renamed "Best Western Short Novel" and "Best Western Long Novel," respectively, and thus no longer try to draw a distinction between "serious," regional, and "popular" generic literature.

frontier, but are not necessarily Westerns in a narrow sense, have been undertaken by Sarah Spurgeon, Carlton Smith and numerous other critics.

While such approaches which read texts that are not clearly coded as Westerns in relation to the genre often yield interesting results, they also run the risk of providing a limited or limiting reading of a text that is much more than a resistance to the Western and its codes. I suggest that, should the goal indeed be to transcend the Western, as such critics frequently claim, we should find a critical concept to replace the Western, one which explains new writings from the West, especially by nonCaucasian writers, in terms that are not rooted in a traditional understanding of the frontier as codified in the Western genre. In such readings there frequently is a misunderstanding of a central function of genre, as Jim Kitses has noted:

> What such a formulation ignores is the classic structure of agreement between film and filmgoers [or text and reader; J.F.], the institutional nature of genre that includes the audience as part of the system of production. In such a system, genre conventions function as a means both of meeting audience expectations and of organizing their experience and comprehension of the film. (*Horizons West* 3)

In essence this means that even if a critic, filmmaker or author describes a film or book as a Western, "the questions remain of how the dominant conventions of these various films position the audience and which genre – if any – provides the most relevant context for their reading" (Ibid. 4). In generically ambiguous films or novels there are always different generic markers competing and some might be more recognizable than others.

In 1966, James K. Folsom in one of the earliest major critical studies on the Western novel defined Westerns as "those books which deal primarily with the trans-Mississippi West," but his decision seems more pragmatic than anything, for as he allows: "I cannot pretend to have thought out a theoretical definition which would magically cover all Westerns and simultaneously exclude all other books" (*American Western Novel* 34). While Folsom's definition is meant to limit the area covered in his study, such a simple definition is too broad and unfocused to be helpful for an examination of texts that explicitly engage the Western within its own generic boundaries, for it would blur the corpus of texts and the questions asked of these texts. Ironically, Folsom's geographical definition is also too limited, for it would exclude a text such as Jonathan Lethem's *Girl in Landscape* set on the extraterrestrial frontier. For the purpose of this study it seems advisable to look for a more specific definition of the genre.

My definition of an ideal or "formula" Western, a term I will explain below, is that of an adventure story set between the mid-19th and the early 20th-century in the trans-Mississippi American West. The setting is usually a "frontier" environment,

imagined as a meeting place between "savagery" and "civilization." This setting "generates certain kinds of crises which involve certain kinds of characters and call for the intervention of a particular kind of hero," as John Cawelti has argued (*Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* 9). Within this definition, cowboy, outlaw, and gunfighter Westerns are subtypes, certainly the most recognizable Westerns, but not the only possible ones.

Following Frow's "modified" version of Wittgenstein's family resemblance model, such a Western would be an imagined ideal, a text that would be positioned in the center as an "archetype." I will, however, also regard as (revisionist) Westerns those texts that bear a family resemblance to the "ideal" Western, even if they are temporally and / or spatially removed from the Western's typical frontier location, but consciously pick up or refer to a number of key elements of the classic Western as central to their setting or action. Such elements could include a modified version of a frontier, as a dividing line between the main characters and an "Other," stereotypical characters or character constellations (e.g. cowboys and outlaws or Indians), plot structures (e.g. the town tamer, the cattle drive), prominently include key scenes (e.g. the shootout), "Western" ideology (usually as a target of parody), and so forth. To get a clearer grasp of these targets of revisionism it seems worthwhile to look at elements that recur in many Westerns, elements which scholars have seen as making up a formula of the Western.

2.3.3. Recurring Elements of the Western and the Critical Construct of a "Formula Western"

> [The Western] is an art form for connoisseurs, where the spectator derives his pleasure from the appreciation of minor variations within the working out of a pre-established order. One does not want too much novelty: it comes as a shock [...]. Indeed, that kind of novelty is absolutely necessary to keep the type from becoming sterile; we do not want to see the same movie over and over again, only the same form.
>
> Robert Warshow, "Movie Chronicle: The Westerner."

There are certain aspects, elements, and plot structures which seem more central and iconic than others in the Western, and which have been used repeatedly to try to define the genre. Richard Etulain, for example, attempts such a definition:

> [T]he Western is an adventure story, set in the West with major emphasis on action and romance. Its characters are nearly always strictly controlled; that is, they frequently fit into "good" and "bad" categories and are rarely complex or ambiguous. [...] Few writers of Westerns are interested in analyzing or in questioning accepted standards of morality. In fact, they most often want to confirm middle class standards; this being the case, they write within a closed society of rigid restriction. In Marshal McLuhan's terminology the Western is a *hot* medium, offering the maximum entertainment with the minimum involvement and complexity. As John Cawelti has pointed out recently, the narrative structure of most Westerns is like a game: the good man pitted against the bad man on a field of competition that is definable and predictable. The game operates under a set of rules that are clear to all those involved in the game – and to the reader. ("Historical" 718/76; emphasis in original)

It bears noting that Etulain's description, particularly the dichotomy between "good guys" and "bad guys," applies only to the most commercial paperback Westerns. Even a casual glance through classic A Westerns, reveals a greater ambiguity and complexity, and consequently a greater interest. The John Wayne character Thomas Dunson in Howard Hawks's *Red River* (1948), for instance, functions as a "bad guy," yet his character is more complex. Walter van Tilburg Clark's classic Western *The Oxbow Incident* is very much engaged in a questioning of "accepted standards of morality," as are other texts such as Oakley Hall's *Warlock*. Fred Zinneman's *High Noon* (1952) is clearly double-voiced and can be read in multiple ways, and the list could go on *ad infinitum*. Even Zane Grey's *Riders of the Purple Sage*, one of the genre's most classic texts, is in many respects deeply ambiguous and selfcontradictory. Granted, many of these instances result from Grey's shortcomings as a writer, it is, however, ultimately his lack of the clear ideology many critics have seen as underlying the Western that makes the text's breaking points explicable. Wister's *Virginian*, itself a complex text, in many respects carries a clearer ideology than Grey's pulp novel.

Certainly the most ambitious attempt to identify and categorize the elements that make up a Western has been made by John G. Cawelti.[23] Cawelti's goal has been to establish what he calls a "formula" underlying the popular genre of the Western. The assumption in Cawelti's work – one which informed much of early popular culture criticism – is that popular fiction depends more heavily on certain narrative structures than other kinds of literature. The writer of pulp fiction draws on the various elements of a formula of a popular genre like the Western or the mystery story and expands them to create a unique tale within that genre's boundaries, adding his invention to the generic convention (as opposed to the creator of an individual nonformulaic piece of art in "serious" literature).[24] A brief and rather broad definition of a formula reads as follows:

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[23] John G. Cawelti major works on formula fiction and the Western are: *The Six-Gun Mystique*, *Adventure, Mystery, Romance*, and the recent reworking of his earlier monograph as *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel*, as well as some essays many of which are collected, introduced and put into their historical context in Cawelti's essay collection *Mystery, Violence, and Popular Culture*.

[24] The critical concepts formula, genre, and archetype are defined and discussed in detail in Cawelti's *Adventure, Mystery, Romance*, esp. 5-50. More recently Cawelti has reconsidered his earlier model and questioned the link of formula to popular culture. In his "Formulas and Genre Reconsidered Once Again," he states:

> [I]t could be said that there are formulaic aspects to almost any sort of literature [earlier Cawelti names Shakespeare and *Ulysses* as examples], just as there are probably aspects of artistry or creativity in the most tired of standardized romances and mystery stories. [...] I have concluded that formula is not characteristic of a particular level or type of literature, but a feature of all literature, and that to pay attention to formula is simply a specific way of reading or analyzing. (131-32)

"A formula is a conventional system for structuring cultural products" (*Six-Gun Mystique* 31). More specifically with regard to fiction Cawelti writes:

> The formulas are the patterns within the genres, such as revenge tragedies, bildungsromans, hard-boiled detective stories, or gunfighter westerns, that have become widely recognized through their frequent use in many different examples of the genre. Most major genres have a considerable number of formulas and often give rise to new formulas for a variety of reasons. ("Formulas" 133)[25]

Unsurprisingly, the concept of formulae has been questioned since it gained currency in the late 1960s and early 1970s,[26] not least by Cawelti himself (e.g. *Mystery* xii and "Formulas"). Nevertheless, it seems helpful to outline the elements Cawelti has described as constituting the "formula" in order to get a feeling of a set of the most frequent elements and clichés of the genre (or some of its most iconic subgenres) – the generic core as it were – and thus identify those elements most obvious as targets for revision or parody, as well as the ones which most clearly communicate to the reader that she is reading a Western, even if there are predominant elements of other genres at work in a given text. Even the most experimental postmodern revisions and parodies of the Western, where they do not target one specific novel or movie like Jonathan Lethem's take on *The Searchers* in his *Girl in Landscape*, draw upon and modify – to a greater or lesser extent – such an "ideal" Western.

The Western formula is best broken down into different elements working together: specific elements of setting, archetypal characters, and recurring situations or "patterns of action."[27] Cawelti's initial attempts at defining the formula was in a rather restrictive framework: "A Western that does not take place in the West, near the frontier, at a point in history when social order and anarchy are in tension, and that does not involve some form of pursuit, is simply not a Western" (*Six-Gun Mystique* 31). As Cawelti has since realized this is more than a bit of an oversimplification.

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[25] As far as I can tell, in Cawelti's model, formulae are smaller units than genres, which can be "virtually universal" like tragedy or comedy or "more historically and culturally limited" like westerns or realistic novels ("Formulas" 136), whereas others might refer to such conventions as the bildungsroman as subgenres, this concept does not seem to exist for Cawelti.

[26] Cf. for instance Walker's criticism of the generalizing tendencies of readings for a formula, which is reminiscent of similar objections launched against e.g. Frye's archetypal criticism:

> [B]ooks – even popular Westerns – if they are to keep their integrity as books, cannot be the objects of such analysis. Suppose I find that a certain novel reduces to a certain formula. What do I then know about the book? Very little, since most of its bookness has been stripped away and tossed into the trash bin. (731/89)

[27] While bringing in other critic's work and some of my own objections and qualifications, I will in large part of this subchapter follow John G. Cawelti's analysis of the Western formula as developed in his classic *Six-Gun Mystique*, and refined in its revised edition *Six-Gun Mystique Sequel*.

Nevertheless, it hints at several important aspects of the Western. The space of action Cawelti talks about ("near the frontier") is perhaps the most basic element of setting, since this setting defines the Western:

> For me, the Western is essentially defined by setting. I refer here not so much to a particular geographic setting like the Rocky Mountains or the Great Plains, but to a symbolic setting representing the boundary between order and chaos, between tradition and newness. It is this setting which generates certain kinds of crises which involve certain kinds of characters and call for the intervention of a particular kind of hero. And all of this is related to America and what was once its sense of itself and its destiny as a New World. (*Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* 9)

Jim Kitses identifies a number of oppositions (or dialectical pairs) along the "master binary opposition" of wilderness and civilization with the individual, nature and the West and their respective traits such as freedom, purity, savagery, equality, etc. on the side of wilderness, the three complexes community, culture and the East and their respective traits (institutions, restriction, corruption, class) on the side of civilization (*Horizons West* 12). In Kitses's view these oppositional pairs allow "a pluralist vision," which can "account for the diversity of forms" of the Western (Ibid. 12, 13). Kitses's

> dialectical scheme positions the Western hero between the nomadic and the settled, the savage and the cultured, the masculine and feminine. This interplay of ideas accounts for the charged racial and sexual dynamics of the genre, wherein the Indian and the woman can be constructed principally as archetypal agents that define the hero's direction. (Ibid. 13)

While compelling in theory, many of Kitses's oppositions collapse onto themselves. It is once again Zane Grey's *Riders of the Purple Sage*, which shows that the clear opposition of man/West and woman/East, for instance is not as rigid as it seems. While this dichotomy more or less works for Lassiter and Jane Withersteen, the second pair of characters, Venters and Bess, reverses it. Bess is frequently identified with the wild land whereas Venters, we are told, "had hated the wilderness – the loneliness of the uplands" (Grey 93). The land is indeed gendered in Grey's novel, which often depicts it in sexually charged ways, a frequent feature in American literature as Anette Kolodny has shown in *The Lay of the Land*, but it is "simultaneously female and male," as Lee Mitchell shows in his insightful introduction to Grey's novel (xix). Tellingly, Venters and Bess in the end flee to the East, upsetting another convention of the Western.

In Cawelti's account, the proximity to the frontier functions

> as "meeting point between civilization and savagery[,]" because the clash of civilization ("law and order") with savagery, whether represented by Indians or lawless outlaws, generates dramatic excitement and striking antithesis [sic] without raising basic questions about American society or about life in general. In the Western formula savagery is implicitly understood to be on the way out. (*Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* 20)

When taking the broader concept of a "meeting point between civilization and savagery," rather than the more specific and narrow one of a nineteenth century Western frontier, as the setting, the formula can account for films and books that are clearly Westerns but are not set in the nineteenth century or in the American West. Cormac McCarthy's novels for instance function according to the same basic setting, only are the borders between civilization and savagery not so much a civilized East versus a Wild West as a civilized U.S. versus a wild Mexico. Similarly in Edward Abbey's *Brave Cowboy*, as in many other Westerns, "savagery" is found in the "civilization," with the hero upholding a purer state. Especially in more complex Westerns, the boundaries are blurred, as Jack Nachbar points out: "[H]eroes are no longer necessarily heroic, the civilized no longer necessarily civilized" ("Riding Shotgun" 102); as noted, Tag Gallagher would question whether this was ever continuously the case.

In the ideal formula Western, the land – not yet entirely tamed and caught in the transition between civilization and savagery – reflects the characters' basic trades: the ruggedness, endurance and regenerative powers of the hero, as well as the viciousness of the Indians or outlaws directly associated with the vast, empty and "untouched" land surrounding the enclaves of civilization on the frontier. It should also be noted that the "West" of Westerns is at least as much temporal (yet paradoxically at the same time "dehistorized" [Mitchell, Introduction xvii-xviii]), an imagined place in time – the "old times" when the frontier still existed – as it is geographical. As such, it is a construct which is defined to a great extent by nostalgia: "[A]s every reader and viewer recognizes at some level, the chief point about the West depicted in fiction is that it has already passed" (R.M.Davis, *Playing Cowboys* xx). James K. Folsom who sees the Western primarily function as making a statement about the present, objects: "To say, as many critics have, that Westerns are 'nostalgic' is to miss the point. They do not so much yearn for an older and simpler life as attempt to set up an alternate standard of values to the often shabby ones of modern finance capitalism" ("Westerns as Social" 82). Yet here Folsom also slightly misses the point in his objection, for nostalgia is hardly ever about a longing for a concrete past, for its own sake but always about a longing for a simplified construction of the past, exactly the simpler, cleaner alternative to an undesirable here and now he sees in it.[28]

Temporal and fictional as it may be, the land is important not only because the genre draws its name from it, but also in the mythic dimensions and added meaning it contributes to the genre and its main characters. This becomes particularly apparent in Hollywood Westerns where the same mythic geography has been inscribed and

[28] As explored above many critics have linked the development of the Western around the 20th century to the problems of a "shabby" present.

reinscribed into popular imagination by countless recastings of the same landscape features, and has created a warped geography of the West in its tapestry of pristine places. Particularly John Ford's classic Western movies never seem to be complete without at least once showing the formations of Monument Valley. The mythic powers these awe-inspiring formations, so "pregnant with meaning" (Engel 174), seem to radiate are more important than narrative credibility: two scenes can take place with the exact same formations in the background even though the diegetic action has shifted to a location miles away. In Ford's *The Searchers*, Texas is explicitly named as the location, yet the formations shown in the movie are clearly identifiable as Monument Valley, Arizona.[29] Due to these repetitions, the space "is space so well known by readers or viewers of the Western that it needs only 'a few simple clues' or signifiers to suggest both its real identity and its symbolic meaning" (Leurat and Guigues 160). The land thus easily identifiable as "the West" becomes one of the elements of setting by which the viewer most easily recognizes the genre. It functions as a backdrop, simultaneously sublime and dramatic, able to stand up to the equally dramatic characters and actions depicted in the course of the movie or novel. The presence of the land is, indeed, such an essential part in the Western that Matt Brown in his book *How to Write Western Novels* dedicates a whole chapter to the depiction of the land, in which the aspiring Western writer learns that "[t]o be authentic, a Western novel must take into account the land. […] From a writer's perspective, the land should be treated as a character within the novel" (133).

According to Cawelti, the center or origin of action in this threatening yet sublime landscape is often an enclave of civilization such as a town, a ranch, a wagon train or even a stagecoach. This place of civilization is surrounded by vast stretches of hostile land and the Indians or outlaws associated with it. While the patch of civilization is threatened by the lawless and savage elements surrounding it, according to Cawelti, it usually retains a link to civilization through such elements as a railroad track, a stagecoach route into town, or a telegraph wire which could be used to call for help in times of serious trouble. As Cawelti observes, "[t]his tenuous link can still be broken by the forces of lawlessness, but never permanently. Geronimo can cut the telegraph wire, but the Western Union crew will be along to restore it once the dust has settled" (*Six-*

[29] Jean-Louis Leurat and Suzanne Liandrat Guigues identify four possible reasons for the repeated use of the same formations in most of Ford's films, of which the second and third seem most interesting and relevant:

> Firstly, there may be a decorative intention (shapes as decorations), secondly, the locations in themselves might create an association between an image and an idea, and thirdly, these locations might occasionally trigger off or emphasise emotional mechanisms. Finally, the repeated use of a single space will create a place in the memory both for Ford to use personally and for everyone who goes to see his films. (160)

Gun Mystique Sequel 24). This once more places the narrative temporally, namely into "[t]he relatively brief stage in the social evolution of the West when outlaws or Indians posed a threat to the community's stability," which in the Western "has been erected into a timeless epic moment when heroic individual defenders of law and order stand poised against the threat of lawlessness and savagery" (Ibid. 23). With the given distance, this "threat" is romanticized and a nostalgia sets in which is often expressed in the hero's tragic function "to bring about civilization and thus render himself obsolete" (Davis, *Playing* xxi). Earlier Westerns frequently ended with the hero being accepted into the community, which either recognized his worth trough a symbolic act such as making him the new sheriff, or allowed him to become one of them, by marrying or settling down, an act by which the hero loses his special status as skillful outsider, but lives happily ever after (cf. Cawelti, *Adventure* 230-41, 243), but this option becomes exceedingly rare in later Westerns. In many earlier Westerns "getting the girl" is a symbolic reward rather than the concrete promise of a married life, which would tie the hero down and rob him of his freedom, which Cawelti sees in it. As an early critic of the Western, David Davis, who looks at Western series such as the Hopalong Cassidy franchise, has seen the Western's ending in different terms. It

> does not mean a physical marriage, children and a home. That would be building up a hero only to destroy him. The love climax at the end of the cowboy drama raises the hero to a supreme height, the audience achieves an emotional union with its ideal. In the next book or movie the cowboy will be the carefree bachelor again. (23)

According to Cawelti the trope of the cowboy leaving the town he has just saved at the end of the story to ride further West into the wilderness, away from a civilization which cannot accept him, as exemplified in Jack Schaefer's *Shane*, becomes the standard after the Second World War. The hero who rides or walks out of town, into the setting sun, has become one of the most famous stereotypes of the genre. Its elegiac dimension is perhaps best expressed in John Sturges's *Magnificent Seven* (1960) in which the surviving gunfighters, despite having successfully defended the town and defeated the forces of savagery, realize in the film's final lines: "Only the farmers won. We lost. We always lose." An even more critical version of this ending is found in the famous last scene of Fred Zinneman's *High Noon*, in which "the sheriff contemptuously drops his badge in the street of the town which, though he has defended, he has found not worth defending" (Folsom "Westerns as Social" 8283). Here the hero is superior to the society and thus refuses to become a part of it. This ending, however, might already be in the realm of revisionism, being as John Wayne famously put it in his infamous 1971 *Playboy* interview, "the most unAmerican thing I ever saw in my whole life" (90).

Another important element of the setting, in fact one of the most basic and easily recognizable elements of any Western, are props such as six-guns and Winchesters, horses, Stetson hats, saloons, and the various stock characters associated with saloons acting as minor characters or backdrop: gamblers, prostitutes and bar girls, the nervous piano player, bar keepers with shotguns under their counter and a giant mirror they are anxious to keep from being shattered in a fight, and so on. As much as the land, such markers are "unmistakable" (Mitchell, *Westerns* 4), suggesting to the reader or viewer that she is in the Western genre. There are two props that stand out above all others: the horse and the gun are central elements of many Westerns in that they define the action. The gun is arguably more prominent. It plays a central role in almost every Western, often being the central tool to the plot's resolution, which is frequently resolved in a shootout of some sort, a convention whose use in the revisionist Western I examine in more detail in chapter 6. As such the gun is ambivalent, destructive in the hands of the "bad guys," but necessary in the hero's hands – the gun that brings justice. It also defines the hero and his heroism and masculinity: he is the one "who display[s] an expertise at shooting quickly and accurately as well as the wisdom to shoot discriminately and justly" (Lenihan 13). The horse, on the other hand, "was not only a matter of life and death to its rider but a companion as well for the journey across threatening plains" (12). As a result the horse is – if it is not ignored as part of the landscape, as Jane Tomkins claims is the rule (*West* 90) – treated with all the emotions the hero cannot or will not show to anyone else. In Zane Grey *Riders of the Purple Sage*, the quality of Jane Withersteen's "hosses" Black Star, Knight and Wrangle is discussed repeatedly and at length. The death of Wrangle is arguably the most emotional part of the book, and Jane's affection for Bess and Venters is expressed not so much in words as in the gift of her favorite "racers" Black Star and Knight. The Virginian, likewise, has a close connection to horses. He immediately identifies Balaam as a villain, due to his mistreatment of "hawsses." Max Brand's hero Whistling Dan in *The Night Horseman* is emotionally distant from all but his horse Satan and his dog Black Bart, two of the more noticeable characters in the novel, and in Andy Adam's autobiographical *Log of a Cowboy*, the end of the trail drive is expressed in one of the novel's only really emotional passages:

> But at no time in my life, before or since, have I felt so keenly the parting between man and horse as I did that September evening in Montana. For on the trail an affection springs up between a man and his mount which is almost human. Every privation which he endures his horse endures with him,–carrying him through falling weather, swimming rivers by day and riding in the lead of stampedes by night, always faithful, always willing, and always patiently enduring every hardship, from exhausting hours under saddle to the sufferings of a dry drive. And on this drive, covering nearly three thousand miles, all the ties which can exist between man and beast had not only become cemented, but our *remuda* as a whole had won the affection of both men and employer for carrying without serious mishap a valuable herd all the way from the Rio Grande to the Blackfoot Agency. Their bones may be bleaching in some

> coulee by now, but the men who knew them then can never forget them or the part they played in that long drive. (150)

Not only horses and guns, other parts of the characters' possessions also play a major role. Whereas the frequently quoted distinction between good guys who wear white hats and bad guys who wear black hats may be an oversimplification, costumes nevertheless have a symbolic function within many Westerns. As John Cawelti claims the outfits worn by the cowboy and his adversary make both stand out from the simple townspeople (Cawelti, *Six-Gun Mystique* 28). It was once again Owen Wister who played a part in inscribing the cowboy's picturesque outfit into popular myth:

> Sagging in a slant upon his hips leans his leather belt of cartridges buckled with jaunty arrogance, and though he uses his pistol with murderous skill, it is pretty, with ivory of mother-of pearl for a handle. […] [T]he handkerchief knotted at his throat, though it is there to prevent sunburn, will in time of prosperity be chosen for its color and texture, a scarf to draw the eye of a woman. ("Evolution" 337)

Although the Western allows a certain flexibility with regard to the historical period the story is set in, the costumes and manners of speech tend to stay in the mid to late nineteenth century (Cawelti, *Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* 23), and will often also be found in a Western set on the extraterrestrial frontier, as the costumes of many of the characters in Joss Whedon's TV series *Firefly* demonstrate.

While the land's significance or the characters' costumes are fairly obvious characteristics of the Western, the question of whether there is in fact a typical plot is more contested. Some critics have for the longest time held that the Western can have almost any plot and express any ideological position (e.g. Philip French). Popular Western writer, Frank Gruber, in contrast has gone as far as suggesting that there are only nine basic plots for a Western (cf. Milton 26-29; Cawelti, *Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* 19 only lists seven).[30] Sociologist Will Wright at the height of the structuralist 1970s even reduced the number to four: "the classical plot", "the vengeance variation", "the transition theme," and "the professional plot." While Wrights reductionist approach has a number of issues – it happily glosses over sometimes grave distinctions between the various movies, equating them with often simple ideological functions, ignores ambiguities within movies to press them into his rigid grid of evolution, and Wright furthermore bases his study on a sampling of movies that is both too small and based on a questionable selection – Wright's analysis is nevertheless helpful when identifying

[30] The nine plots Gruber suggests are the Rustler story, the Range War or Empire story, the "Good but not Worthy" story, the Marshal or Dedicated Lawman story, the Revenge Story, the Outlaw Story, the Cavalry and Indians story, the Ranch Story, and the Union Pacific Story. Milton summarizes each of these plots and their variations in a few sentences (*Novel* 26-29). Curiously Gruber does not mention another standard, the Cattle Drive Western.

typical elements of the Western, not least because it points to the fact that there are certain recurring patterns of action in many Westerns. Such patterns also constitute the most central stereotypes and thus are the easiest targets for revision or parody. Some works such as Robert Coover's *Ghost Town* seem almost eager to tick each one of them off.

Such plot patterns link the action closely to the characters; quite often the characters are essentially variations on stereotypes which exist primarily to fulfill a function in the plot, e.g. the stereotypical schoolmarm as a stand-in for civilization and Eastern culture. Cawelti divides the characters into three groups, the helpless townspeople, the savages (Indians or outlaws), and the hero. The action, according to Cawelti, is mirrored in the three groups' varying degree of connection to and mastery of the land:

> [Indians or outlaws] are associated with the inhospitable and uncontrollable elements of the surrounding landscape. The townspeople are static and largely incapable of movement beyond their little settlement. The outlaws or savages can move freely across the landscape. The hero, though a friend to the townspeople, has the lawless power of movement in that he, like the savages, is a horseman and possesses skills of wilderness existence. (*Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* 24)

The special status of the hero goes further than his mastery of horses and wilderness survival skills. In his fight against the powers of savagery he has to become, at least in part, like them, a characteristic that also explains his separation from the townspeople, even though theoretically both are white and connected to the East and to civilization:

> As the "man who knows Indians," the frontier hero stands between the opposed worlds of savagery and civilization, acting sometimes as mediator or interpreter between races and cultures, but more often as civilization's most effective instrument against savagery – a man who knows how to think and fight like an Indian, to turn their methods against them. (Slotkin, *Gunfighter* 16)

A common set-up is a conflict between good and bad, hero versus outlaw, Indian or otherwise lawless character or group of characters, who threaten the helpless townspeople, the "simple farmers […] people of the land, the common clay of the new West – you know, morons," as Mel Brooks puts it in his Western parody *Blazing Saddles*. Concepts such as good and bad, innocent and "had it coming" are generally assumed to be taken for granted within the formula without being questioned – another assumption that says perhaps as much about the public image of the Western as about the Western itself. As a result of their general acceptance, they provide yet another target for subversion and play in both parodies and postmodern revisions of the genre.

Many Westerns revolve around the conflict between the hero and some other person or group which opposes the hero or a community the hero protects. It seems

almost needless to say that problems are solved by violent means, which have become accepted throughout the history of the genre. As discussed in chapter 6, despite the occasional "Calamity Janes" the "Old West" remains, for the most part, a violent, male-dominated space. "History" (or rather, in this case, the myth presented as history) is at least initially written by the victors of history, the whites. As a result Native Americans often become stock-characters ("Indians"). African Americans, Chinese and other ethnic minorities are marginalized, become comic relief characters or are not part of the setting at all.[31] Even in later works, as Cawelti notes, while Indians are often treated with more sympathy, it is always from a paternalist point of view. The Natives' way of life is in decline, it does not constitute an alternative or threat anymore, as a result they still remain marginalized figures. As Cawelti explains:

> The reason for this is twofold. Giving the Indian a more complex role would increase the moral ambiguity of the story and thereby blur the sharp dramatic conflicts. Second, if the Indian represented a significant way of life rather than a declining savagery, it would be far more difficult to resolve the story with a reaffirmation of the values of American society. (*Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* 22)

2.4. Revisionism

> Reading is just as creative an activity as writing and most intellectual development depends upon new readings of old texts. I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode.
>
> Angela Carter, "Notes from the Front Line."

The term revisionism is commonly used to refer to trends in scholarly discourse, such as historiography. In this context it describes how one established school's teachings are being revised, that is examined, challenged and ultimately replaced by a new school of revisionists. When transferred to literary and film studies, the concept of revisionism becomes a bit harder to grasp critically: films and novels are seldom explicitly informed by certain theories and only occasionally form schools of thought. Even more problematic is the fact that, given a flexible model of genre as outlined above, genre becomes a category which is not made up of a prescriptive set of rules, but an open category which changes over time as the texts which define the genre change. In an evolutionary model *every* new text in a way revises the genre. It points the genre in a slightly different direction, picks up and stresses some previous elements, while dismissing or ignoring others, possibly introduces some new ones and reforms or defaces still others. A model of genre that is always in flux is also constantly under revision. David Lusted adds another point to be considered: "Though some Westerns

[31] I discuss both of these "traditions" and their revision in more detail in chapter 4 and 5.

are inevitably more reflexive than others, more reflective and selfconscious about manipulating generic form and meaning, it is criticism that detects significant generic changes that make any western 'revisionist'" (231). These caveats notwithstanding, the term revisionism is both a useful category and – at least in Western film studies – one which is readily recognized. Barry Langford frees it from the close connection to a genre's lifecycle it was perceived to have in earlier evolutionary genre models, and links it instead to a more general movement in culture:

> Genre revisionism [...] appears to be a function of larger trends within the American film industry, and in turn within American popular and political culture, as much as, or more than, of evolutionary change in a generic universe closed off from interaction with the world outside. (25)

Langford's New Historicist angle, which sees revisionism as part of a culture critically examining its own values, can account for the simultaneous appearance of revisionism in many film genres, as well as the revision of the Western in film and literature.

2.4.1. The Concept of Revisionism

Whereas film critics have been comfortable with the term revisionism, literary critics have preferred to coin their own terms, without, however, reaching an agreement. Suggestions have included such terms as "New Western" and "Anti-Western," both coined by Leslie Fiedler (*Return*),[32] "Literary Extensions of the Formula Western" (Bloodworth), and others. Although details vary, these terms all seem to refer to similar texts, texts which question the genre's ideology and form in one way or another and which in film studies go by the label of revisionism. In adopting this term, I hope to allow connections of my observations to those that have been made in film studies.

Even if the term is largely uncontested, the question of how to define revisionism nevertheless remains. In 1968 Fiedler described what he called the creation of a "New Western," "a form which not so much redeems the Pop Western as exploits it with irreverence and pleasure, in contempt of the 'serious reader'" (14). Unfortunately Fiedler's book is in large parts as much an exercise in eccentricity as a work of literary criticism, starting with Fiedler's definition of the Western as a story "involving a white man and an Indian," which leads him to the claim that Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* is "an almost classic Western in theme" (Ibid). Others have since adopted Fiedler's term and given it a more refined definition: Christine Bold, for instance, distinguishes between three subcategories within the New Western. The first subtype is the elegiac

[32] In 1954 Warshow already used the word "anti-Western," but did not define it (49).

Western, a form which shows characters who uphold the moral codes of the old West in a contemporary society and fail, as seen in Edward Abbey's *The Brave Cowboy*, a second type, the story of a new unheroic West, which deconstructs the classic Western hero, as exemplified by Larry McMurtry's *Horseman Pass By*, and a third type which, following Fiedler she calls the anti-Western Western, a form "which gives new life and new significance to the old formula" (*Selling* 156). Bold sees this anti-Western Western as growing "up as part of the general rebellion against conventional patterning in fiction that took off in the sixties and seventies" (Ibid), and thus sees its primary function as first assuming and then exposing the popular Westerns patterns and formulae.

Film critic David Lusted similarly distinguishes between three categories. He differentiates between the dystopian Western, the elegiac Western, and the revisionist Western. The dystopian Western in Lusted's model is set in a late West, usually toward the end of the nineteenth century, a West

> colonized by the sins of urban modernity and the worst of human values are evident in the greed, self-interest and injustice of its townsfolk. These are Westerns that "depict the corruption and restrictiveness of the industrial era" [...]. In these new historical conditions, the cowboy gunfighter's function and purpose as hero becomes less certain. The conditions are such that the Western hero is unable and unwilling to act in the interest of justice. (176)

The noir Western, as well as the Spaghetti Western are subgenres of the dystopian Western in Lusted's model. The elegiac Western is similarly set around or after the end of the "old West." Both the elegiac and the dystopian Western thus share a dystopian present. In contrast to the dystopian Western, the elegiac Western, however, is more about the nostalgic past, intensifying the nostalgic trends which have been a part of the Western from its beginning. "The response of the elegiac Western is to turn romance into tragedy and the hero into a victim of dystopia" (205). Coinciding with the final days of some of the great Western actors in the 1960s and 1970s, most notably John Wayne, the elegiac Western "is about historical and personal ageing, and the problems of people and societies growing old" (Ibid). In contrast to the revisionist Western such elegiac films "attracted writers and directors interested in social criticism more than the challenge of generic convention" (226).

Jim Kitses, on whose definition Lusted also relies for his third type, describes revisionist Westerns as "films that in whole or part interrogate aspects of the genre such as its traditional representations of history and myth, heroism and violence, masculinity and minorities" ("Post-modernism" 19). Revisionist Westerns thus actively engage in questioning and revising, or laying open the ideological areas of the generic code that makes up the genre they partake in, a code negotiated in culturally dominant earlier examples of the form. Revisionist texts try to change the genre they depend on to be

fully understandable, writing against older trends and ideologies, going above and beyond what non-revisionist texts do in scope and intent. Although they are not necessarily formally postmodern, revisionist Westerns often partake in postmodernism's larger effort to question and lay open established patterns and societal convictions, as discussed below. While there are revisionist texts before the advent of postmodernism, as I will argue below (2.4.3.), and revisionism is more helpfully understood as a technique – maybe a subgenre – rather than a late period in a genre's "lifecycle" as the evolutionists have claimed, much of revisionism nevertheless falls into the period of cultural postmodernism.

2.4.2. Techniques of Revisionism

The way revisionism works in the Western can perhaps best be described by quoting at some length from Edward Buscombe's analysis of the beginning of Sam Peckinpah's *Ride the High Country*, a striking revision of the Western's codes, settings and conventions. Buscombe briefly shows how generic conventions, reading (or in this case viewing) habits and expectations and the generic contract between film maker and audience are drawn upon to be subsequently violated by the film's "auteur" Sam Peckinpah:

> Knowing the period and location, we expect at the beginning to find a familiar western town. In fact the first minutes [...] disturb our expectations. As the camera roves around the town we discover a policeman in uniform, a car, a camel, and Randolph Scott dressed up as Buffalo Bill. [...] Significantly, the camel is racing against a horse; such a grotesque juxtaposition is painful. A horse in a western is not just an animal but a symbol of dignity, grace, and power. These qualities are mocked by having it compete with a camel; and to add insult to injury, the camel wins. (22)[33]

Shifting to Randolph Scott's portrayal of a character who looks like a parody of Buffalo Bill, Buscombe continues:

> Peckinpah uses [Scott's] screen image by having him play against it all through the film; but the initial shock of seeing him in a wig, running a crooked booth at the fair, does more than upset our expectations about his role in the film. It calls into question our whole attitude to the heroes of western legend. Scott dressed up as Buffalo Bill is an image that relies not only on Scott's screen personality, but also on the audience's stock response to Buffalo Bill, for he too is debased by this grotesque impersonation. (22-23)

[33] The camel proves a favorite with authors of revisionist Westerns, far exceeding the relevance of their somewhat grotesque and short-lived intermezzo in the historical West as a United States army experiment. On top of Peckinpah's use of them in *Ride the High Country*, camels feature – more or less prominently – in Larry McMurtry's *Anything for Billy*, George Bowering's *Shoot!*, Anne Cameron's *The Journey*, and Jerome Charyn's *Darlin' Bill*.

Buscombe sums up:

> Clearly, then, although Peckinpah is working against the conventions he could not do this unless he and the audience had a tradition in common. He needs the outer form, though in many ways he is making an antiwestern. [...] The cluster of images and conventions that we call the western genre is used by Peckinpah to define and embody this situation [the situation of men who have outlived their time and now cannot come to terms with the present], in such a way that we know what the West was and what it has become. The first is communicated through images that are familiar, the second through those that are strange. (23-24)

Although Buscombe talks specifically about film and some of his points are specific to or more pronounced in film, his analysis is easily adaptable for revisionism in Western novels. The persona of an actor, for instance, obviously does not play a role in a written text. Expectations of various roles and stereotypes (i.e. the cowboy hero) do, however. A historical person such as Buffalo Bill can expect to be met by the same "stock response" Buscombe describes in both media, and thus becomes an equally powerful tool in the hands of a novelist. A historical character even more than a broader generic role, such as the cowboy or gambler, will often conjure up specific expectations, since we think we "know" this person and thus have expectations of how this person should be depicted (e.g. as "good" or "bad"). This of course makes such a person, particularly one who has been identified as a heroic frontier character, a perfect target for revisionism – a point I will return to in more detail in chapter 6.

While such an intertextual, and in the case of the Canadian Western often transnational, playing off of other texts, actors or specific clichés and generic expectations is frequently found in revisionist Westerns, there is a more direct approach, the shifting of a text to include a previously marginalized perspective. Revisionist Westerns need not be parodic, ironic or formally postmodern (aspects I discuss in section 2.4.4.), but could also be fairly straightforward texts which examine some of the ideological areas frequently left out or "misrepresented" in the traditional Western, such as the depiction of African and Native Americans, examined in chapters 4 and 5 respectively.

2.4.3. The Western's Revisionist Counter-Tradition

In his examination of the "literary Western," William Bloodworth speculates that the "non-popular (that is, not popular in the way that Zane Grey, Luke Short, or Louis L'Amour have been popular) tradition [of the Western] may have had its earliest expression in Walter Van Tilburg Clark's *The Ox-Bow Incident* in 1940" ("Literary Extensions" 287). Clark's novel, along with Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust* (1939), is also often mentioned as one of the first revisionist or "anti-Western" Western

(cf. Bold *Selling* 157). One could, however, easily find other and earlier examples: Christine Bold discusses Frances McElrath's *The Rustler* (1902) as an early forgotten text which could have become foundational to quite a different Western tradition (cf. also Lamont "History"). According to Bold the novel, published the same year as Wister's foundational effort and set in the same period and region with a similar setup of characters,

> reads like a point-by-point refutation of Wister's heroic optimism. [...] *The Rustler* ends in criminality and death for the cowboy and a life of penance for the schoolmarm, an outcome which can be read as a warning about the classed system of the West quite at odds with Wister's representation of the frontier as democratic open space unfettered by Old World social distinction. ("Popular West" 865)[34]

Famous 19th century examples of revisions, or at least parodies, of a popular Western are Stephen Crane's short stories "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" (1898), "The Blue Hotel," and "Twelve O'Clock" (both 1899). Crane's short stories parody the distorted version of a late 19th century West his contemporary dime novelist continued to evoke. A version of the West which as Crane argued in his journalistic writing, "amounted to a fiction maintained because of its 'commercial value.' By Crane's light, 'an illustration of Galveston can easily be obtained in Maine" (B. Brown 3). Like the work of later revisionists, the parodic aspects in Crane's stories only succeed because he could already take his reader's acquaintance with the formulaic plots and stereotypes of the (dime) Western for granted. In "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" Crane also plays with gender roles: the realization that Sherriff Potter is now a married man forestalls a duel between the Sherriff and the town rough Scratchy, who takes the woman's presence as representing the end of the old West. In "Twelve O'Clock" a cuckoo clock causes a disagreement between a number of cowboys, resulting in the murder of the clock's owner, who tries to stop the fight but lacks the competence – a parody of the easy bloodshed and duelling in the dime Western. "The Blue Hotel," finally, is perhaps Crane's most effective attack on the dimes. In this story a Swede comes to the West, which he has never been to but has a very clear image of from reading about. After expecting to be killed in the first half of the story, the Swede, emboldened by a few drinks, continues to misread the West in terms of a dime novel and after winning a fistfight against the hotel owner's son starts to mock and bully every inhabitant of the town, now reading himself as the hero of his dime novel. When he attacks a gambler he finally manages to get stabbed very unheroically, becoming the first victim in the town's history. Crane's technique of using a character's illusions about

[34] Cf. also Victoria Lamont's more in depth discussion of the novel and the questions it raises with regard to the classic Western's origins, depiction of history, and gender ("History").

the West which he has gained from cheap fiction, is still employed by a number of authors, as I will explore in chapter 6. It is also occasionally used in the popular Western novel, e.g. George L. Voss's *The Man Who Believed in the Code of the West*.

Still earlier parodies of the frontier narrative are distributed all over Mark Twain's writings. Parts of Twain's semi-autobiographical tall tale *Roughing It* (187071; 1872), with its accounts of life in the Nevada mining towns and their supposedly peculiar moral codes, where "a person is not respected until he has 'killed his man'" (*Roughing It* Vol. 2, 54), or his encounter with the (in)famous outlaw Slade, can be read as humorously targeting Bret Harte and other author's earlier mythologizing of the West.[35] In Twain's later works the mythic West also appears periodically. In *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), his protagonist Hank Morgan mixes rodeo roping and shootout in his duel with the "invisible" Sir Sagramore and the other knights of the dinner table, resulting in a grotesque situation sending up the romance tradition of Sir Walter Scott. The incomplete "Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer among the Indians" is another literary attempt to revise Cooper's depiction of "Indians" as noble, which seem to have greatly enraged Twain, who targeted it not only here and in chapter 19 of his *Roughing It*, but also devoted large parts of his "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offences" and "Fenimore Cooper's Further Literary Offences" to deriding what he calls the "Cooper Indians."

Before Twain Bret Harte had parodied the grandiose style and characters of Cooper's Leatherstocking tales in his "condensed novel" "Muck-a-Muck" (1867), and the literary historian setting out to write a history of the Western's numerous parodies, counter-myths and -narrative could certainly find even earlier texts. Yet these examples should suffice to make the point that the mythology of the West has been contested by some writers for almost as long as it has been constructed by others. Interestingly, it has frequently been kept alive in slightly different fashion by the same writers who criticized their predecessors. Both Harte, in his Western short stories collected in *The Luck of Roaring Camp*, and Twain worked with some elements of the Western myth, while writing against others. Although Harte arguably contributed less ironically to the myth of the West (cf. in greater length Scharnhorst), Twain, despite his partial revisionism and claim to realism, participated in the mythmaking of the West. It is, after all, telling that Twain expressed his admiration for the accuracy of the portrayal of the West by one of the greatest mythmakers of the West, Buffalo Bill (cf. Blair 84).[36]

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[35] Twain would not start seriously attacking Harte until after what Scharnhorst calls "arguably the most disastrous collaboration in the history of American letters" (xiv), Harte and Twain's play *Ah Sin* (1877).

[36] Slotkin, *Fatal* 516-30, has a broader discussion of Twain's West as expressed in *Huck Finn, Roughing It, A Connecticut Yankee* and others, crediting "Twain's [myth/ideological] system" with a "greater complexity and ambivalence" than that of his contemporaries (522). Coulombe also argues for a more differentiated view of Mark Twain's relation to the West.

While such early examples of revisionist tendencies exist, they are arguably few and far in between, and more importantly wane in the face of more traditional forms of the Western, which for the longest time had a far greater cultural impact. Until the middle of the 20th century viewers and readers of Westerns have almost always encountered the Western in one of its more traditional guises, be it in hardbound or paperback novel, magazine, motion picture, TV series, comic, advertisement, politics, or any of the many other forms this myth has taken. As a result such early revisions, along with ambivalences in double-voiced traditional texts, have often been overlooked or explained away by critics in the interest of painting a unified image of the Western, a situation which recent critical attempts have started to question and correct. As Jim Kitses remarks with regard to the Western in film,

> there have always been dissents, deviations, aberrations, revisions. Even in pre-classical silent days, before there was an established myth in the cinema to critique or subvert, there were pro-Indian films, films that championed women. Indeed, as Doug Williams shows [...] even in the genre's literary roots, its heroes could be critiqued and support periodically provided for minorities, alongside its more customary abuse or neglect of them. ("Postmodernism" 17)

This makes it possible to see the pro-Indian films of the 1950s "as precursors to a counter-tradition that the Western tradition itself generates, a revisionist shadow, a parallel track to the imperial mainstream with all its ideological baggage" (Ibid.). The complexities and counter-narratives in earlier works notwithstanding, it is not until the 1960s that Hollywood films, aided by "outsiders" such as Sergio Leone, start to question and revise many of the Western's earlier stories, stereotypes and ideologies in greater number, as countless critics have argued. While this time certainly sees an increased number of revisionist films, Hollywood continues to produce traditional Westerns, even if their numbers dwindle and seem low in comparison with the 1950s. Most critics have seen this as a trend of the Western genre's turn towards revisionism. However, it seems at least as much a matter of a critical blindness which only regards a small number of canonized 1960s and 1970s Westerns, as Andrew Nelson's recent work has shown.

A similar picture presents itself in fiction: "The pulp Western caught one between the eyes in 1953-55, but, like [Luke] Short's expiring gunman, managed to stumble and stagger into the 1960s before finally dropping into the dust" (Dinan 115). The demise of the pulp Western, which John A. Dinan has captured so poetically, by no means corresponds with the end of the traditional Western in print, however, which continues to be published in slick magazines, and in original soft- and hardcover publications until today. It nevertheless marks the beginning of a long trend of ever dwindling importance of the traditional Western in writing. This trend has been met by various attempts to change the classic Western in the 1970s and 1980s by including lurid sex or ever more

outrageous scenes of violence, and by focusing on romance plots to target female audiences, or historical accuracy, allowing the novel to be marketed as historical fiction rather than Westerns.[37]

Critics have long speculated what brought about the Western's transformation and loss of significance after more than half a century as the dominant movie genre and an even longer period of attraction in print. While some critics have tried to establish an evolutionary model to explain the genre's natural death, others have argued that its traditional themes were transferred to other genres, such as science fiction or action movies, which were more up to date in an increasingly technological world and could more fully embrace new technological trends in film making (e.g. Lusted 6; Hitt 293-94).[38] The traditional Western's demise has convincingly been linked to larger cultural trends. It did not adequately reflect the changing society of the 1960s and 1970s, with its infatuation with an anti-authoritarian counterculture, its opposition to the Vietnam War, Civil Rights, Red Power, and feminist movements, which led to a larger movement of revising the Western The traditional Western's loss of influence thus not coincidentally coincides with a rise of revisionist Westerns, both films and novels. "Since about 1960," Michael Cleary writes, "the Western novel has attracted a number of writers who have parodied, ridiculed, exploited and otherwise altered the Western formula" ("Saddlesore" 4-5).

2.4.4. The Western's Ideology, Postmodernism, and the Revision of a "Popular" Genre in "High" Literature

> Was the myth of the Old West so powerful and so closely connected to US national identity that, like the Word in the mind of God, once something was filmed it really happened, or at least that anyone who wanted to sell a reissued film should say so?
>
> Reinhold Kramer, "Nationalism, the West, and *The Englishman's Boy*."

If we limit the Western to its narrower, contemporary sense, there exists a connection between postmodernism and revisionism in the Western. Jim Kitses links postmodernism and revisionism, when he speculates that "the wave of revisionism" in the 1960s was "driven by the period's counter-culture, a rupture marking an incipient post-modernism's impact as a cultural movement advancing the goals of pluralism and heterogeneity" ("Post-modernism" 18). Kitses understanding seems informed by Jean-François Lyotard's definition of postmodernism as "an incredulity towards

[37] Cf. Drew, Hutton, Etulain "Westerns," Marsden, Alter for more detailed accounts of the changes in post-classical Western novels.

[38] The recent film *Cowboys & Aliens* (2011) almost seems like an ironic commentary on this critical position by having an astonishingly traditional Western, set in 1870s Arizona, invaded by gold"mining" aliens, complete with space ships and weapons which disintegrate an enemy.

metanarratives" (*Postmodern Condition* xxiv), and, in fact, much of revisionism seem directed at various meta-narratives inherent in the Western.

The Western gives artistic expression to several decidedly pre-modern thought patterns. Most obviously, it strongly contributed to mythologizing America's past, as the latest variation of the idea of Manifest Destiny. Among other things, this glorification of America's past leads to a seriously transformed and simplified view of colonial history which frequently justifies the massacre and mistreatment of the Native American population as inevitable. Indirectly it also reproduces several other hegemonies in society, most commonly racial and gender roles:

> Just as the ideological West itself had become naturalized through its myths and representations, so one of its central signifiers, the Western, had become bound to linear codes and systems of theme and image that were sacrosanct and yet almost invisible in their authority. In breaking the latter, one simultaneously challenged the former. (Campbell, *Rhizomatic West* 153)

Writers of postmodern Westerns use different techniques to work against such inherent meta-narratives and hegemonies. Neil Campbell sees the revisionist Western as a version of what Deleuze and Guattari call a "minor language" and describes the working inside, but against the codes of the Western, as follows:

> [T]he established and taken for granted "major language" and codes of the Western genre are made to "stammer" in these renewed forms, drawing attention to its mythic constructs and to new thematics within the texts – "Conquer the major language in order to delineate in it as yet unknown minor languages." (Ibid. 151)

In Deleuzian terms such a creative stammering "'affects each system by stopping it from becoming homogenous' and creat[es] some new perspective" (Ibid. 152). Making the genre "stammer" not only works to expose and upset its underlying ideological notions and meta-narratives, it also rejuvenates the genre and keeps it from becoming entrapped in a solipsistic cycle of repetition without variation and meaningless self-reference. In this way, the revisionist Western, while criticizing the traditional Western on different accounts, also transforms it and instills new life blood in the genre.

Rather than merely changing the elements of the formula, by – for instance – introducing new players, e.g. a female protagonist in Gil Adamson's *The Outlander*, a number of the more radical texts revise classic models through formal innovation, a trend Marc Chénetier has focused on in his article "Wordslingers." In Theo D'Haen's words:

> [T]he specific use postmodernism makes of these code-determined genres [formulaic genres like Westerns, spy stories and others], rather than merely illustrating the "problem" Jameson

> has with our postmodern world [i.e. the total aesthetisation of everyday life in the form of simulacra], from the outset draws attention to it. In particular, it approaches the world as "*texte*," and language as a Derridean […] "*difference*-ing" instrument, thus once again, albeit coming from the opposite direction, doubling or underscoring what [Linda] Hutcheon saw as historiographic metafiction's primary achievement. (185)[39]

As participants in a postmodern discourse, many works are more concerned with their literary predecessors than with rectifying an image of the past which, although demasked countless times as an imagined construct, "a West as it should have been rather than as it was" (Yates 12), still lingers on. A narrative as emotionally and mythically puissant as the Western, yet virtually immune to objections based in the empirical study of history, can perhaps only be met by an equally fictional counternarrative.

By freeing the Western from earlier constraints of realism and authenticity, which have too often been held up as the ultimate goals and only possible modes of Western writing,[40] postmodern writers frequently highlight how earlier fictions simply obscured the fictionality and constructedness of the narratives and modes they introduced or reinscribed into the West. A helpful way to understand what many of these texts do is to look at them in terms of Linda Hutcheon's concept of "historiographic metafiction." While Hutcheon developed her concept with regard to the writing of historical novels, the approaches authors of revisionist Westerns take are often quite similar to those of historiographic metafiction. Hutcheon locates the mode within the larger context of postmodernism. It entails a mixing of "high" and "low" art forms, employing parody as one of its chief instruments. Inscribing "and only then subvert[ing] its mimetic engagement with the world," historiographic metafiction attempts to "change irrevocably any simple notions of realism or reference by directly confronting the discourse of art [which for Hutcheon includes literature; J.F.] with the discourse of history" (*Poetics* 20).[41] The Western, a form of literature which has been seen as both inescapably American and tied to 19th century history, lends itself to being challenged in a postmodern, as well as a transnational, environment:

> It has been suggested that "the one thing the Western is always about is America rewriting and reinterpreting her own past" (French 1973, 24). But the ironic intertextual use of the

[39] D'haen makes a distinction between historiographic metafiction's inscription and subversion of a "mimetic engagement with the world," and a similar inscription and subversion postmodern Westerns engage in, only this time in reference to a "generic dis-engagement with the world." This distinction, however, does not lead to a significant difference in the way the texts work – they aim for and achieve "the same thing" only "from the opposite direction" (184).

[40] E.g. the model of classification suggested by Tuska and Piekarski, whose pitfall is its overinsistence on historical accuracy as a – and it seems the only relevant – yardstick for judging and grouping Westerns as well as the work of other critic's work.

[41] Hutcheon uses E.L. Doctorow's *Welcome to Hard Times* (1960) as an example for the "bridging the gap between élite and popular art" in the Western genre (*Poetics* 20).

> Western is not, as some have claimed, a form of "Temporal Escape" (Steinberg 1976, 127), but rather a coming to terms with the existing traditions of earlier historical and literary articulations of American-ness. (*Poetics* 133)

In contrast to previous art forms, historiographic metafiction does not try to conceal underlying paradoxes, but lays them open and thrives in them. As a highly selfconscious mode of writing, it foregrounds the process of *énonciation*, the process of the writing and reception of a text within the framework of a cultural and historical discourse as a whole.[42] Historiographic metafiction thus lends itself to working with and at the same time against pre-conceived notions in both history and fiction, participating without belonging, as it were. The Western's unique mix of history, myth, and narrative provides an especially rich playground for such postmodern games. Postmodernism's mindset grants authors freedom from such traditional notions as historical accuracy, and allows them to invent their own versions of the West – to create their own blend of "fact" and "fiction."

Furthermore, the Western has from its inception had an air about it which Jean Baudrillard would call "hyperreal." In fact it is difficult to challenge the Western's notions of "reality" since it is only partly rooted in history; to complicate matters, the genre also helped to shape history, as even historians have begun to acknowledge: "the Real West and the Fake West end up tied together, virtually Siamese twins sharing the same circulatory system" (Limerick quoted in Handley and Lewis 1). [43] While C.L. Sonnichsen still seems to believe it possible to distinguish between the "West That Was" and the "West That Wasn't" with a gray zone in between, he remarks, coming close to acknowledging the authenticity of the West as simulacrum: "What seems hard for us to admit is that we are quite comfortable in our two Wests, inhabiting them simultaneously without even realizing it, and unaware that we need both for our national health and well-being" (*Hopalong* 9). Michael L. Johnson recounts an anecdote about a professor of history which goes beyond Sonnichsen's belief of a coexistence of the two Wests: Professor Shoemaker remarked that her students "wouldn't buy New Western History, for they '*knew* the frontier was a place of raw opportunity, where individuals flourished

[42] The *énonciation* is closely connected to the belief that all cultural products are produced from within a dominant surrounding, "un locuteur qui énonce, un allocataire à qui on s'adresse, un temps et un lieu, un discours qui précède et qui suit; en bref, un contexte d'énonciation. En d'autre termes encore, un discours est toujours et nécessairement un acte de parole" (Todorov, *Genres du Discourse* 48).

[43] This realization is expressed for instance in Patricia Limerick's article "The Adventures of the Frontier in the Twentieth Century." While they toy with and acknowledge postmodern theory, Forrest Robinson has brutally confronted the New Western Historians with their tendency to pay lip service to such notions while hanging on to a privileging of "objective reality" as expressed in (their) historiography in his article "Clio Bereft of Calliope." Robinson attacks the notion of a "real West" which underlies the practice of the most prominent New Western historians, Patricia Limerick, Richard White and Donald Worster, while showing Limerick et. al.'s rhetorical maneuvers to acknowledge postmodern discourses in passing while disregarding their full implications in practice.

and men could prove they were men.'" Her conclusion proves devastating for historians: "Myths about the West seem resistant to knowledge, so I don't make much headway when I try to take the clothes off the emperor of Western history" (quoted in Johnson *New Westers* 199-200). While there are some facts to be excavated, the untangling of the strands of myth and history proves ultimately impossible because the Western is so closely interrelated with the "original" places, actors and narratives. Many of the Western's "original" cast of characters, Kit Carson, Buffalo Bill, Wyatt Earp, Pat Garrett and others have been nothing if not "hyperreal," being mythologized or mythologizing themselves both while they were still actors in the historical West in dime novels, first person accounts, pageants and so forth, and after their days through Hollywood's film industry.

Gaining full stride only in the dying days of the historical frontier, the West of the Western has always acted as a simulacrum, simulating an absent and imagined Western past. Limerick's observation of the impossibility to separate real from fake West, for instance, brings to mind Baudrillard's "age of simulacra and simulations" in which "there is no longer any God to recognize his own, nor any last judgement to separate true from false, the real from the artificial resurrection, since everything is already dead and risen in advance" (6). It is in this light, significantly, that nostalgia, one of the key ingredients of any Western,

> assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths and signs of reality; of second hand truth, objectivity and authenticity. There is an escalation of the true, of the lived experience; a resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared. And there is a panic-stricken production of the real and the referential, above and parallel to the panic of material production. (6-7)[44]

In light of this realization of the constructed and simulated nature of the West, writers critically examine the narrative of the "Old West." Their works are, for the most part, not so much attempts to rescue the West from misrepresentation and reinstate the "truth" of historical experience – a goal that would be at odds with postmodernism's caution of replacing old simple answers with new ones –, rather these authors write narratives which recast old story elements and generic patterns in new stories that reflect their

[44] James Welch also pays tribute to the irony of simulation in the face of an absent referent, as well as, the destructive impact of white societies genocide (understood here in Elizabeth Cook-Lynn's broad sense, [185-95]), when in his *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* Buffalo Bill's Wild West provides the closest approximation to an "authentic" Native way of life his main character can find. As in Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* in which Charlie Looking Bear's father has to wear a rubber nose to "Indianize" his profile for the Hollywood movie industry, in Welch's *Heartsong* there is an ironic reference to common stereotypes of what an Indian should look like. The "real" Indian Strikes Plenty is "not Indian enough" to be included in the show, for he does not match the "boss's" preconceptions: An Indian, we are told "should be tall and lean. He should have nice clothes. He should look into the distance and act as though his head is in the clouds" (38).

particular concerns, or narratives which – in true postmodern fashion – draw attention to their own artifice. Such texts often highlight the breaking points and contradictions of not only the original myths but also of their own versions, i.e. they highlight the process of *énonciation*.

The relative freedom in dealing with facts and "realism" in postmodernism leads to an almost endless possibility of deviations from the standard Western narrative, cast of characters and so on, giving, for instance, every ethnic group the possibility to reclaim "their" West (cf. chapters 4 and 5). Anachronisms, intertexts, and genre mixing are utilized to show the cultural frame the Western is created in. One of the pervasive methods of attacking the Western formula is that of parody. Naturally, since they so heavily rely on a preexisting idea of the West, revisionist works function only through a familiarity with the formula Western's conventions, outlined above. The appropriation of the Western in an effort to rewrite it leads to a reliance on generic patterns and consequently a reproduction of some of the Western's more traditional themes, as Robert Davis states with regard to Mel Brook's Western parody *Blazing Saddles*: "Brooks is still, *perhaps inescapably*, working with thematic issues that the Western *has always raised*" (*Playing Cowboys* 129, my emphasis). This reference to the original myth is a double-edged sword, as the revisionist text works against the genre, while the Western simultaneously works through the text, to retain its generic integrity, sometimes leading to a text that is merely a Western with a difference, not a radical deconstruction of the genre.

As D'haen remarks with reference to Richard Brautigan's *The Hawkline Monster*, postmodernist references to the genre can sometimes be taken rather freely, especially if the text identifies itself as a Western in its re-mark, as discussed by Derrida with regards to the novel:

> Brautigan's gunfighters are not "real" western heroes, his villain is not a true villain, and his plot is not a true western plot, his setting is not truly a "western" setting. In fact, we read Brautigan's novel only as a western because a number of its characters are said to be dressed like characters from this particular genre, and – perhaps most of all – because the subtitle of the book claims it to be a "gothic *western*." (189; emphasis in original)

D'haen sums up the way in which the more radically postmodern Westerns he examines work. According to D'haen they all

> play on the character, plot and setting conventions. […] In all cases the result is a greater awareness in the reader of the hold conventions exercise over his or her expectations and how they are linked to the metanarratives justifying his or her culture to itself. Via the ways in which they thwart these expectations, these novels bring out the emptiness and the very conventionality of the conventions they started out invoking. By extension, the metanarratives these conventions are inspired by and which they work to uphold are likewise revealed to be

> constructs: discourses projecting themselves in fictions, without any necessarily privileged truth claims. (Ibid.)

The postmodern Western in its most effective form can thus achieve one of the ultimate aims of any postmodern or metafictional approach: the visualization and (given the co-operation of the reader) deconstruction of the power structures underlying a text, in this case the archetext of the generic Western and the ideas of society concerning its history and its present hegemony perpetuated through it. In this respect radical revisions, and certainly generic parodies such as Brautigan's "Western" all partake in the subversive mode of postmodern irony as defined by Linda Hutcheon:

> [I]rony – even in the simple sense of saying one thing and meaning another – is also a mode of "speech" (in any medium) that allows the speaker to address and at the same time slyly confront an "official" discourse: that is, to work *within* a dominant tradition but also to challenge it – without being utterly co-opted by it. (*Splitting Images* 1-2)

It is worth noting, however, that not all of the texts examined in this study are as formally radical. Indeed, while Sorrentino's or Coover's texts work well to show the artifice and triteness of generic conventions, novels which target a specific ideological formation closely connected to the Western genre often choose a less whole-sale approach. Their postmodernism is expressed less in their formal experimentation than in their appropriation of a popular genre in a non-popular text, and in their writing against specific meta-narratives.

2.5. Transnationalism and the Canadian Western

> The bourgeoisie has, through its exploitation of the world market, given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of reactionaries, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilized nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. [...] In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. *The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature.*
>
> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (my emphasis).

As noted, the Western is commonly seen as necessarily linked to American history and the American nation. Even appropriations of the genre in other cultures usually imagine their Westerns in an American mythscape. Canada on the other hand has for the longest time refused to take part in this imagining of America's past. Over the years, Canadian

comparativists have occasionally looked across the border at the Western and largely rejected it. Canadian scholar Sherrill Grace in her article "Western Myth and Northern History" published in 1983 sets off the Canadian Northern from the American Western, and Dick Harrison wrote, in an article published the same year:

> When an American and a Canadian sit down to their T.V. sets, they may tune in to the same American western, but the American is watching something domestic, in some sense his own, while the Canadian is watching something he knows to be exotic. ("Fictions" 91)

In recent years, however, the Western has more clearly shown its transnational dimensions. British critic Neil Campbell has recently stated that

> [t]o examine the West in the twenty-first century is to think of it as always already transnational, a more routed and complex rendition, a traveling concept whose meanings move between cultures, crossing, bridging, and intruding simultaneously. (Campbell *Rhizomatic West* 4)

Indeed, a number of Canadian authors have written novels that are obvious variations of the Western genre. To find their models they go back not primarily to the history of 19th century Canada, as Rudy Wiebe had done in his *Temptations of Big Bear* and *The Scorched-Wood People*, but to the mythscape of the Western as a popular image of 19th century history and a genre of American self-definition. Given the different history of the Canadian and the U.S. West and its settlement, usually put in phrases such as frontier vs. garrison mentality, this seem peculiar at first, but becomes understandable if one views this phenomenon through the lens of transnationalism.

2.5.1. Transnationalism as a Critical Concept

While the term transnational has been around for at least a hundred years,[45] a broader comparative, transnational or hemispheric approach has only begun to take hold in the humanities and social sciences since the late 1970s.[46] Among American Studies scholars, transnationalism only gained currency in the late 1990s and early 2000s (cf. Siemerling and Casteel 5). Part of the transnational project was a rejection of American Exceptionalism and the decentering of the "America" in American Studies. Janice Radway's article "What's in a Name?," based on her Presidential Address to the

[45] In a 1916 article, Randolph S. Bourne rejects the idea of the melting pot in which all immigrants were assimilated "into a tasteless, colorless fluid of uniformity" (90) in favour of a "cosmopolitan America" made up of a "trans-national spirit" (97). Donald Pease even traces the term's origin to the 19th century. According to Pease, John O'Sullivan used the term "to justify expansionist U.S. policies" (4).

[46] While the terms carry different nuances within specialist circiles, I follow Siemerling and Casteel in their use hemispheric and transnational as synonyms.

American Studies Association in 1998, questioned the way the field of American Studies has been conceptualized, including a critique of the very appropriation of the term America by one country, the United States. Six year later, in her own presidential address Shelley Fisher Fishkin famously called for a "transnational turn" in American Studies. Arguing against oversimplified notions of nationalism and an exceptionalism she sees at the basis of the field of American studies, Fishkin champions an understanding that takes into account the virtual and physical circulation of "ideas, people, culture, and capital" (21). She also specifically wanted to expose an oversimplified self-conceptions she identified in American foreign policy with a transnational understanding, which questions the naturalness of borders, of the nation state and of such concepts as clearly distinguishable national characters or identities, national cultures, and so on. Instead transnationalism insists on the fluidity of cultural products and ideas that move beyond borders, investigating in the case of American Studies the "cultural work" of U.S. culture in cultural contexts outside the U.S. A complex interaction of cultures for which "[c]ultural imperialism turns out to be too simple a model" (33).

Arguing from a Canadian perspective, Winfried Siemerling has recently tried to define a "New North American Studies," which "includes cultures in North (of) America like those of Canada" (1) and pays attention to a shared experience as part of a "New World" which shares a history of setting itself off from the "Old World," and being read through a "double consciousness," simultaneously as different from the Old World and through narratives deriving from this Old World.

In his "response" to Fishkin's presidential address, Winfried Fluck has warned against overly optimistic celebrations of a new trans-national and self-declared postexceptionalist American Studies.[47] Fluck distinguishes between three different meanings of the term transnational, "an institutional, a conceptual, and a methodological one." For the discussion at hand the methodological approach, which Fluck sums up as "support[ing] claims for a comparative perspective that will help to broaden our interpretative options in American studies" (23) is certainly the most important and fruitful one, although Fluck himself is less convinced, seeing any transnational approach other than an increased institutional collaboration as merely a flight to a utopian illusion of a "romance of the intercultural space beyond the borders of the nation-state" (26), and a "running away from the task and interpretative challenge for which [American studies] was created" (30). While Fluck is certainly correct that it is not desirable to shift all enquiries in American studies to a transnational model, the same is true of any critical

[47] Liam Kennedy, Bryce Traister and others have made similar points. Traister claims that "even in our most resolute calls for slaying the exceptionalist beast, we end up doing little more than constructing another enclosure at the zoo in which to house the monster" (6).

paradigm. In fact Fishkin herself, despite her passionate call for a transnational turn, says as much (22). Fluck's objections against an uncritical embracing of intercultural spaces, however, certainly needs to be heeded, but this does not discredit transnationalism for all critical endeavors, as Fluck's own subsequent work in the field has shown.

Although transnationalism as a methodological approach examines the flow of ideas and cultural products across borders and questions the naturalness of these borders and the clear disparity of cultures on either side of these borders, it does not go as far as the critical concepts of "transculturality" or "transculturation."[48] From a transnationalist perspective, these approaches seem to deny the relevance of borders or nations as constructs that are meaningful because they shape the ways in which we think about ourselves and our culture as well as the actions and reactions of nation states on the global scene (cf. Siemerling 2; Pease 4-5). Robert Warrior, a Native American scholar, has highlighted the power of nations and their various interpretations: "The power of nations and the influence of various versions of nationalism," as Warrior writes, "do not simply go away because of the critical promotion of transnationality" (808).[49]

Many Americanist scholars have adopted a transnational approach in their work dealing with hemispheric or transatlantic relationships, the spread of and reactions to "U.S. culture" abroad, or the Mexican-American borderlands. It has thus far, however, had only a limited impact on approaches that deal with Canadian and U.S. literary relations. American scholars have, according to Siemerling and Casteel, held on to their usual stance of ignoring Canada, whereas many Canadian scholars have rejected the concept as nothing more than a sly new way to demolish the sovereignty of Canadian culture or as yet another mask of American Exceptionalism, e.g. Bryce Traister who integrates his rejection into a larger critique of the conceptual hick-ups and contradictions of transnationalist theory. Native American scholars, such as Robert Warrior, have shared a similar skepticism and suspicion against a neo-colonial approach which denies the nation as a valid unit, attempting in essence to take away from smaller nations, including many Native American nations, their autonomy now that they finally have a nation, and adding them to a larger post-national pool in which they will once again be subordinated and eclipsed by the larger and more dominant United States. Similarly, Canadianist Herb Wyile has noted that his reaction "to the prospect of hemispheric studies is an automatic, almost knee-jerk, defensive posture vis-à-vis the

[48] In summing up Wolfgang Welch's position, Carmen Birkle writes that transculturation "cannot be referred back to national or geographical identities or boundaries, but follows for the first time purely cultural processes of exchange" (6).

[49] Fluck makes a similar point when he remarks "globalization does not mean that American power becomes porous or is going away. It means that it is reconfiguring itself and may emerge in even more effective, albeit more invisible, forms than before" (29).

United States" ("Hemispheric Studies" 49). Wyile sees the reasons for his and other Canadian's defensive reaction against transnationalism in the "relatively nascent status of Canadian literature itself" which leads to an anxiety that such a comparative approach "will result merely in the eclipse of Canadian literature" (Ibid. 52). Nevertheless some critics see transnationalism as a chance to write Canada into a more truly North American critical arena. Siemerling and Casteel, for instance, caution against a Canadian critical isolationism:

> There is a danger [...] that a defensive Canadian nationalism and self-protective instinct visà-vis the United States may inhibit the development of alternative paradigms in hemispheric American studies that Canadianists, with their historically weak nationalism and acute awareness of the imperial tendencies of the United States, are uniquely positioned to produce. (10)

Similarly Wyile, while staying wary, sees benefits in a transnational or hemispheric approach, as long as it does not ignore the particulars of the local:

> A variation of this tension between the local and the universal should resurface in considering the possibility of hemispheric literary studies. Especially because Canada is a relatively marginal country in the international scheme of things and because the everprecarious sense of identity, there is a good reason to be wary of comparative perspectives, which often establish a common ground by downplaying or effacing those local, contextual specificities that suggest difference rather than commonality. ("Hemispheric Studies" 55)

The solution Wyile proposes is a "bilateral" development, which can take into account transnational connections, while not losing sight of the specificities of the local or national:

> To steer between the Scylla of homogenizing, parochial localism and the Charybdis of a potentially imperializing hemispheric scope, then, what is necessary is a bilateral or multilateral development, in which, as Siemerling argues, a "larger comparative perspective" allows us to see "the costs and losses" (2005,10) of a national literature, even when it is "overtly constructed as discursive multiplicity but nonetheless circumscribed as national space" (9). […] I think reaction to this and enthusiasm for larger comparative perspectives, including hemispheric ones, need to be checked by a continuing concern for local specificities that might be occluded or effaced by extranational, transcultural perspectives. (Ibid. 58)

Such an approach, indeed, seems the most promising to engage in the study of the Western, a genre that is always connected to American national identity when appropriated by Canadian authors.

2.5.2. The Non-American Western's Connection to the U.S.

For the present study a transnational approach is necessary, since it can take into account that the Western has been formed mostly in the U.S., and, more importantly, has been

identified, more perhaps than any other genre (and certainly more than the internet), as *the* quintessential American narrative (e.g. by Philip French, quoted above). At the same time, the genre has been disseminated and reworked worldwide speaking in its various forms to different audiences in different countries and cultures. Going back to the early 19th century with Cooper's reception in Europe and Buffalo Bill's long European tours, and German imitators such as Karl May and Friedrich Gerstäcker, the frontier narrative of the United States has held a fascination with audiences in other countries, a fact speaking for its more universal appeal.[50] It seems that the genre has, since its embryonic state in Cooper's writings, always at once defined America – or rather one particular version of America – and transcended its national boundaries in its reception and success abroad, especially in Europe where it has not only found significant audiences, but also many imitators, e.g. among writers, filmmakers, and comic artists. While critics have long debated the appeal of the genre, explaining it alternatively as the narration of a heroic national past, a metaphoric narrative of the human condition, a parable of good and evil, simply an adventure story, and so on, it seems most promising to reader the Western as all of these things in different texts to different readers and sometimes in the same text *all at once*. It speaks and appeals differently to different audiences, which results in an interconnectedness of these various aspects and appeals.

The most striking aspect of many non-Americans' appropriations of the Western is that they try to be as American as the Americans, despite usually carrying distinct markers of their own culture. They do this not only by placing their narrative in American "history," but also through other means, such as the hiring of actors known to the viewer through their appearance in supporting roles in many Western films in Sergio Leone's work, and the filming in locations that look like the American West. At the same time the transnational, or in this case perhaps transcultural, circle closes when one regards the impact such films as the Spaghetti Western have had on the style of the American Western, the publication of works by the German author Friedrich Gerstäcker in the Beadle & Adams dime novel series (cf. Ostwald and Hochbruck 375) or the existence and success of a number of English writers of popular western novels (cf. Folsom "English Westerns").

In contrast, the cultural product of the Western with its close association with the U.S. and its self-conceptions is used quite differently in Canada, a country whose intellectual elites traditionally have strongly set themselves off from the U.S.A. It becomes apparent that Canada, through its geographic and cultural proximity to the United States and a history and geography which, as explored below, bears some

[50] At the same time, however, the myth of the West has retained its connection to America. As Paul Reddin argues, one of the goals of Buffalo Bill's European tour was imperial, aiming to ensure that the Europeans "esteem us better" (88).

similarities, has a special relation to the Western genre both as a powerful expression of a (North) American past and geography, and as an expression of the expansionist idea of American Manifest Destiny. In fact, the use and transformation of the Western formula in Canada is related to the complex of (perceived) U.S. cultural dominance over Canada through the country's export of its cultural products, its dominant position in a North American space and so forth, ideas I explore in more detail in chapter 3. While the Western has an impact all over the Euro-American or perhaps the entire globalized world, the debate over the impact of American culture has had a special status in Canada, since it is, and has been for a long time, an issue which has upset and horrified many Canadians. The ongoing cultural influence of the American media is perceived not only as present, but as almost unbearably strong by many Canadians.

There are also a number of concrete transnational connections in Canadian Westerns. George Bowering in particular likes to link his texts to earlier American revisionist Western. As explored in chapter 3, his character Strange Loop Groulx is a direct reference to Ishmael Reed's Loop Garoo Kid, protagonist of *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down*, Dingus Magee and Turkey Doolan from David Markson's *The Ballad of Dingus Magee* show up among the otherwise historical actors in his *Shoot!* (p. 122), as does the character Everyday Luigi from Bowering's own *Caprice* (p. 22). Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Englishman's Boy* includes several references to American literary critic H. L. Mencken, which Sharon Hamilton has explored in her article, as well as clear parallels to Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust*, as I show in chapter 3, and Jack David has suggested that Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* was inspired by American poet Jack Spicer's earlier poem "Billy the Kid," which Ondaatje reviewed favorably in 1965, while Ondaatje himself claims to have been inspired, through another transnational connection, by the American Western myth via the films of Sergio Leone and the magazine *Frontier News* (Freedman 1). The most obvious transnational connection, however, is the genre as a whole, a presence in (Western) Canadian authors' lives which George Bowering has ironically remarked upon: "Where I grew up it looked a lot like the landscape in western movies. We played western movies a lot, with sixguns and all, but no horses. It helped a lot to be able to crouch behind a clump of real sagebrush" ("Parashoot!" 160).

Transnational approaches comparing U.S. and Canadian literature of the West – while by no means as common as transnational looks at the U.S.-Mexican borders, are not unheard of.[51] Publications such as the special issue of *The American Review of*

[51] Examples of transnational comparisons between the United States and the Mexican "frontier" are fairly common, particularly in historiography (e.g. Muthyala 29-66, Slatta's *Comparing*, and his online bibliography of comparative histories of America's frontiers "Comparing"), but have also been

Canadian Studies 31.4 (2001), which compares images of the frontier in American and Canadian culture, the three connected conferences in 2002 and 2003 which led to another special issue of *The American Review of Canadian Studies* 33.4 (2003), as well as two volumes *One West, Two Myths* I and II (Highham and Thacker) one of them a reprint of the earlier special issue of *The American Review*, the Banff conference "Crossing Frontiers" in 1978 (Harrison), as well as a reader entitled *Cowgirls* (Poirier), which collects stories by female writers from both the U.S.A. and Canada and includes a section "A Common Range: The American and Canadian West" (119-229), all testify to this trend. Some critical works, such as Robert Davis's *Playing Cowboys* or Theo D'haen's article on the postmodern Western include readings of Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* along with texts by U.S. authors. Carlton Smith in his *Coyote Kills John Wayne* similarly looks at Canadian and American appropriations of the Western in a postmodern environment, and Laurie Ricou has stated the necessity to recognize connections between texts across national lines: "To trace parallels between [Ivan] Doig and [H.L.] Davis and, for examples, the Indians wisecracking about fictional theory in George Bowering's *Burning Water* (1980) or *Caprice* (1987) seems much more informative than to differentiate them along national lines" ("Pacific Northwest" 264). Nevertheless it is still too frequent for American critics to continue to by and large ignore Canada, and for Canadian critics to either include the U.S. only as a model against which to set off Canada in contrastive, national, rather than transnational readings.

It was in this mindset that early Canadian regionalist critics have stressed a difference between Western American and Canadian novels, often taken in a generic U.S. versus a regional Canadian meaning, and thus attempted to set off two distinct national cultures from each other. Martin Kuester sums up these common assumptions about the Canadian West: "If there is a frontier in Western Canada, it certainly has a meaning and connotations that differ markedly from those it has in the United States. Traditionally, the Canadian West is seen as more civilized, i.e. less frontier-like, than the American West" (277). These conceptions are usually linked to the different history of the American and Canadian West. Heinz Ickstadt paraphrases the Canadian participants of the 1978 Banff conference, "Crossing Frontiers":

> The American dreams of the West could not be universalized, since they were the result of a specific American experience of settlement [and it should be added mythologization; J.F.]. Canadians dreamed differently because in *their* history (and in the interpretations of that history) the frontier had played a different role and therefore had a different meaning. (281)

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undertaken with regard to the cowboy and frontier in fiction, e.g. Tom R. Sullivan's *Cowboys and Caudillos*, Morley's article on Cowboy and Gaucho Fiction, and others.

Comparative approaches in historiography which compare the Canadian and the American West, while less common, also exist. Slatta's "Comparing" lists a few entries, and historians such as Jill St. Germain, Walter Nugent, and John Bennett and Seena Kohl, have examined various aspects of frontier life in Canada and the U.S.

While Canadian critics thus like to stress the difference between the American and the Canadian West I will in the following also explore their commonalities, similarities which can sometimes lead to a confusion of codes when Western Canadians "learn" about themselves through the Western and one of the factors which has contributed to Canadian writers' appropriations of the "American" Western genre.

2.5.3. Canadian Cowboys? Different Frontier Myths in the United States and Canada

> Robert Frost's line, "The land was ours before we were the land's …" does not apply to Canada. Nor does the Turner thesis, nor the idea of nature's nation or virgin land or American Adam or city upon a hill – not because Canada had no vast tracts of uninhabited land, *not* because it lacked idealistic or Edenic vistas, not because it could not afford immigrants the prospect of a fresh start, but because Canadian identity was the product of history rather than rhetoric.
>
> Sacvan Bercovitch, "Fusion and Fragmentation: The American Identity."

The West looks very much the same for those who live there, regardless of which side of the border they happen to be on. Not coincidentally many American Westerns were at least in part filmed in Canada. Historically, too, the two Wests have in some respect shared a similar experience, as Walter Nugent observes: "Culturally as well as geographically, Canada is closer to the United States than is any other society. Like the United States, Canada has had several frontiers, some of them closely paralleling the American experience" (816). It could be added that one of these frontiers was a ranching frontier, as David Breen has shown at length (cf. also Nugent 820), that there were, and still are, cowboys,[52] as well as a cowboy culture, as any visitor to the Calgary airport can see firsthand, and that therefore the basis for a Western myth exist in a way which looks somewhat similar from a contemporary perspective on both sides of the Medicine Line. However, this would be missing the central point of the Western myth / formula also made by Bercovitch in the above epigraph: it is not about cattle driving, but about a hero who, if he happens to be a cowboy in the first place, is one by definition rather than by occupation. The Western formula is about the struggle between civilization and savagery packaged as the epic struggle between good and evil. And it is about U.S. American exceptionalist self-interpretation.

In fact, the hybrid stage of a frontier, somewhere in between "civilization" and "savagery" as eternalized by the Western did not exist in a comparable way in Canada, at least not continuously, nor, more importantly, was it perceived to exist. While there were trappers, and the Hudson Bay Company exploited Canada's natural resources from

[52] Cf. for instance Hugh A. Dempsky's somewhat romantic claim "The cowboy has been an integral part of western Canadian life for over a century […] and contributed much to the history, romance, and culture of the West" (*Golden Age* 1).

the seventeenth century onwards, the actual large-scale settlement of the Canadian West was centrally planned, supported by an adequate infrastructure and thus (perceived as) a much more orderly process. As a result the dominant theme in Canadian literature and art on the West in the second half of the nineteenth century is that of the garden where one can find God and nature, with nature depicted as the potential birthplace of a new perfect civilization (cf. R.D. Francis "Wasteland"). In later literature this perception changed, as in the works of Frederick Philip Grove or Sinclair Ross, but at no time did the lawless elements central to the American Western play an important role. When the settlers are threatened, it is not by Indians or outlaws, but rather by the vast empty land (cf. for instance Hochbruck "Natur und Kulturträger").

As a result, there is no tradition of writers of Westerns in Canada comparable to that of the U.S. With a few exceptions, including Frederick John Niven and Scottish-born Robert Service, most writers of classic Westerns born and raised in Canada went south to the U.S. in order to become successful. While some Canadian writers such as R.G. Everson stayed in Canada, but published their Westerns in the U.S., Will James (Joseph Ernest Nephtali Dufault), an ex-cowboy born in Quebec, perfectly symbolizes the trend towards a self-Americanization undergone by Canadians to appear adequately "Western." In order to gain authenticity he reinvented himself as an American orphan found by French settlers, a move to explain his French-Canadian accent.[53] As Dufault's example suggests, the Canadian Western was simply perceived to lack authenticity.[54]
As a result of this different history and mythology, it has been argued that if such a thing as a solely Canadian frontier narrative exists, it is a "Northern." In fact Sherrill Grace went as far as claiming that "[i]t is Canadians who write northerns, whether they are in the Maritimes, Montreal, Toronto, the Prairies, or on the West Coast; *even their westerns are northerns*" ("Comparing Mythologies" 249; my emphasis). In her article "Comparing Mythologies" and its earlier companion article "Western Myth and Northern History," Grace consequently sets off American Westerns from Canadian Northerns. Grace's definition of the Northern reads:

> [T]he Canadian Northern is a mystery story that celebrates the community, and when violence occurs it erupts from within the group and leaves "losers" on all sides. It is a feminine story [as opposed to the masculine Western; J.F.], located in space and ending in the fusion of man and landscape through death. Like the Western it stems from literary models, but those models, unlike the American, have not been self-consciously literary until very recently. ("Western Myth" 154)

[53] I am indebted to Lutz Schowalter for first drawing my attention to the specific case of Will James.
[54] On the centrality of authenticity, especially for the American West, cf. Handley and Lewis; Lewis.

In light of the texts examined in this study, Grace's claim that Canadian authors seem by definition unable to write Westerns, will have to be corrected. Furthermore a number of American authors have written texts which would have to be classified as Northerns, e.g. some of Jack London's works.[55] In fact, Grace's description sounds a lot like the American new regionalism by women which has gained prominence since the mid-1970s and which Krista Comer describes in her article as "radically different. Its narratives are not classically heroic, driven by dreams of individualistic freedom. Writers care more about human community, and the places of women, men, and children in that community" (31). This suggests that the "Northern," if such a genre exists at all, is connected more to issues of gender, or maybe even simply a maturing of a regional literature which frees itself from myths of the 19th century, than to a national distinction. Even if the North as a Canadian symbol certainly plays a larger part in Canadian writing, a transnational view disqualifies claims of a Canadian exclusivity of non-Western frontier writings, and challenges the implied moral high ground of such statements. Furthermore, others have pointed out that Grace's definition is only valid for a very small group of highly literary works. Konrad Groß has observed that "the Northern may be an appropriate label for a few aesthetically outstanding modern Canadian novels, but it will hardly ever help to explain popular Northern fiction" (354). Indeed, despite raising some intriguing points, Grace's argument is not sufficiently substantiated to establish a generic differentiation along national lines. Her original claim that the Canadian equivalent to the Western is a (vaguely defined) Northern, derives from an eight page comparison of only two books, a comparatively traditional Western parody, *Little Big Man*, and an historical novel working through the use and arrangement of historical documents, Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear*, which paints a picture of 19th century Western Canadian life and the signing of treaties between the Canadian government and the First Nations under Cree chief Big Bear.

2.5.4. The Settlement of the West and the Brief History of the Canadian Cowboy

> In any western, it is necessary to include a version of cowboy (a Marlboro Man), who is always disguised as himself, but who is immediately recognizable as an icon, a metaphor, a foreshadowing.
>
> Aritha van Herk, "Shooting a Saskatoon (Whatever Happened to the Marlboro Man?)."

In the following brief overview of the settling of the Canadian West I will elaborate upon some of the various reasons for the different connotations the "old West" has in Canadian culture. As has been mentioned above, the settlement of the Canadian West

[55] Cf. Barbara Giehmann's comparison of images of the northland in the works of Jack London and Robert Service.

was strongly dominated by central Canada. While "[t]he American West enjoyed a degree of autonomy and suffered a degree of disorder not tolerated in the Canadian West," the latter "was developed as a series of orderly colonies where social institutions were commonly installed in advance of settlement" (Harrison, Introduction 5-6). A look at the idea behind the settlement of the West also reflects this much more orderly Canadian version of "going west."

Following Harold Innis's "Laurentian thesis" first put forth in his influential *The Fur Trade in Canada*, and elaborated by J. M. S. Careless in his works dealing with the so-called Metropolitan-Hinterland Thesis,[56] Laurie W. Felske and Beverly Rasporich evaluate the economic reasons for Ontario's decision to initiate a settlement of the West as follows:

> The idea of western agricultural settlement arose as a solution to economic problems facing central and Atlantic Canada in the mid-nineteenth century. Losing an assured market space in Great Britain by their shift to free trade, and cut off from the American markets by the ending of the Reciprocity in 1866, the Canadian colonies needed an expanded domestic market to survive. Developing and colonizing western territory was a long-term solution to this dilemma – one that took deep hold on central and eastern imaginations. Although a grand idea, attempting inclusion of all British North American areas, it was more narrowly a plan to expand the western boundaries of Ontario. (3)

The expansion of the Western boundaries of Ontario proved problematic for geological reasons, however, and this may in fact be the reason for the lack of a similar frontier myth in Canada, as Walter Nugent argues:

> The [Canadian] Shield [which was not farmable] prevented young Ontarians from continuing the frontier of settlement northwestward, wheras the international boundary meant that they moved out of Canada into Michigan, and beyond to the American Midwest. The Canadian frontier of settlement was thus interrupted in space – and, as Canadian historians have pointed out, it was also interrupted in time for and entire generation or more, weakening any hold the frontier idea might have had in Canada. Whereas the American frontier experience was continuous from earliest times into the twentieth century, Canada's was fragmented into several nearly discontinuous pieces. The interruptions helped prevent the development of a national mythology of frontier-based exceptionalism, which was so characteristic of the United States. (Nugent 818-19)

When Canadian politicians finally decided to stimulate a settlement of the West, one reason for their decision to promote this settlement, e.g. through the distribution of pamphlets and posters invoking the idea of the West as a garden and through the infrastructural development of Western Canada, was their anxiety towards their southern neighbor. They feared that the much denser settlement of the American plains

[56] The most concise and comprehensive version of Careless' theory is probably found in the lecture *Frontier and Metropolis*.

might lead to an annexation of the more or less unsettled Canadian Prairies. This fear only grew worse after the purchase of Alaska in 1867 (McGillivray 274).

In order to prevent American conditions, the central government attempted to create a great deal of infrastructure before the first settlers arrived. This led to the creation of the North West Mounted Police (NWMP) and the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) in 1885. To a great extent, this creation of an infrastructure which preceded most settlers was a success, as a juxtaposition of the American and Canadian West shows:

> Whereas on the more raucous American ranching frontier, bitter and violent range wars preceded the establishment of "law and order," the Canadian ranching community was the product of government initiative and developed within a well-established legal framework. The ethos of this community was deeply conservative. (Seiler and Seiler 158)[57]

The same "in-advance-solution" seen in the building of the CPR and the creation of the NWMP was also used with regard to the First Nations and Métis who already inhabited the "unclaimed" land in the West. The Métis, having formed their own state, were not considered equal negotiating partners. As a result, the latent conflict surrounding the Canadian westward movement and the ownership of the Red River land erupted in violence during the Red River Insurrection of 1869 (cf. Kloos 39-66). The First Nations were even worse off. The almost complete extinction of the once mighty buffalo herds had deprived them of their primary source of sustenance. Weakened by hunger, they were forced to sign contracts resulting in their relocation onto reservations, an exchange based on unequal power which has since been mythologized as less imperial than U.S. policy, a point explored in more detail in chapter 5. The few Natives who refused to sign the treaties were fought and defeated by the government, as was the case in the North-West Insurrection of 1885 when a group surrounding chief Big Bear joined the Métis in their second rebellion.

The different attitudes towards conquering the West are also reflected in a discrepancy between American and Canadian cowboys, both historically and in myth / fiction. Whereas historically both the Canadian and American cowboy performed similar daily tasks (cattle herding, roundups, etc.), and for the most part had a less than romantic life, some differences in their representation and significance as cultural icons are huge. It should be mentioned that the cowboy, together with many of the cattle herds he drove up north, came from America (or rather Mexico), and consequently the heyday

[57] The topos of a Mild versus a Wild West, explored in more detail in chapter 3, which clearly also informs Seiler and Seiler's writing, while partly based in history, has been challenged by William H. Katerberg in his article "A Northern Vision." As Katerberg suggests history seems to have been more complex than popular belief would have it.

of the Canadian cowboy both started and ended later than that of his American cousin.[58] It has been speculated that the attitude within the Canadian cowboy community was a different one; a communal feeling still reflected in the tradition of chuckwagon racing perceived often as primarily Canadian, but this seems hard to prove without substantial evidence and could well turn out to be an incident of "Mild West" mythmaking.[59] Whatever its historical basis, the myth is real. Aritha van Herk, for instance, considers the chuckwagon races at the Calgary Stampede – a sport which originated from the communal taking in of meals while on a roundup – distinctly Canadian in its communal anti-individualism ("Shooting" and "Leading").[60] This is contrasted by Canadian critics with the solitary American cowboy's struggle with rope, bull, and horse in American rodeos (Felske 119-20, van Herk, "Shooting" 22-25). Such critics conveniently overlook that these "American" struggles are as much a part of contemporary cowboy culture in Canada and consequently a large part of rodeos such as the Calgary Stampede.

Robert and Tamara Seiler see the fictionalized version of both the American cowboy and the American West personified in Buffalo Bill Cody's self-mythologization through his continuing reinvention of himself (158-60). In contrast to Buffalo Bill's tales of individualism and danger, the Canadian "frontier" is determined in their view by ideas of community and order. As a result, the equivalent of the fast-drawing cowboy who solves problems through his "peace-maker" was the Canadian Mountie "who, rather than making law on the spot, serves as an instrument of law, which like the whole system of order he maintains […] is created elsewhere" (162-63).[61]

The alternative hero figure of the Mountie was used for some time as a Canadian alternative to the classic formula Western in stories such as Ralph Connor's *Corporal*

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[58] The approximate dates are generally given as late 1860s to the harsh winter of 1885/86 during which many free-grazing cattle died in snow storms, for the U.S., and as 1880s to at most the equally harsh winter of 1906/07, in which low temperatures and blizzards killed most of the free-grazing stock, for Canada. This disastrous winter was the final coffin nail for an economy that had already suffered from huge prairie fires in 1901 and declining meat prices in Great Britain from 1903 onwards (Dempsky 1, 142-149). The importance of markets in Great Britain is also stressed by Harold Innis, who points out: "The importance of metropolitain centers in which luxury [but not only luxury] goods were in most demand was crucial to the development of colonial North America" (*The Fur Trade in Canada*. quoted in R.D.Francis, "Turner versus Innis" 476).

[59] Cf. van Herk. "Shooting a Saskatoon" and "Leading the Parade," as well as Felske. "Diversifying our Past."

[60] Hugh Dempsky gives a brief description of the historical role of a chuckwagon: "The chuckwagon traveled ahead of the drive, the cook being accompanied by a rider who drove the extra saddle horses to the new camp. By the time the other crews arrived, the cook had his tent pitched and a meal ready" (16).

[61] The famous image of the peaceful and popular Mountie almost omnipresent in Canadian publications is questioned by Louis S. Warren who tells another story: When Buffalo Bill hired some Canadian Mounties for his 'Wild West' in 1901, the temper rose in New York and other parts of the United States; the show was protested against due to the Canadian troops' involvement in the British Boer War, which was hugely unpopular especially among the Irish population (427-28). Cf. also D. Francis, *National Dreams*, for the changing image and recent fate of the Mountie as cultural icon in Canada.

Cameron of the North West Mounted Police: A Tale of the Macleod Trail (1912), *The Patrol of the Sundance Trail* (1914), and others. These Mountie adventure stories, despite being successful for some time, were quickly used up, and as a result have not had a serious impact on Canadian literary history.[62] A number of poorlymade CBC films produced in the 1930s which simply adapted the American Western conventions and transplanted them onto Canadian grounds were even less successful. This suggests that as early as the 1930s the public did not buy the American image of the cowboy hero when it appeared in a Canadian context. They did, however, connect to the Western's symbols in their original form when attending the rodeos and watching American Westerns.

The cowboy consequently is an American import, both historically (from Mexico via Texas) and culturally in what could be called a second import. Through the impact of American media the cowboy in his American form became more credible and, to be sure, more interesting than his Canadian equivalent, even for a Canadian audience. This has in recent years led to an attempt to reclaim the historical Canadian cowboy through books such as *Men of the Saddle*, and *The Canadian Cowboy* from what is perceived as a "dramatiz[ation] by Hollywood to a ridiculous point" (Grant and Russell 29).[63]

2.5.5. Space and Region

> It is easier to shoot a saskatoon than it is to name this awesomely confounding, unlimited and indefinable space.
>
> Aritha van Herk, "Shooting a Saskatoon (Whatever Happened to the Marlboro Man?)."

The imaginary space of the West plays an important role in both the Canadian and the American West. The land is traditionally perceived differently in the two countries, however. The American tradition which informs the Western focuses more on its role as wilderness, while downplaying its actual physical geography – the West could be

[62] Cf. John Lennox observation: "By the twenties, the myth of the glorious West had been played out. Those who wrote about the West in this decade – Frederick Philip Grove, Robert Stead, and Martha Ostenso – saw it not as a land of promise and hope, but as a place where dreams were often doomed to despair. […] Although [Connor] continued to sell books in the 1920s, increasingly the economic, political, and cultural urge to move forward relegated the fiction of Ralph Connor, in the minds of the readers and critics, to an outmoded way of looking at a bygone era" (77). This is also seen in Connor's sales figures. By 1901 he had sold over 5 million copies of his first three books, and while he remained popular until shortly after the First World War – his subsequent novels appeared on the annual best-seller lists in 1907, 1918 and 1919 – he had no similar success after 1919, although he continued to publish until his death in 1937.

[63] Ironically, the impact of the Romantic, (American) cowboy myth influences publications such as Andy Russell's *The Canadian Cowboy* and Hugh A. Dempsky's *The Golden Age of the Canadian Cowboy* substantially. Especially Russel seems under its spell. A study on the impact of the Western myth on non-fictional publications on the cowboy, especially the Canadian cowboy would certainly produce interesting findings in this respect.

anywhere as long as it functions as a frontier, and, for the purpose of dramatization in movies, is visually stunning and sublime.[64] This view of the land is linked to its role as an identity formant as expressed by Frederick Jackson Turner, who linked the vast empty spaces in the West to the formation of a new American. Mathias Waechter aptly sums up this part of Turner's argument:

> Nachdem zunächst also durch den Einfluß der amerikanischen Wildnis das geistigkulturelle "Gepäck" der Siedler weitgehend zerstört worden war, konnte ein zweiter, nun kreativer evolutionärer Prozeß beginnen, in dem sich Siedler den spezifischen Umweltbedingungen anpassten. Nur unter den "primitive conditions" des freien Landes war ein unbelasteter Neubeginn, soziale Evolution von den einfachsten Anfängen an aufwärts, möglich. (103)[65]

The focus in Turner's theory is on the "primitive conditions" of the "empty" land, rather than on any specific features of the land. It may be hostile, sublime or otherwise interpreted, but it is defined by its relation to the European settlers in that it is still untouched by them and thus "primitive." Owen Wister can once again be taken as a representative for the Western tradition, when he shows equal beliefs in how the frontier can transform a gentleman (as long as he is of Anglo-Saxon descent) into a "true American," as represented by the figure of the cow-puncher in his essay "The Evolution of the Cow-Puncher" (1895).

In contrast, the Canadian tradition of what Douglas Francis calls "formal regionalism" (one of the predominant traditions in Prairies literature and culture from the late 1800s on) focuses more on what it perceives as the actual landscape of the West ("Regionalism").[66] The impact of the land on Canadian literature, and resulting claims of a distinct national or regional literature (depending mainly on where the critic is based) which originates directly "out of the land," are perhaps some of the most discussed topics revolving around the literature and identity-seeking of the Canadian West in particular. An authentic Western literature has for the longest time been perceived to necessarily come out of the land, a claim also made with regard to the regional Western American novel. Especially in the West, regionalist critics claim, the

[64] It should be mentioned that the following exploration focuses on the West's traditional role in the American and Canadian imaginary which has informed the creation of a Western, or the lack thereof. Recently Western American critics have embraced much more differentiated models of critical regionalism, which see the West in a complex of forces between the global and the local diverging and interacting at the same time.

[65] Canadian historian Harold Innis in contrast sees Canadian civilization as "an extension of European civilization" (R.D. Francis, "Turner" 476).

[66] This "actual landscape" is of course as much a cultural construct as the American landscape in the Western, it merely operates under different terms.

land has had an almost overpowering formative influence on literature – whether or not we agree, it definitely had this influence on criticism.[67]

Whereas the American land has, by non-regionalists, been seen as a harsh but ultimately positive force,[68] the Canadian landscape is seen by regionalist critics such as Laurie Ricou as characterized in Canadian literature in a much more negative fashion. Its impact on the inhabitants is perceived as hardening them towards both nature and despair arising almost automatically when confronted with a bleak landscape such as the Canadian Prairies. The Canadian land, it is held, can never be fully tamed by the settlers or by later inhabitants, even in the 20th century. In her influential "thematic guide" to Canadian Literature, *Survival*, Margaret Atwood calls this phenomenon "Nature the Monster" (55-81). George Bowering sums up and humorously shortens the whole discourse:

> When critics with an eye to thematic concerns look at USAmerican [sic] literature they descry the theme of the New Eden and the New Adam. When Canadian thematic critics look at our literature they see Adam and Eve kicked out of Eden into the snow. (*Stone Country* 114)

2.5.6. Towards a Transnational Reading of Canadian and American Narratives of the West

In her afterword to the collection of essays from the 1978 Banff conference "Crossing Frontiers," Rosemary Sullivan sums up the "findings" of the conference:

> Americans stand on one side of the word "West," the Canadians on the other. The American understanding of the word necessarily includes the Turner thesis of the frontier that makes American and West virtually synonymous. The Canadian begins with a confusion between an assumed identity with an American experience and a different historical reality, and is forced to sort out the two. In short, the difference is a romantic versus an ironic identification with the frontier concepts, which may be the most important insight into cultural differences reached at Crossing Frontiers. (144-45)

Indeed, the treatment of the frontier, as undertaken in many, but not all, of the Canadian texts discussed in this study is an ironic one, caught between a prevalent American myth of the frontier and a Canadian feeling of difference, even if it is at least as likely informed by a Canadian identity politics as by a different history. A similar ironic

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[67] Notable early examples of this school of thought are Laurie Ricou's *Vertical Man / Horizontal World* and Dick Harrison's *Unnamed Country*, as well as Henry Kreisel's influential article "The Prairie: A State of Mind." For a discussion and critique of both Harrison's and Ricou's approach see Alison Calder's "Getting the Real Story."

[68] In Turner's words, democracy "came out of the American forest, and it gained new strength each time it touched a new frontier. Not the constitution but free land and an abundance of natural resources open to a fit people, made the democratic type of society in America for three centuries while it occupied its empire" ("The West" 293).

distance can be said to be at the heart of many postmodern U.S. authors who reject the notion of the frontier and its related ideas and ideologies such as Manifest Destiny as sharply as their Canadian counterparts.

Easy assumptions about a clear distinction along national lines are problematic as Reinhold Kramer points out, since they can lead to intellectual laziness and selfcongratulation:

> Taken far enough, the tendency to create generic differences evolves into a grander theme: American myths of "the West" are grand, imperial structures that justify any amount of violence, border crossing, and egoism; Canadians, it is implied, can show America the real West, shorn of white symbols and alibis. (11)

To the same effect, the idea behind a transnational approach is to not erect artificial borders between nations, setting off one distinct national literature against another, but rather to show connections between literatures written by authors from different nations. As insisted by Wyile and others, it should aim not to overlook or explain away local specificities, however, such as the Canadian insistence on difference from America explored in chapter 3, or the lack of African American characters in the Canadian Western mentioned in chapter 4. A transnational approach explores continuities in the revision of the Western myth on both sides of the border, a myth which remains almost always connected to America and thus reflects back on the U.S. even if it is used by Canadian authors.

The importance of such an undertaking derives from the continued significance of the Western myth which remains visible on both sides of the border. In fact, a number of Canadian and American authors have commented on the impact of the Western myth on the self-perception of people living in the West. According to these authors the Western myth lures readers and viewers with its supposed authenticity, impairing whatever "authenticity" or originality farmers, cowboys and other Westerners had.[69] In *The American West as Living Space*, for instance, American author Wallace Stegner remarks: "Plenty of authentic ranch hands have read pulp Westerns in the shade of the bunkhouse and got up walking, talking, and thinking like Buck Duane [the protagonist of Zane Grey's *The Lone Star Ranger*] or Hopalong Cassidy" (68). And Canadian author Sinclair Ross in *As For Me and My House* asserts a similar situation in the Canadian West. Describing a dance in a Western town, he observes:

[69] As mentioned previously, authenticity as a key ingredient of the West is examined in by Handley and Lewis. As they note the authentic is not a unique original as is often assumed, rather it "is an original that has many copies. Indeed, the 'authentic' gains authority the more it is copied" (2).

> [C]owboys here and there in chaps and gaudy shirts and handkerchiefs, sombreroed some of them even while they danced, all swaggering a little to maintains the dashing, picturesque traditions of a West that they had read about in magazines. (127)

This is of course a situation which would strike a postmodernist as an instance of life imitating art and, unsurprisingly, the mythic West's influence of personal codes and behaviors has inspired many authors. Ishmael Reed, for instance, being always a little more over-the-top than his contemporaries, goes as far as flaunting his status as a non-Westerner as a qualifying criterion for writing in the form:

> Reed argues that the West was "invented" by writers who imagined the region from a geographical distance and that "real" cowboys modeled themselves after purely fictional characters. Thus he can boast about his own lack of qualifications for writing a Western (in ungrammatical language, stating "I've never rode a horse in my life"), since Westerns require neither historical accuracy nor fidelity to grammatical rules. (Allmendinger, *Imagining* 76)

While some commentators, frequently regional critics or historians, such as David Hamilton Murdoch, seems full of spite and wonder at the loss of the "real West" when observing such trends as the rather amusing comment of one cowboy regarding Owen Wister's use of dialect and its impact on the American West: "Well, maybe we didn't talk that way before Mr. Wister wrote his book, but we sure all talked that way after it was published" (89), Ishmael Reed stands on the other end in regarding the whole situation in more ironic terms: "Yellow Back writers [i.e. writers of popular Western novels] were really dudes from the East like me. The cowboys would read their books and begin to ape the exaggerations of themselves they read. A case of life imitating art" (*Self Interview* 25, quoted in Fabre 22).[70]

In such instances of life imitating art, the Western is then a part of a cultural background that influenced both Canadian and American culture. Thus it is at the same time a universal narrative, as Leslie Fiedler claimed ("Canada"), and one that is seen as Other, particularly in a Canadian environment, but also from a postmodern or even critically modern or regionalist American position. Canadian writer Robert Kroetsch, who was clearly influenced by the myth of the frontier in almost all of his writing, but was too aware of his own position as a postmodern Canadian regional author to ever write in the form, has commented on the special status of the Western in a Canadian

[70] Cf. also Murdoch:

> [T]he creators were for the most part not Westerners – from start to finish the West of myth was invented by the East. On any sensible assumption this should have meant the myth died stillborn – but instead of challenging the fantasies, the real West enthusiastically subscribed to them. (22)

environment – an environment in which the genre always exists as a transnational borrowing – as Dick Harrison explains:

> Serious fiction of the Canadian West [...] springs from no corresponding narrative germ [as the frontier] and may as easily invoke a Turnerian frontier or something from Biblical, classical, or native mythology. What Kroetsch calls "this willingness to refuse privilege to a restricted or restrictive cluster of meta-narratives" (23) offers a basis for a general contrast: a literature that draws freely on the mythic and narrative patterns of Western civilization, as opposed to one that is preoccupied with a specific national myth of origins – a Copernican, as opposed to a Ptolemaic, literary universe. ("Dialectic Structures" 63)

While the foreignness of the Western genre secures a critical distance in "serious" Canadian fiction, as Harrison states, it is presumptuous to assume that there is no such critical distance in American literature. Indeed, as discussed above, the revisionist tradition within the Western similarly functions as a "minor language" in Deleuze's terms within an American literary landscape. Consequently it seems viable to not only examine the Canadian Western within its transnational connection to the American genre of the Western, but to add the additional critical layer of reading the American Western transnationally to see further connections in (postmodern) revisions of the Western in both local / national literatures.

2.6. Corpus

French critic Marc Chénetier recently described the revisionist Western texts he examines in terms of their stylistic variations of the Western as "shooting at the Western mode," their authors as "wordslingers." My focus in this thesis similarly lies on such "wordslingers," U.S.-American and Canadian authors who approach the Western, extending, revising or "shooting at" the generic codes of the popular Western in texts that are Westerns, but, in Derrida's words, participate in the genre without belonging. Many, but not all, of these revisionist texts fall into cultural postmodernism. While a number of them are openly postmodern in their style, most are the products of a wider postmodern mindset which distrusts formulae and metanarratives, working instead to (re)establish heterogeneity. They do this as part of the postmodern trend of appropriating popular genres.

My focus lies on texts, mostly novels, many written by critically acclaimed and influential American and Canadian authors, who have picked up trends and formulae of the popular West and revised them within works that clearly set themselves off from the popular Westerns, either through parody or through their treatment of elements of the formula Western in more ambiguous and openly "literary" ways. These authors draw explicitly upon Western generic codes, making the reader aware that their work is to be

read as a Western – if as a Western with a difference. While such aspects of generic codification may include marketing, subtitles and blurbs, "remarks" in Derrida's terms, as Reinhold Kramer states with reference to the cover design of Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Englishman's Boy*'s (15), the texts usually bear their generic participation out by other means. To do this most of the novels I discuss employ variations of standard Western props such as six-guns and horses, stock characters such as the cowboy or gun fighter, and plot structures all of which ensure that the reader correctly identifies the genre, before they turn to parody or revision. In other words, they establish a family resemblance to the genre.

In choosing my texts I claim guilty of the "offence" Blake Allmendinger has charged earlier critics with:

> Smith, Tompkins, and others have used *noncowboy* texts – novels written by Zane Grey, a New Jersey dentist, and films made in Hollywood – as sources for their investigations of "cowboy" film and literature. Their works exploit cowboys as metaphor: not interested in "real" cowboys, the work that they did, or the art that they made, the books used cowboys only as symbolic springboards for diving off into discussions of wide-ranging issues, most of which have little or nothing to do with real working cowboys. (*The Cowboy* 12; emphasis in original)

Being interested in appropriations of the Western as a popular genre within a wider postmodern field, I likewise am not interested in "real" cowboys and do not regard the author's place of birth, upbringing, or his profession as a relevant factor. This has in any case never been a serious issue for the writers of Western, as Wallace Stegner remarks: "Some of the most persuasive horse operas, as witness Jack Schaefer's *Shane*, have been written by people not native to cow country, to horse, or to gun" ("History" 62).

This dissociation of the Western from the West frees us from the assumption that every novel about the American of Canadian West is to be regarded in relation to the Western. While the Western is referred to or plays a role in shaping specific characters' mindsets in countless works, e.g. the Coen brother's film *The Big Lebowski*, there are other generic regimes which pervade and make the novel or film not primarily a Western but part of a different genre, regional writing, etc., although it might have aspects identifiable as belonging to the Western. Willa Cather's *My Ántonia*, for instance, certainly take place in the West, even on a frontier, but it is the farming, not the ranching frontier. Tellingly, Cather's characters locate the "wild West" further West: "Otto said he was not likely to find another place that suited him so well; that he was tired of farming and thought he would go back to what he called the 'wild West'" (*My Ántonia* 81.). Likewise, the concerns of Cather's novel are decidedly not the conflict and violence of a Western frontier, but questions of growing up in the West, immigration, the workings of a community, and so on. Similarly, while there is some justification in

reading parts of Sherman Alexie's short story cycle *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* in terms of the Western – after all Alexie repeatedly plays with the image of the Lone Ranger's stereotyped Indian sidekick Tonto – Robert Gish has to seriously stretch, and I would claim overstretch, his categories to read James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* as a Western ("American"). Like Cather's regional novel, Welch's text is not about the issues dealt with in the Western either, but deals with a middle-aged Native American protagonist who does not manage to come to terms with his life, his heritage and his "wife." Despite a bar fight and a reference to rodeo, which Gish takes as signs that the text is a Western, Welsh's novel is, for all I can tell, not even targeting the Western genre from the outside. Thus while it can certainly be regarded as one of the "politically liberating, humanizing text for Indian authors who attempt to reclaim, rectify, and authenticate their respective cultures and people," as Gish claims, it is not an "Indian western" ("American" 922), nor should it be read in terms of the Western. Gordon Bölling has an understanding that is closer to my own, when in his comparative article of two Canadian texts targeting the traditional Western, Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* and Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Englishman's Boy*, he remarks on Thomas King's non-Western:

> The refusal to adapt the genre of the classical Hollywood Westerns to the revisionist aims of *Green Grass, Running Water* suggests that Thomas King completely rejects this popular genre. As a native writer, he does not regard the Western as a means to authentically represent the historical experience of North America's indigenous cultures. […] [I]nstead of scripting a Western, he chooses to foreground Native conceptions of storytelling. (82-83)

Because of this refusal by King, Welch, Alexie and other Native American writers, as well as other non-white and most female authors to write within the generic boundaries of the Western, the genre, even in its revisionist form, remains very much a white, male dominated field – a somewhat uncomfortable situation at odds with the revisionists' objective to give a voice to marginalized groups, and one obviously also reflected in the texts examined in this study.

CHAPTER 3
NATIONAL IDENTITY

3.1. Nations as Imagined Communities

Homer: "[There's] a big game between Springfield U and Springfield A&M. I hate Springfield U so much!"
Lisa: "You went to Springfield U, you hate A&M."
Homer: "… so much!"

The Simpsons Season 11, Episode 11 "Faith Off."

"Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it *invents* nations where they do not exist" (Gellner quoted in Anderson 15; Anderson's emphasis). As Ernest Gellner points out, nations are not independent entities, which exist on the basis of some essential characteristic or independent identity-forming feature. Rather, as Benedict Anderson explains, "nationality, or […] nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind" (13). Nations are imagined communities which define themselves as sovereign, and set themselves off against other communities through (arbitrary) boundaries, which in their purest form deny the intrinsic interconnectedness of communities and cultures. While, as Edward Said has shown, "all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogenous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic" (xxv), dominant discourses of nationalism and national identity deny or at least downplay this interconnectedness. Instead they capitalize on narrative constructs such as national history, literature or culture, which are held up as the basis of a unique national identity.

As leftist critics have pointed out, one of the functions of national identity is to mask or at least soften inequalities in modern societies, such as the distribution of wealth and power in a society, gender or race relations, cultural, legal, and political hegemonies, and so forth. As Anderson has argued, one of the nation's strongest unifying narratives is the imagining of a community,

> because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploration that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings. (16)

This "horizontal comradeship" not only disregards historical and present inequalities, but also makes it possible for an Eastern reader or author to imagine himself as part of a progressive Westward moving nation in the 19th century, even to contribute to the telling of this narrative, despite the fact that, like Edward Wheeler, the creator of

Deadwood Dick, he may never have crossed the Mississippi.[71] Since the nation as imagined community is based, in part, on historical meta-narratives and myths of a shared past and supposedly progressive national history,[72] almost any member of the (white) American population in the 20th century can feel as the son or daughter of the great and daring pioneers portrayed in many Westerns.[73]

The West perpetuated in the Western is one of the mythic frontier narratives providing a story for the unifying identity of an American imagined community. That this narrative, like other (popular) expressions of national myths, in large part lacks an accurate historical basis does not lessen its power. Far from being a disadvantage, this allows the Western to create a national mythology by repeating certain key elements of a tiny sliver of "national history," elevated in 20th century popular memory to the status of a golden age. Similarly, in early 20th century historiography the frontier was interpreted as a formative, nationalizing experience, following Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, in which he proclaimed the frontier to be "the line of most rapid and effective Americanization" (3-4). Given Turner's attempts to set himself off from historians such as Francis Parkman or Theodore Roosevelt, who, in contrast to Turner's agrarian focus, promoted a view of a more obviously romantic, adventurous frontier history defined by heroic frontiersmen,[74] it seems particularly ironic that Turner's frontier thesis survives most visibly in the Western with its emphasis on action and adventure, the very elements Turner wished to downplay in his frontier thesis.[75]

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[71] Cf. "Edward L. Wheeler" for a correction of Edmund Pearson's exaggerated claim that Wheeler had never been farther west than Jersey City. The essence of Pearson's claim remains, however, Wheeler was certainly not a Westerner or even a well-traveled Easterner.

[72] Cf. Joshua Fishman's observation "History and ethnography are the reservoirs of symbols and myths, heroes and missions which nationalist elites first mine and then refine in their quest for ethnically unifying and energizing themes" (16).

[73] Cf. Robert B. Parker's appraisal of Michael Barson's *True West: An Illustrated Guide to the Heyday of the Western*: "We are all of us, willy-nilly, westerners of a kind, regardless of the zip codes where we actually reside" (reverse cover).

[74] Cf. Etulain, "Frontier": "Turner endeavored to lead interpreters of the West in a more analytical, less romantic direction." And: "For Turner historians like Francis Parkman and his own contemporaries Theodore Roosevelt, Justin Winsor, and Reuben Gold Thwaites too often stressed adventure or failed to adopt and interpretive approach to the past" (8).

[75] Cf. Canadian historian J.M.S. Careless in his seminal 1954 article "Frontierism, Metropolitanism, and Canadian History":

> Defenders of Turner might claim that he had not proposed a frontier hypothesis as the only key to American history, but it was widely seized upon as the true explanation, especially as its nationalist and romantic implications gripped the American imagination. Its effects may still be found today, on different cultural levels in the United States. Indeed, it may not be irrelevant to note that Hollywood, that lowest common denominator of the American mind where myths are mass-produced, still pours forth a flood of highly technicoloured Westerns each purporting to touch the very soul of America, as some pioneer rugged individualist with iron hands and blazing guns "carves out an empire" for the nation at various points west, while Indians in their thousands from Central Casting Office go down before the onward march of democracy. (7)

In contrast to history, popular culture, despite a marked penchant to authenticate itself, as in statements about such creators as Western romancer Louis L'Amour in the short biography of his novel *Lando* – "His personal experience as well as his lifelong devotion to historical research combined to give Mr. L'Amour the unique knowledge and understanding of people, events, and the challenge of the American frontier that became hallmarks of his popularity" (157) – is largely untroubled by heuristic intricacies in its gospel of the frontier as formative, heroic national moment.[76] The popular Western's aim, at least where it does not venture too far into the terrain of the historical novel, remains to create a Western and by extension *national* past not as it was, but as it should have been. It is in this light that Martin Weidinger sums up the Western's peculiar relation to history and national myth:

> [Es kann] festgehalten werden, dass der Western in der Repetition und Variation verschiedener fiktionalisierter, sich aus der mythischen *frontier-experience* speisender Aspekte amerikanischer "Geschichte," diese in seinem Mainstream gewiss nicht dekonstruiert, sondern sie als einzigartige, genuin amerikanische Erfahrung in ihrer Gesamtheit affirmiert, oft geradezu zelebriert und höchstens einzelne Bereiche, etwa den Genozid an der amerikanischen Urbevölkerung vorsichtig kritisch beleuchtet. (55; italics in original)

Overall then, the West has, as Neil Campbell states, "been a particular focal site for the inscription of national identity, and one of its primary mythic vehicles has been the Western generic 'system'" (*Rhizomatic West* 152). In Jack Schaefer's *Shane* for instance, the depiction of the uprooting of a gnarled tree becomes a symbol for the heroic struggle of frontiersmen and -women. As Campbell further observes, "generic traditions of community building, individual sacrifice, acceptable violence, hypermasculinity, and racial and gender division have too often become unquestioned elements within this system" (Ibid.). Furthermore, the West has played a larger part in the American imaginary, as Lewis and Handley argue: "[F]or popular interpreters of American experience in the West, the West has often been the legitimating source and sanctifying ground of American authenticity" (6).

It is within the scope of Benedict Anderson's rejection of Ernest Gellner's earlier attempt to dismantle nationalism as "'fabricated' and 'false'," as obscuring allegedly

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[76] Nat Lewis discusses the authentication of Western literature in detail in his study *Unsettling the Literary West*. Lewis and William Handely further discuss the issue of authenticity not only with regard to authors but also audience's reactions in the insightful introduction to their collection *True West*. Here they claim "there is no other region in America that is as haunted by the elusive appeal, legitimating power, and nostalgic pull of authenticity, whether with regard to ethnicity, cultural artifacts, or settings," and "[r]eaders and critics have consistently evaluated western literature and other forms of representation against what historian Patricia Nelson Limerick calls, with some amusement, 'the Real West' [in this they often] make unexamined assumptions about what is authentic, what is real, what is true" (1).

more "natural" communities, that the Western's role as a national, mythological narrative becomes fully apparent, a narrative which constructs a national cohesion out of nothing rather than falsifying or obscuring a truer unity within the U.S.A. As Anderson stresses, "'true' communities," in Gellner's sense, "which can be advantageously juxtaposed to nations," do not exist. "In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (or perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished not by their falsity / genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (15). The Western, and more specifically the frontier, lying at its heart, has for the longest time provided one of the major metaphors and foundation stories of the U.S.A, incorporating and transforming older mythic narratives, such as Manifest Destiny, as Richard Slotkin and others have shown.

A brief turn to the quote at the beginning of this chapter sheds light on another important mechanism of community building, namely "Othering," which will become particularly important in the discussion of an identity construction in the Canadian Western. While this quote in which Homer Simpson expresses his contempt for an imagined Other is of course humorously exaggerated, it gains its humor from drawing on real life Othering. It points out the arbitrariness underlying the contempt and mistrust for a despised Other: although Homer has to be reminded which university he went to and thus confuses "Other" and "self," he remembers one thing: he hates that Other (whatever its specific nature or details) "so much." Julia Kristeva explains the notion of "Othering" in the construction of a group identity with reference to Freud's writings in her *Nations without Nationalism*:

> "Society is founded on a common crime," [Freud] wrote in *Totem and Taboo*, and the exclusion of "others," which binds the identity of a clan, a sect, a party, or a nation, is equally the source of the pleasure of identification ("this is what *we* are, therefore this is what *I* am") and of barbaric persecution ("that is foreign to me, therefore I throw it out, hunt it down, or massacre it"). The complex relationship between cause and effect that govern social groups obviously do not coincide with the laws of the unconscious regarding a subject, but there unconscious determinations remain a constituent part, an essential one, of social and therefore national dynamics. (50; Kristeva's emphasis)

While the non-Freudian might not necessarily agree with Kristeva's likening the "good narcicistic image of the child" with national pride (52), the importance of Othering in the construction of a group identity that Kristeva explores is undeniable. Eric Hobsbawm, too, in his history of nations and nationalism, has commented on the tendency of nation building through exclusion and the construction of a hostile Other. Through an ironic reference to the British national anthem, Hobsbawm highlights the

centrality of the Other: "If the foreigners with their knavish tricks did not exist, it would be necessary to invent them" (174).[77]

In the introduction to his collection *Nation and Narration*, Homi Bhabha expounds this notion of Othering in the imagining of a community. According to Bhabha, who like Kristeva builds on Freud, specifically Freud's observations on the uncanny (*unheimlich*), nationalism constructs a narrative which sets off "the *heimlich* pleasures of the hearth" from the "*unheimlich* terror of the space or race of the Other" (2). Building on Anderson's work and adding his own blend of poststructuralism to highlight the textuality and narrativity of nation building, Bhabha writes:

> To encounter the nation *as it is written* displays a temporality of culture and social consciousness more in tune with the partial, overdetermined process by which textual meaning is produced through the articulation of difference in language; more in keeping with the problem of closure which plays enigmatically in the discourse of the sign. Such an approach contests the traditional authority of those national objects of knowledge – Tradition, People, the Reason of State, High Culture, for instance – whose pedagogical value often relies on their representation as holistic concepts located within an evolutionary narrative of historical continuity. Traditional histories do not take the nation at its own word, but, for the most part, they do assume that the problem lies in the interpretation of "events" that have a certain transparency of privileged visibility. (Ibid. 2-3; emphasis in original)

In contrast to primordialist notions, which see the nation as the result of more "objective" and graspable cultural traits, such as a common language, territory, history, or even "blood,"[78] Bhabha conceives the nation as being narrative in nature. As a result his approach is to examine the imagination of the nation from a poststructuralist perspective, "to explore the Janus-faced ambivalence of language itself in the construction of the Janus-faced discourse of the nation." Following Edward Saïd, Bhabha's collection aims to highlight the "performativity of language in the narratives of the nation" (*Nation and Narration* 3).

Coming from a more traditional Marxist understanding, and one which preceded the textual turn in the humanities, Benedict Anderson is, as mentioned, more interested in hegemonic relations and the creation and maintenance of unequal power. The relationship between language / literature and the nation had in Benedict Anderson's account a slightly different, but no less important, dimension. Anderson links his argument about the origin of national consciousness to capitalism's appropriation of the print media. According to Anderson, print-capitalism not only created a community based on the vernacular language, but "gave a new fixity to language, which in the long run helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the

[77] The English national anthem "God Save the Queen [or King]," which Hobsbawm refers to, expresses the plea that God scatter the queen's (or king's) enemies and "Confound their politics, / Frustrate their knavish tricks."

[78] Cf. Hearn's discussion of primordialism (20-66).

nation," and, in the process, privileged some forms of language over others, creating "languages of power" for an elite whose spoken language was closer to the printed word (47-48). Thus "the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation" (49). Within the process of nation building, newspapers, and later literature, played a central role in the creation of the imagined community, which forged e.g. the thirteen North American colonies into a community which perceived itself as unified and set itself off against a foreign, British Other.

A critique of the nation as narration, be it in Anderson's or Bhabha's sense, is, almost of necessity, a critique of nationalism, one of the quintessential narratives of cultural supremacy. To reveal what Bhabha calls the "ambivalent margin of the nation-space" means first and foremost "to contest claims to cultural supremacy, whether these are made from the 'old' post-imperialist metropolitan nations, or on behalf of the 'new' independent nations of the periphery" (*Nation and Narration* 4), a political agenda which also lies at the heart of many transnational approaches. There is in Bhabha's thinking no "good" or justified nationalism of new postcolonial nations, as claimed in early postcolonial discourses, at least not when the new nation attempts to counter the "bad" imperialist nationalism of the old colonizing nations with their own brand of equally exclusionist nationalism.

This observation is of relevance not only for clearly (post)colonial situations, but also for the relation of Canada and the U.S., which from the Canadian viewpoint has been uneasy to say the least. While Canada, of course, is not, nor ever was, in a postcolonial relation to the U.S. in the political-historical sense, – obviously Canada never officially was a U.S. colony – Robin Mathews put Canadian intellectuals' often wary feelings towards their Southern neighbor into the language of colonialism: "Canada has a three-part history of colonialism, first as a French Colony then as a British colony, and now as an economic colony of the U.S.A." (1). As Mathews' statement suggests many Canadians in the mid-20th century sported a postcolonial mindset. Canada was perceived as a nation confronted by a homogenizing power, U.S. culture, by a number of Canadian intellectuals, such as political philosopher George Grant, whose influential *Lament for a Nation* questioned Canada's sovereignty and contributed to a huge upsurge in Canadian nationalism in the late 1960s, or poet Dennis Lee, who wrote the influential essay "Cadence, Country, Silence: Writing in a Colonial Space," in which he read Canada as a colonial nation, as well as the deeply elegiac national meditation *Civil Elegies*, which won the 1972 Governor General's Award for Poetry. These intellectuals feared that an overbearing American presence would wipe out what traces of a distinct culture there were. A feeling of uneasy nationalism had also

informed the years leading up to the famous "Massey Commission" and its report (discussed below). The middle of the 20th century has recently been described by Jason Blake as a climate in which Canada felt like a "cultural backwater": "That Canada managed to publish just fourteen books in 1948 quantifies what many Canadians intuitively felt."

It is only with the beginnings of postmodernism, a movement whose primary proponents were funded to a large degree by the Canada Council, Canada's conclusion drawn from the Massey Report and its dire predictions for Canadian culture, that a massive effort of nation building begins. Canadian writers and critics of the 1960s and 70s attempted to invent a distinct Canadian national identity, clearly separable from both the United States and Great Britain in a Canadian literature which dealt with unique national themes. More recently Alison Calder has commented on the expanded official funding of literature in Canada as an expression of a continued nation building through the support of a national literature:

> One indication of the continuing desire for a specifically national literary culture is shown in Canada's growing number of national annual literary awards: the $10,000 GovernorGeneral's Literary Awards, Canada's most prestigious literary honor, were joined by the $25,000 Giller Prize for fiction in 1994; by the $10,000 Drainie-Taylor Literary Prize for biography, autobiography, and personal memoir in 1998; and by the $40,000 Griffin Poetry Prize in 2000. This nation-building desire is also being replicated on a smaller scale at regional levels, with a proliferation of provincial and civic book awards. ("Getting" 68)

The strategies which many Canadian authors used to confront and subvert the dominant neighbor's culture, have been described by Walter Pache, Linda Hutcheon and others as expressions of postmodernism. When looking at attempts to set off Canada as a nation distinct from the U.S. an understanding of the situation in postcolonial terms, as described below, may also be helpful, however.

The Western genre in Canada, a transnational borrowing akin to the larger borrowing of postmodernism from the U.S. (cf. Pache), has to be seen not merely as a postmodern parody of a popular genre, an approach which is in itself already inherently political – and a technique which is similarly embraced by U.S. novelists and filmmakers – but most often as a *national* act of resistance. By "borrowing" and transforming the American Western, these texts frequently turn it against the U.S., its nation of origin in an attempt to distinguish a national Canadian identity, as I will show in this chapter, an act which presents a conscious setting off of Canadian culture and history from the U.S. as Other. The Western in Canada thus becomes part of the narrative imagination of the nation, a project that Robert Kroetsch has famously remarked on in the wider context of (Western) Canadian fiction: "In a sense we haven't got an identity until somebody tells our story. The fiction makes us real" (Kroetsch,

"Conversation" 30). Alison Calder pointed to the inherent contradiction of linking postmodernism, which rejects essentialisms and metanarratives, e.g. national unity and identity, to Canada as a nation when discussing Linda Hutcheon's thoughts on the Canadian postmodern ("Getting" 58-59). The same paradox lies at the heart of many of the texts using postmodern strategies to construct two disparate nations, Canada and the U.S. While the authors are often highly self reflective and conscious of the constructed nature of history and myth with which they work, Canada still frequently emerges as the more civilized place, taking moral high ground over a violent U.S. It is only in dissenting voices to this easy nation building through Othering that a truly postmodern stance towards national identity is reached. As I will show, Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Englishman's Boy* questions simple national identity constructions as a whole and thus reaches a postmodern ethics, which the novel's fairly traditional, non-experimental style would not immediately suggest.

3.2. The West, the Frontier, and the Idea of American National Identity

The myth of the West has been closely associated with the concept of identity, both with the identity of the individual(ist) who constructs, affirms or reinvents his identity on the frontier, and with the larger identity of the nation, which sees its symbol in the image of the frontiersman. After the American Revolution, the 19th century was the first independent, "genuinely American" century. Politically independent from England, the new nation also quickly lost the Other which had served to unify the colonies, most notably in the figure of the abusive father, King George III, in the Declaration of Independence. Authors and audiences thus deepened their search for a unique national identity, a new "Americanness," that had already begun to be formulated in the writing immediately leading up to the American Revolution (cf. Karrer 21-22).

The frontier as the source of a national story was one of the major concerns for James Fenimore Cooper in his Romantic mythologizing of the frontiersman in *The Deerslayer*, *The Last of the Mohicans* and other works in the first half of the 19th century. In his fiction, Cooper transformed the historical frontiersman Daniel Boone, his main model, into Hawkeye, the quintessential American frontiersman, and elevated the frontier story into a national narrative. This character is kept alive in the work of Cooper's many imitators, most importantly the dime novels of the mid to late 19th century. While their adventure stories offered its readers "imaginative escape from an increasingly urbanized East" (B. Brown 5), superficially addressing and resolving problems of Modernity for an increasingly literate Eastern working class, they "water down" the "irresolvable conflict between East and West" prominent in Cooper's work, as Christine Bold has argued (*Selling* 10). As such these novels avoid any thorough

treatment of the many conflicts underlying late 19th century America. In fact, they paradoxically "disengage the story of the West from the story of the nation," focusing on more local levels as Bill Brown claims (14), while at the same time offering the Westerner, who according to Bold in the dime novel usually had some strong tie to the East and thus symbolically united both regions, as an American hero and a figure of identification for Eastern audiences. Brown later notes that the publisher Beadle & Adams in particular marketed dime novels as "National and American Romances," setting their "literary" fare off from the translated foreign material other publishers were selling as "'Purely American Novels' written by Americans about America," and thus "coded their enterprise as a patriotic project, responding to the ongoing call for a national literature" (21). He does not, however, address the apparent paradox between Beadle's nationalist marketing and what he perceives as the lack of a national link in the novel's treatment of the West. Even if we accept Brown's claim that the frontier and the Western's link to national identity were tenuous in the late 19th century, it became one of the major sources for a new national identity in the years around 1900. Following the rise of the new frontier interpretations and depictions brought forth in various media by Turner, Roosevelt, Wister, Remington, and others (as explored in chapter 2), the Western in fiction, film and drama remained a site of white national identity construction long into the 20th century. While the myth of the frontier, going back to Puritan self-conceptions, was not a new myth *per se*, in the Western it received one of its most efficacious and long-lasting transformations and actualizations.[79] It was, in fact, only after the frontier had officially been declared closed in 1890 by the Census Bureau that it developed its full impact on American minds, becoming more influential as an image than it had ever been as a historical force during its existence.

Owen Wister added a nationalist and racial component to the adventure story of the frontier. The impact of the frontier as expressed in his "clerk Western with Horatio-Alger tendencies" (Karrer 82),[80] *The Virginian*, transported the frontier myth safely into the 20th century, slightly modernizing it while adding a good dose of nostalgia to the mix. Most significantly *The Virginian* added a national, and in fact expansionist, dimension to the narrative of the West, thus both capturing and shaping its own time's preoccupations. As Slotkin writes, "[t]he exchange of an old, domestic, agrarian frontier for a new frontier of world power and industrial development had been a central trope in American political and historiographical debates since the 1890s" (Slotkin, *Gunfighter* 3).

[79] Cf. Slotkin's momentous *Regeneration through Violence* for an in depth exploration of the development of the frontier myth from around 1600.

[80] "Owen Wisters *The Virginian* markierte die Wende zum Angestelltenwestern mit Horatio-Alger Zügen;" my translation above.

Theodore Roosevelt's work, particularly his massive *The Winning of the West*, and Frederick Jackson Turner's more Jeffersonian interpretation of the frontier, also connected the West to the nation, and made the Westerner into the quintessential American:

> The histories they [Turner and Roosevelt] produced portrayed the Frontier as the source of exemplary tales that provided a model of the workings of natural, social, and moral law in history. From these tales they derived a paradigm of interpretation and a model of social behavior which, if understood and followed, would keep Americans true to the values and practices of republican democracy despite the transformation of the economy. (Ibid. 32)

Richard W. Etulain similarly sees Turner's impact in providing "the storyline for a new way of narrating American history. Capitalizing on the keen desire of a historical profession and a general public for a nationalistic, even chauvinistic, portrayal of its exceptional past" ("The Frontier" 7).[81] As noted above the implications of a national identity in the sense of Turner's new American which derives from the struggle between civilization and savagery, resulting in the "perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life" (Turner, "Significance" 19) lies at the heart of the Western. This essentially Modern project is only systematically questioned in a postmodern environment.[82]

What makes a debunking of expressions of a nationalism formulated through the metaphor of the frontier or coded in Western narratives culturally and politically relevant is the identity-forming power of the frontier which informs not only historiography and popular culture, but also frequently politics, as Richard Slotkin shows at length. Kennedy, for whom the frontier provided "an authentic metaphor" is only one of many cases, more recent ones are, of course, Ronald Reagan and George Walker Bush. "The 'Frontier' was for [Kennedy and his advisors] a complexly resonant symbol, a vivid and memorable set of hero-tales – each a model of successful and morally justifying action on the stage of historical conflict." (Slotkin, *Gunfighter* 3). The frightening impact of such simple metaphors becomes apparent when Slotkin cites Kennedy's ambassador in Vietnam who justified "a massive military escalation by citing the necessity of moving the 'Indians' away from the 'fort' so that the 'settlers' could plant 'corn'" (Ibid.). This statement by a political official, seems to illustrates Slotkin's somewhat overstated earlier claim in *Regeneration Through Violence*: "The archetypal enemy of the American hero is the red Indian, and to some degree all groups or nations which threaten us are seen in terms derived from our early myths" (558). As

[81] New Western historian Richard White argues that Turner dramatized the frontier in an equal although slightly different way as other promoters of the frontier, such as Buffalo Bill Cody (cf. White, "When Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill Cody Both Played Chicago in 1893").

[82] Even Stephen Crane in his Western parodies ridicules the ignorance of Easterners and the stereotypical conventions of the dime novels, but does not question the underlying ideology of Westward expansion.

discussed in more detail in chapter 5, within a national identity constructed through the frontier myth, Native Americans until today almost always remain the Other.

In other areas, too, the frontier as a genuinely American identity formant still holds its powers over the American imagination. The interpretation of Alaska, as America's (self-proclaimed) "last frontier," serves as an example of the double edge frontier discourses can have. While on the one hand it allows a conservative, provincial politician with grand political ambitions to style herself as frontierswoman by killing whichever animals come her way in *Sarah Palin's Alaska*, environmental concerns, too, are fuelled not only by concern over the disappearance of habitats, plant and animal species, for their own sake, but also by anxieties of losing the last link to the American frontier past, perceived in the Alaskan wilderness.[83] Thus Alaska serves the nostalgia of Americans living outside Alaska, who like to imagine that the westerner can always ride into an eternal sunset off to new frontiers, even if he has to go North to do so. The notion of postmodern nostalgia for the frontier as a ground for environmental protection and the related issues of the construction of "nature" and "landscape" are explored in Susan Kollin's *Nature's State*. Here Kollin writes:

> Widely regarded as the Last Frontier, Alaska is positioned to encode the nation's future, serving to reopen the western American frontier that Frederick Jackson Turner declared closed in the 1890s. In this sense Alaska functions as a national salvation whose existence alleviates fears about the inevitable environmental doom the United States seems to face and, like previous American frontiers, promises to provide the nation with opportunities for renewal. (5)

As seen in such political, environmental and broader national narratives, the frontier and the Western remain influential, despite the reduced lure of the Western to paying audiences when compared to its heyday in the 1950s. It is the Western's iconic recognizability and its claim to a status as a national narrative, which makes it so effective for postmodern revisionists, Canadian, American or other, who want to make a statement about some aspect of the nation. Even if they do not explicitly address the notion of national identity, the Western is bound to reflect on issues of the construction of history, in the case of the classic Western American history, as British film critic Philip French observes:

> The western is a great grab-bag, a hungry cuckoo of a genre, a voracious bastard of a form, open equally to visionaries and opportunists, ready to seize anything that's in the air from juvenile delinquency to ecology. Yet despite this, or in some ways because of this, one of the things the Western is always about is America rewriting and reinterpreting her own past, however honestly or dishonestly it may be done. (*Westerns* 13)

[83] Cf. Roderick Frazier Nash's chapter on Alaska in his groundbreaking *Wilderness and the American Mind* for an enlightening discussion of this phenomenon (272-316).

Linda Hutcheon modifies French's notion in light of postmodern texts:

> The ironic intertextual use of the Western is not, as some have claimed, a form of "Temporal Escape" (Steinberg 1976, 127), but rather a coming to terms with the existing traditions of earlier historical and literary articulations of American-ness. (*Poetics* 133)

Despite their different emphases, both critics agree that the Western plays an important role in the narration of the American nation's past, be it in "rewriting" and "reinterpreting," as French suggests or in Hutcheon's more textual and discursive focus on a "coming to terms with the existing tradition."

3.3. (De)Constructing National Identity in the American West

Given the centrality of the issues of national identity and national character and their link to the retelling of the frontier experience and the myth of the West, it is rather surprising to find that many of the contemporary American novels which set out to revise the Western only examine these issues in passing. Sometimes – through a lack of reflection – they even continuing to write these myths or do not manage to entirely keep the myth from writing itself into the texts through intrageneric connections and associations.

To be sure, some works such as Gilbert Sorrentino's *Gold Fools* or Robert Coover's *Ghost Town*, both literary wholesale assaults on the Western, implicitly deconstruct the identity-forming power of mythical cultural narratives. In one scene, for instance, Coover lays bare the clichéd nature of a narrative such as the long trek West with all its hardships and Indian attacks, by drawing attention to its artifice through pastiche:

> Lying there grit in his teeth, he seems to recollect – it's sort of a memory and it sort of happens – accompanying a wagon train of emigrants heading west across the dusty plains. He might have been a hired gun or a scout or he might himself be one of the pioneers, it's not clear, but their passage takes them through endless black acres of burnt-out prairie grass, dust churned up by the wooden wheels so thick wet bandanas tied over their faces cannot filter it out (he can taste it, coating his tongue, clogging his throat), the teams of oxen plodding through it all, their hickory yokes squeaking, chains rattling, and there's the tinkling clatter of tinware, the shriek of ungreased axles, the squalling of children; he can hear all this. […] [T]hey are attacked by a band of screaming Indians on horseback, emerging as though out of the vanishing storm itself, their naked bodies striped head to toe with red and black paint. […] Already the settlers are falling – men, women, and children, their horses and oxen, too – with arrows through their throats, chests, and eyeballs. He seems to recognize them all but doesn't know them, except for that beautiful widow woman in black, the schoolmarm from the town up ahead, moving among the fallen, treating their injuries, consoling the dying, keeping wounded and orphaned children distracted by teaching them their ABCs. (66-67)

This passage serves up a miniature version of many classic Western tales. Its shorthand form of the nationalizing experience of "going West" seems silly and arbitrary rather than heroic. The land, a key ingredient in the heroic West, turns into a clichéd tapestry of "dusty plains" and "endless black acres of burnt-out prairie grass," and remarks such as "He might have been a hired gun or a scout or he might himself be one of the pioneers, it's not clear" play on the generic nature of the Western's stock characters, while suggesting their replaceability. Indeed, just like Coover's protagonist the reader "seems to recognize" all the characters "but doesn't know them" for their flatness and lack of definition. It is the Indian attack, however, which most clearly exposes the frontier's supposed function, personified by the hostile Indian savages, of forging immigrants into Americans. It comes about so unprovoked and rings so hollowly with its countless repetitions in the genre's past that one can only laugh at its silliness.

There are many similar instances in *Ghost Town*. In fact, the entire book is one giant patchwork of ironic references a set of pastiches taken from a generic pool, exaggerated by their barely connected stringing together, as well as the deliberately overdone "Western" speech Coover uses. Earlier one of the deputized men of the ghost town, who later "undeppitize" themselves to take up cowpunching instead (61), responds when asked why he and the others are not "ahuntin injun scalps" (60), an activity they took up when the "wimmenfolk" were complaining about "gittin raped too regular by the goddam savages" (45): "Well the problem with thet, sheriff, [...] is we're plumb outa savages. Aint seed a live one with his skin still on in a coon's age" (60).

All the elements of a western are there in such scenes. In fact, the elements are so present that they not only draw attention to generic conventions, but ridicule them through the excess with which they are strung together. By the absurdity of their presentation they lay bare and ridicule the Western formula: the hunchback speaks in what Mel Brooks has termed "authentic frontier gibberish" (*Blazzing Saddles*), chews tobacco (how could he not), and, of course, has "grizzled cheeks;" the schoolmarm cares for the wounded, the Indians are naked, painted savages, the uncivilized Other. Throughout it is the internal contradictions, which deny any real unity of character or plot, let alone an overarching principle or goal,[84] and the discrepancies between the "genre ideal" and Coover's novel that expose the ridiculousness of the genre's clichés.

Nevertheless, in Coover's attempts to unmask the Western the power of myth surfaces again and again. Even within his arguably ridiculous, anti-climactic and

[84] The "plot" of Coover's novel contributes significantly to the novel's sense of absurdity through its extreme arbitrariness: the actions of the main character are as often as not inconsequential. He is transferred from one stock situation to the next with little regard for real-world parameters or logic – horses appear and disappear as does his sheriff badge depending on whether he is currently seen as a lawman or an outlaw, and so on.

antiheroic description, the Western reinscribes itself in a way that Linda Hutcheon describes as typical to her definition of the "postmodernism of complicity and critique, of reflexivity and historicity, that at once inscribes and subverts the conventions and ideologies of the dominant cultural and social forces of the twentieth-century western world" (*Politics* 11). To be sure, it is hard to take the Western serious while reading Coover's novel, yet it is almost as hard not to be drawn in, time and again, by the mythic power of the original Western parodied, which still resonates in the text. This tendency is much more pronounced in a less formally radical parody like Condon's *A Talent for Loving*, or Thomas Berger's satiric *Little Big Man*.

Gilbert Sorrentino's *Gold Fools*, while also employing a primarily formal, postmodern technique, more radically engages the genre by literally questioning most if not all the clichés of the Western. The novel is made up entirely of interrogative sentences. Most of the novel's questions would fulfill generic clichés if answered affirmatively, and in fact the plot again relies on generic patterns of the Western while simultaneously laying bare the very fabric it is made of. Through its questioning, the narrative frequently draws attention to underlying ideologies, such as the racist tendencies of traditional Western narratives by asking questions such as: "Did good women and girls fear and loathe greasers, Mexicans, and Indians?" (14). Many of the sentences achieve a comic effect by being subversive suggestions rather than actual questions: "Did folks think too highly, perhaps, of guns, out amid the mesas and washes? Did they, actually *love* their guns? Did these gunlovers have vivid, if fleeting, fantasies anent sexual adventures with their guns? Was this one of the West's best kept secrets?" (13; italics in original). Other sentences mock the features of stereotyped Western talk or the style of the genre's major proponents. The narrative asks, for instance: "Was a storm a-comin' up, and did it 'pear to be right powerful?" (15), and by spoofing the peculiarities of Zane Grey's purple prose, calls attention to the genre's major writers and their presence in any generic text, including Sorrentino's own: "Wasn't it about time for supper? Or, as Zane Grey might have put it, 'the evening meal'? Did Zane Grey ever put it that way? In what way *did* Zane Grey put it, most of the time? And what did he put it in? What did Louis L'Amour put it in? John Ford?" (130-31). While Sorrentino's novel questions, mocks, and exposes most, if not all elements of the traditional Western, *Gold Fools* is clearly a one trick pony which initially achieves some laughs, but, once the reader understands its basic functioning and wit quickly becomes lifeless. More importantly for a discussion of (de)constructions of national identity, Sorrentino's novel is, like Coover's, more interested in pastiching ossified and badly written popular narratives, while at the same time acknowledging the power of their underlying narratives, than in systematically engaging their function as a site of national identity construction.

In general, American revisionist Westerns do not proceed as far as Coover's or Sorrentino's novel in unmasking the myths which construct and invent the nation. Instead they are more interested in the particulars of how the nation is invented, engaging the Western as national narrative through one of the other aspects examined in this study, e.g. highlighting the role Native Americans have played in the colonization of North America and the ways in which they have been misrepresented in Western stories, or deconstructing popular heroes. In Ishmael Reed's *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down*, for instance, racial division and racism unmask the illusion of national unity. The white rancher Drag becomes the villain, and the black cowboy Loop collaborates with the Indian Chief Showcase against Drag, the Pope and the racist John Wesley Hardin. While *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* is not primarily concerned with national identity, but rather with issues of race, ethnicity and their imbalance in the United States, as I will argue in the next chapter, in the end, nationalism or national identity are not compatible with Reed's deconstruction of the genre.

In other works, too, the revisionist Western becomes more multi-cultural. Apart from the ever present "Anglos" of English, Irish and Scottish descent, all kinds of ethnicities are introduced: Russian counts and merchants (*The Drop Edge of Yonder* and *Welcome to Hard Times*), Black cowboys (*Lonesome Dove*, *God's Country*, *Gabriel's Story*, and others), Italian Gunslingers (*Anything for Billy*), and so on.[85] A more diverse and multicultural West replaces the old West, yet nationality is seldom radically questioned. Transnationalism has not, for the most part, reached the American western novel. Borders between ethnicities are crossed and confronted within a national framework, which for the most part accepts national borders and thus remain surprisingly stable even where they are "physically" crossed by the novel's characters, as Reginald Dyck observes with regards to Cormac McCarthy's post-Western *All the Pretty Horses*:

> Touring the other side of the borders […] is not the same as living in borderlands. Settings that cross national lines have long been a staple of Western U.S. literature. Cormac McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses*, a relatively recent example, makes clear the lack of mestiza consciousness in traditional Western border crossings. Mexico, the setting for most of the novel, is the protagonist's heart of darkness, an exotic place of escape when his normal U.S. world unravels. Rather than the primitivism of Conrad's Congo, the Other [sic] side here is defined by brutal lawlessness and rigid social hierarchies [John Grady Cole first comes to grief against the patriarchal structure of his love interest's traditionally Spanish family, and subsequently gets jailed, tortured and black-mailed by the corrupt Mexican official]. For the protagonist, crossing the Rio Grande means entering an alien world. Even if his home place has been lost, hope for recovery only exists on the northern side of the river. Going south is in the end only an excursion. (7)

[85] Nevertheless many of these ethnic characters remain marginal, see chapter 4.

While Dyck's description of "touring the other side of the border" is true, both for *All the Pretty Horses* and the entire border trilogy, it is a little too weak. His assessment of John Grady's (emotional and physical) odyssey through Mexico as "an excursion" is an understatement. The borders remain stable entities, national identities are fixed and Mexico in all McCarthy novels remains the Other, yet Cole is ultimately altered by his experience in a way that does not justify the term "excursion." Indeed, McCarthy's Mexico is more similar to Conrad's Congo than Dyck explores. As the narrator states in *The Crossing*, the trilogy's second novel, McCarthy's Mexico is "undifferentiated in its terrain from the country they quit and yet wholly alien and wholly strange" (74). After leaving Mexico, the heart of darkness he has found there stays with John Grady, as Kurtz's horror does with Marlow, and both Mexico and the Congo are ultimately an Other that the protagonist cannot grasp or come to terms with. To the extent that they do, both Marlow and John Grady Cole are lucky to escape from a world they do not belong in.[86]

Maybe the only truly post-national work in the Western genre by an American author is Rudolph Wurlitzer's odyssey through the Americas, *The Drop Edge of Yonder*, with its half-Abyssinian female protagonist, Delilah, who is so out of place in the West that not even Zebulon "had ever seen anyone like her, not even in his usual rut of Denver whorehouses known for specializing in mixed colors" (25). The novel's plot meanders through both Americas and all stages of frontier life, yet defies essentialist categories of nationality. Despite its transcendence of national categories, Wurlitzer's novel does not address them expressedly. National identity is not a central issue in the book, which is ultimately more concerned with the related notion of space, as well as Wurlitzer's own brand of Zen transcendentalism.

Overall, the attack on national identity in the American revisionist Western is slight, contained within and resulting out of the laying bare of other issues in the Western. While the genre's traditional close connection to national identity would suggest that an attack on the genre would also destabilize its function as a construct of national history and identity these aspects prove astonishingly resilient. Most revisionist American Westerns are primarily concerned with the interior forces of the American West and too preoccupied with other myths, such as the racial purity of the West or the construction of masculinity on the frontier, to adopt a transnational let alone an anti-national mindset. In such attacks the Western myth might be altered in parts, yet this

[86] Neil Campbell sees "an extreme refocusing of history" ("Liberty" 218) taking place in *Blood Meridian* through the character of the judge, which foregrounds the construction of history, and other myths, yet I would claim not only that the judge cannot be taken at face value but that *Blood Meridian* and other McCarthy texts attempt too hard to be mythic themselves. As a result they are not so much deconstructing as redirecting myths of national identity.

does not necessarily mean that it is deconstructed in its entirety. In fact, the myth is so capable of integrating alterations, such as a diversification of the players on the frontier, that it often persists, continuing to write itself. Even when the particulars of the project of "civilizing" the frontier are questioned, and the cost of white settlement of the American continent are highlighted in books which point to the extermination of the Native population, the project itself more often than not remains largely unscathed.

In a way the Western truly is rhizomatic, as Neil Campbell's recent book title suggests,[87] capable of forming new connections where old ones are severed. As Deleuze and Guattari explain "any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other" (7), the Western myth seems to be able to do something similar despite the decidedly un-rhizomatic "history lesson" the Western frequently transports.

3.4. The Politics of Canadian Identity

In contrast to the American revisionist Western, the Canadian Western is almost obsessed with national identity and nationality. After all, one of the driving forces behind the writing of Canadian Anti-Westerns is a defense against the proverbial "cowboy" imperialism of its Southern neighbor. In "America's attic," as Reinhold Kramer writes, "everybody watches the cowboys on *Mission Impossible*, everybody buys Ram-tough Dodges, and literary scholars can remember Leslie Fiedler claiming that there is no border in the West" (2).[88] Taking Canadian media consumption as an indicator of a lack of a distinguished and secure national self-image Kramer states: "Canadian movies only accounted for 4 percent of the box office in Canada in 1992; 92 percent of the comedies and 85 percent of the dramas seen on Canadian television were/are foreign, mostly American, productions" (2).[89] As we see, Canada (and especially Western Canada it seems) is, as always, on the brink of being overtaken by American culture – at least in the eyes of concerned Canadianists.

The anxiety about Canadian identity which shows in such observations is not new. It was famously expressed by George Grant in his 1965 book-length essay *Lament for a Nation*, and was earlier encapsulated by theoretician Northrop Frye in his frequently quoted diagnosis: "The fundamental question in Canada is not 'Who am I?' but 'Where is here?'" ("Conclusion" 220). In this uncertainty of place and identity the perception

[87] It should be mentioned that this is not exactly the sense in which Campbell uses his title.

[88] This is a reference to Leslie Fiedler's paper "Canada and the Invention of the Western," which seems to have made Fiedler into a lasting target for Canadianists as a chauvinist American (cf. Brenner's "Response," as well as Ickstadt's and Kramer's references to the paper).

[89] Part of the reason for this situation is systemic. To a large degree Americans own the franchises and the distribution process even within Canada. As such, as Sherrill Grace remarked in a personal communication (30 May 2011), "Canadians have little real choice."

of a threat of Canadian culture by America plays an important role and is particularly relevant to a discussion of late 20th century Canadian literature. It ranges from the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences' "Massey Report" in 1951, the founding of the Canada Council for the Arts in 1957 and the institutionalization of Canadian cultural protectionism, over Grant's treatise, to Margaret Atwood's *Survival* and the CanLit debates in the general public and Canadian university departments. In the 1970s in particularly, as W.J. Keith remarks, "the study of CanLit became an exercise in patriotism and puffery" (74). Disgruntled by a policing of reading and teaching texts which was more interested in constructing the Canadian nation than literary quality, Keith asks: "Is CanLit nowadays anything more than an excuse for politically correct indoctrination?" (78).[90] In 1977 Paul Goetsch interpreted the CanLit debate as a cultural nationalism that took the place of a diffident political nationalism in proving the existence of a nation through its cultural, particularly literary products and their supposed national uniqueness (123).[91] Given the academic affiliation of almost all Canadian authors discussed, this is the background against which the depiction of a national identity in Canadian texts has to be read.[92]

While the question of nationality is certainly an important one for many Canadian authors, I do not wish to suggest that it is the driving force behind each and every Canadian appropriation of the Western. bp Nichol, for one, does not address the issue at all, and Michael Ondaatje, always hard to classify in terms of nationality, shrugs it off in his *Collected Works of Billy the Kid* with two brief references to Canada. Billy is a fan of "a Canadian group, a sort of orchestra, that is the best. Great. Heard them often when I was up there trying to get a hold of a man who went by the name of Captain P–———.* Never found him. But that group will be remembered a long time" (84).[93] In

[90] This complaint against a criticism that disregards contexts, nuances and literary value to construct national identity is not new. In 1976 Frank Davey brought up similar charges against the thematic critics, most prominently Margaret Atwood, John Moss, and Northrop Frye, in his famous article "Surviving the Paraphrase" accusing them of paraphrasing and simplifying literary works to arrive at a pre-determined national character supposedly inherent in these works. Robin Mathews brings up similar points against what he calls Margaret Atwood's "survivalism" (119-30).

[91] It is worth pointing out that Goetsch closes with the far-sighted caveat: "Ergänzend muß vor allem darauf hingewiesen werden, daß alle Nationalisten sich die Antwort auf die Frage zu leicht machen, ob nicht die von ihnen konstatierten kanadischen Themen und Motive im Grunde Merkmale der modernen Literatur überhaupt sind" (137).

[92] One of the peculiarities of the CanLit debate, which Sherrill Grace has kindly alerted me to, is the fact that in the 1960s and 1970s, during the height of the debate, Canadian English Departments were to a large degree staffed by American or American-trained professors. While this point would certainly need more exploration, it would certainly prove ironic if Canada's nationalist attempt to move out of the shadow of America's cultural dominance was orchestrated by Americans, even Americans funded by Canadian politicians.

[93] Cf. Ondaatje's evasive answer in an interview with Linda Hutcheon to the question of whether he regards himself as a "Sri Lankan Canadian writer," "I guess I'm *that* more than anything else." ("Michael Ondaatje" 197) Later he states: "I guess I like being a writer because of the freedom that is allowed me: I can write about whatever I want to write about." The demands that he should write in a

his second reference Ondaatje finds a metaphor for both his own relationship to Canada in his texts and the Canadian Western's transnational connection to the ur-American genre: "Two years ago Charlie Bowdre and I crisscrossed the Canadian border. Ten miles north of it ten miles south. Our horses stepped from country to country, across low rivers, through different colours of tree green" (20). In contrast to McCarthy's treatment of the border discussed above, as well as his fellow Canadian author's approach to questions of nationality, the border in Ondaatje's work is almost irrelevant, an arbitrary line to be criss-crossed "like a whip in slow motion" (Ibid.). Blaine Allan speculates that Ondaatje's use "of an outlaw hero from the US Southwest may have run against the grain of an era of heightened nationalism in both English Canada and Quebec for insisting on the significant presence of the United States" (79), and indeed if Atwood's *Survival* is any indication Ondaatje had to pay the bill by being largely ignored in the study.

Michael Ondaatje's and bpnichol's indifference notwithstanding, the issue of nationality plays an important role in a great number of Canadian takes on the Western genre, most centrally perhaps in Margaret Atwood's nationalist poem "Backdrop Addresses Cowboy." In Atwood's poem the cowboy "sauntering out of the almost-/silly West" (70) becomes a symbol of U.S. imperialism, whereas Canada, the backdrop trying not to be invaded, becomes "the space you desecrate / as you pass through" (71).

I will in the following focus on two quite different treatments of the issue of nationality in Canadian Westerns. Firstly there is the attempt to create a counter-myth, which sets off Canada from its American (as well as occasionally British) "colonizers." As I will argue below (3.4.2.), this is undertaken by contrasting the lawless, violent American West with a peaceful and thus superior Canadian West, the "Mild West."[94] In this first treatment the generic patterns of the Western more often than not are adapted, even if new players fill the old oppositional roles. In Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Englishman's Boy*, in contrast, national identity as a concept is rejected and dismantled more completely. While Vanderhaeghe also paints the picture of a violent American West, he complicates the black and white image of Canadian against American behavior, and rejects both myths, the American story of the frontier and the Canadian counter-myth of the "Mild West" as oversimplified constructions of cultural elites more

less international, more Canadian or ethnic "mode" "seem to be more to do [sic] with the world of sociologists or motivated by political usefulness. I feel little responsibility to that sort of demand" (202). A brief look at the settings of Ondaatje's novels whose locations have, over time, changed from the U.S., over Canada, to Europe and Sri Lanka certainly bear out his claim. On Ondaatje's choice of American characters in both his *Collected Works* and *Coming Through Slaughter*, and their status as "Canadian" books see Hochbruck, "Metafictional" 448, 460-63. Hochbrucks regards the texts as "mockingly defiant comments on the CanLit debate rampant in the 1970s" (462).

[94] I adopt the term from Daniel Francis (*National Dreams*) and William Katerberg who expounds on and questions Fancis' notion of a "Mild West."

interested in nation building than in historical realities. By transferring some of the most violent action onto Canadian ground, and by including characters who act in the traditionally "American" or "Canadian" modes, but do not carry that nation's passport, Vanderhaeghe complicates essentialist notions of nationality. There is a transgression of borders and identities, which ultimately destabilizes and deconstructs any clear boundaries and distinct national identities, no matter which side of the border they come from. Identity is shown to be as much of a construct as history, the other major concern in the novel.

In outlining these two distinct approaches, the writing of the counter-myth of the "Mild West" into the American Western format, and the rejection of both "Wild" and "Mild West," I do not wish to suggest that there are only two ways of addressing the issue of national identity in the revisionist Canadian Western novel, or that all novels fall clearly into one of these two ideal categories. The lines between the categories are, as always, blurred, particularly since most authors have an awareness of their roles and the interrelation of myth, story and history. In fact, the use of the counter-myth of the "Mild West" in some cases works to destabilize the notion of two distinctive national identities, even if the text in other respects reaffirms them. Similarly, *The Englishman's Boy* while ultimately rejecting the Canadian "Mild West" myth as merely another construction based on political ideology, in places sets Canada off from the U.S. as "not-America" in ways similar to those texts which ultimately affirm this distinction.

3.4.1. Writing against the "Colonizers"

> Perhaps the most striking thing about Canada is that it is not part of the United States.
> John Bartlet Brebner, *North Atlantic Triangle*.

As has been noted, Canadian intellectuals in the 1960s and 70s sometimes regarded themselves as facing a wave of colonization by U.S. cultural imperialism. It is within this train of thought that the Western genre in Canada is used in a way that I will term "writing against the colonizers." The term "the colonizers," here refers to both the former historical colonial power, Britain, and the new, (imagined) cultural and economic "colonizers," the U.S. This positioning of Canada in the role of a postcolonial nation is a somewhat problematic stance, yet one frequently made by critics and adapted in this study under the constructivist assumption that if a phenomenon is described and imagined long enough, it will finally start to exist. Nevertheless it can be argued historically that white Canadians were if not part of the former British ruling class then at least their agents, and that the truly colonized in North America were the Natives who were murdered or displaced, and perhaps to a much lesser extent the French minority

in Quebec after the Paris Treaty of 1763.[95] Canada and other former Empire nations with mostly white populations, are not considered (post)colonial by many (non-Canadian) critics. Ania Loomba, for instance, rejects Canada's claim to postcoloniality:

> Because [the white settlers of Australia, New Zealand or Canada] also feel estranged from Britain (or France) they want to be included as postcolonial subjects. However, we cannot explore in what ways they are postcolonial without also highlighting internal differences within these countries. White settlers were historically the agents of colonial rule, and their own subsequent development – cultural as well as economic – does not simply align them with other colonized peoples. No matter what their differences with the mother country, white populations here were not subject to the genocide, economic exploitation, cultural decimation and political exclusion felt by indigenous peoples or by other colonies. (14)

Canadian critic Herb Wylie in contrast takes a more affirmative stance in pointing out the benefits of employing a post-colonial approach to the study of Canadian literature, while avoiding the shift of historical blame:

> Although there is nothing approaching a consensus on whether Canada is, indeed, postcolonial – or even on whether it might be desirable that it be so – certainly the prevailing assumption has been that postcolonial theoretical and critical perspectives are highly relevant and useful for examining a range of dynamics in and characteristics of Canadian literary texts. ("Hemispheric" 53-54)

Laura Moss, similarly sees the question "Is Canada postcolonial?" as problematic, but argues that it can be answered in some cases with a cautious "it depends," and one of the scenarios she identifies as benefiting from a look at Canadian culture through the lens of postcolonialism is a Canada defined "primarily as 'not America'" (8).

The position of the Canadian Western as directed largely against the U.S.A., seems to make it a genre which is, if not truly postcolonial, at least close enough to a postcolonial act of resistance to remind one of the colonial situation of "mimicry" as an "almost but not quite the same," which Homi Bhabha has described:

> The ambivalence of mimicry – almost but not quite – suggests that the fetishized colonial culture is potentially and strategically an insurgent counter-appeal. What I have called its "identity-effects" are always crucially *split*. Under cover of camouflage, mimicry, like the fetish, is a part-object that radically revalues the normative knowledges of the priority of race, writing history. For the fetish mimes the forms of authority at the point of authority at which it deauthorizes them. Similarly, mimicry rearticulates presence in terms of its "otherness," that which it disavows. (*Location of Culture* 91; emphasis in original)

The Canadian Western similarly is almost but not quite the same, highlighting the fractures of the dominant form of the American Western, which – while it was not part of a colonial culture forming its subject – is present as penetrating the Canadian

[95] This is a view fueled at least as much by French-Canadian pride as by history.

imaginary. Like colonial culture, the Canadian Western, through its setting in Canada and through its other distinctions insists on its otherness, "rearticulating" the presence of supposedly domineering American culture.

While the majority of Canadian Westerns is directed against America, there is also an element of Anti-Britishness in some of the books. A number of Canadian Westerns depict British gentlemen as tinhorns who take the role generally played in American texts by the hapless Easterner (or coincidentally the British tinhorn). In Canadian texts in particular, the Englishmen think they know everything better, yet embarrass themselves time and again. I will first examine the more prominent AntiAmerican tendencies before looking at how British characters are featured in the Canadian West.

In 1977 Dick Harrison wrote:

> Most western Canadians think of themselves as living in a northern extension of the great frontier West they know so well from American popular culture. Even Al Purdy, who should know better, can write of the cowboys in the Chilcotin valley having a ready-made mythology with which to identify. He says, "They love the movies of John Wayne and Gary Cooper; they listen to country and western music, practically standing to attention when Wilf Carter sings *Oh, That Strawberry Roan*." A poet like Purdy should sense the anomaly of their condition. Beneath it and the fanfare that attends the Calgary Stampede and Edmonton's Klondike Days there lies a careless assumption of a tradition of frontier values, a past which may have been quieter, more respectable than the American frontier, but which had vaguely the same significance in the development of the nation. […] Western Canadians are, in effect, assuming a new colonial state of mind before they have outgrown the older one dominated by British-Ontario culture. (*Unnamed Country* 207-08)

It seems that Harrison's concerns with his countrymen's ready assumption of a cultural identity acquired from American popular culture have found fruitful ground in the revisionist Canadian Western. Many of the works share his suspicion of an alltoo-ready adaptation of foreign concepts and "imperial" culture and are informed by a deep concern to deconstruct and ridicule the easily made assumptions about the heroic and important American, versus the boring and insignificant Canadian West.

In the Canadian Western, as in much of Canadian culture, the depiction of the American West and American cowboys is dominated by violence. It is often contrasted with the anti-violent, communal and peaceful Canadian West: "Up here us and the Indians understand each other. […] Only thing we ever use guns on is snakes and Germans," as one cowboy tells his Austro-Hungarian interviewer in George Bowering's *Caprice* (94). Americans are seen as trouble-makers, who both directly and indirectly, through liquor sales to the Canadian Natives, abuse the Canadian people(s). Indian troubles are often attributed to the fact that "Yankee" whiskey traders have sold alcohol to the natives, who, as a result, start to act funny. Along the same lines, troubles with violence in Canada are usually attributed to troublemakers from across the border, who

do not understand that in peaceful Canada a man either does not wear a gun at all, or else never uses it (at least not against another human being).[96]

This view is not only a polemic used by fiction writers, but is also seen in historical interpretations. Hugh Dempsky for instance in his *The Golden Age of the Canadian Cowboy* tells us that

> [t]he American attitude of individual freedom and the right to bear arms contrasted with Canada's preoccupation with law and order. As a result, American cowboys had more gunfights, more lynchings, and more disputes with Indians than their counterparts in Canada. (44)

Dempsky is by no means the only scholar who paints an oppositional picture of the American and Canadian West(s). J. Arthur Lower's description of the Cypress Hills Massacre, the historical event which provides the background for Guy Vanderhaeghe's *Englishman's Boy*, runs along the same lines. Lower writes that "a group of American wolf hunters, claiming they were looking for some stolen horses, massacred a camp of Assiniboines in the Cypress Hills" (118-19).[97] Not only does the author's phrasing suggest that he doubts the wolfers' motives (and they definitely are questionable) and seems to at least suggest that their actions were the result of a general (American?) bloodlust, the real problem is that Lower, as a result of sloppy research, parrots the official one-sided propaganda of making "American wolf hunters," or "American outlaws" as they were called at the time of the massacre, out of a group which consisted of both American *and* Canadian hunters. He thus reproduces the very distortion of history which Vanderhaeghe challenges and corrects in his novel.[98]

George Bowering's *Caprice* reverses (and at the same time evokes) the standard Western by featuring as its "cowboy hero" a female poet from Quebec equipped only with a Spanish stallion, a bull-whip, and a copy of *Faust*. Unlike Coover's protagonist in *Ghost Town*, who embodies every Western stereotype, being "old as the hills. Yet just a kid" (3), Caprice, the French Canadian woman without a gun, is the reversal of all the stereotypes of the classic "American" Westerner, while at the same time – in contrast to e.g. Willa Cather's Bohemian girl in *My Ántonia* – fulfilling the stereotypical role of the cowboy hero. Her quest, the persecution of the American desperado Frank Spencer who has murdered her brother, is an example of the archetypal "revenge story" (Cawelti, *Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* 19), but, following Charles Portis' *True Grit*, it is one with a gender reversal. As in the classic revenge story Caprice must take the law

[96] There are also a few good, "Canadianized" Americans, such as Doc Windham in Fred Stenson's *Lightning*, who understand and appreciate the difference between violent America and peaceful Canada, and Rachel Gould and Shorty McAdoo in *The Englishman's Boy*, discussed below.
[97] Davidson (*Coyote Country* 5) quotes Lowel without comment.
[98] Cf. also Weihs 17 and Thompson 46.

into her own hands. As a good Canadian Caprice does not avenge her brother, however, but instead opts to turn the outlaw over to the authorities, a final act which restores the balance in the peaceful "Mild West." Following the American Western's trope of incompetent representatives of the law, the figure of the Mountie, who protected the Canadian West from American outlaws in a number of early 20th century texts, is repeatedly ridiculed in *Caprice*. The law only acts after Caprice has hunted down and defeated Spencer.

Bowering presents a variation of the American Western, which is at once clearly recognizable as a Western and as a deviation of it. He uses the Canadian counter-myth of the "Mild West" and eventually upholds it, even as he ironically comments on his own construction, being, in typical postmodern fashion, aware of his own mythmaking. Like *Ghost Town*, Bowering's novel ends up both evoking and subverting the formula at the same time and thus continues to write the Western. It showcases its disapproval of American imperialist narratives while simultaneous reflecting the appeal of the genre's adventure, in fact reproducing many of its most prominent patters. In Bowering's depiction of his American villain, Frank Spencer, for instance, generic cliché remain largely intact. Spencer is linked, like all good Western villains, to a mythic episode of the violent American frontier, namely the gunfight at the OK Corral, as well as established within the Western American territory:

> people […] said that he had ridden with the Clantons, and that he had only ceased to do so when the Clantons made a date with the Earps at a corral in an Arizona town. After that he had traveled northward, making enemies in Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana, before crossing the medicine line to Alberta. (13-14)

The difference in Bowering's account is that he adds a peaceful "Mild West" North of the medicine line, the border which usually limits the traditional Western's sphere of action (cf. M. Ross)

The way in which Bowering sets off Canada from the U.S. is perhaps clearest in his use of Spencer's follower "would-be villain," Canadian "Strange" Loop Groulx. The Canadian is no match for a real American outlaw. Instead he reminds the reader more of a mischievous kid who does not understand the consequences of his actions. He lacks any real incentive and is so infantile that he simply thinks it would be exciting to become an outlaw by joining Frank Spencer.[99] Accordingly, when he tries to act like a "real outlaw" he is a complete failure: trying to ambush Caprice, he misses her three times and only kills her horse (236). In the end his romantic view of himself as an outlaw,

[99] In many respects, "Strange" Loop is reminiscent of Turkey Doolan the devoted admirer of the outlaw Dingus, in David Markson's *The Ballad of Dingus Magee*, a novel which Bowering alludes to in his next novel *Shoot!*.

which includes never to be taken prisoner, and his fear of Caprice lead to his death. He falls down a slope when he refuses her hand, whereas the "real" outlaw, Spencer, surrenders. Throughout the book Groulx works as a bad example in his cultural cringe towards his "Yankee" desperado companion: he "was not a nationalist or a patriot […] he was proud to be thought eligible for the role of partner to this storied Yankee" (125). Yet he cannot become a real outlaw, or a real American. His failure as an outlaw and his immature, misguided ideals are expressed in his constant whining to Spencer, who abuses him more and more as he becomes aware of the full scope of Loop's incompetence, alternatively calling him "Frenchie," "Stupid Loop," and "my brave Kid Fuckface" (241, 242, and 238 respectively). In contrast to Caprice, the good Canadian who is successful in her difference, Loop seems to stand for an unsuccessful and inauthentic attempt to become something he is not, a Canadian trying to play American outlaw, as well as a Canadian who buys into the imported American myth since he fails to realize his own difference from it.

Given the novel's seemingly straightforward Canadian "Mild West" politics, it speaks of Bowering's postmodern sneakiness that Loop Groulx's name is a transnational connection to Ishmael Reed's protagonist in *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down*, the Loop Garoo Kid. A connection between the works is also suggested by Caprice's and Loop's choice of a weapon: both use a whip, rather than the traditional six gun, with astonishing effectiveness. Both Bowering's and Reed's names provide a parody of the French word for werewolf, *loup garou*. That Bowering chooses the same spelling in making a loop out of a loup leaves no question about their connection. While both character's names link them to a shape-shifter, their shape shifting is quite different. Whereas Loop Groulx unsuccessfully tries to transform into an American outlaw, Reed's Loop more effectively uses his shape shifting powers as a tool of resistance against the Western and the conservative politics it stands for, as I will argue in the next chapter.

Shoot!, Bowering's next novel, is a more independent revision of the Western, owing to its larger, more political goal. Whereas *Caprice* is mostly a light-hearted parody, *Shoot!* concerns itself with more grave matters, primarily the systemic racism against its mixed-blood characters, the McLean brothers and Alex Hare.[100] Throughout the novel Bowering plays with Canadian myths and clichés, such as the contrasting between the good Canadian Indian policy and the bad American one, and a mindset which expects violence only from Americans. In "Parashoot!," his paratext to the novel, he describes people's expectations as so focused on the idea that any troublemaker has

[100] Cf. Chapter 5 for a thorough discussion of the novel and its depiction of racism in the 19th century as well as its continued misrepresentation in Canadian historiography.

to be an American that they do not know how to treat Canadian troublemakers. In this Bowering pokes fun at a nationalist thought which underlies his own *Caprice* and, to an extent, *Shoot!*, since both novels rely on the myth of a peaceful Canadian West:

> The guards were used to fighters and even killers in that cell block. There were a lot of USAmericans in the Province. There were a lot of Indians who got whiskey from the USAmericans in exchange for furs and secret stories about valuable stones. […]
> But the guards did not remember anyone like the McLean brothers and Alex Hare. They were not USAmericans. They were not Indians. They were something else that had come down from the country no one here could imagine. ("Parashoot!" 164)

In his ironic description of the mostly peaceful town of Kamloops, where the law is represented only by "a special constable without a gun" (*Shoot!* 13), and where the prison is so dilapidated for lack of use that the McLeans constantly break out of it, Bowering toys with stereotypes of the "Mild West." In his narratorial comments "George Bowering" underscores this notion as well, although once again in the tone of a postmodern awareness of his own stance. He observes that the McLeans "were not gun-toting cowboys, exactly, not USAmericans" (42). Their difference as outlaws, but not U.S. Americans, and people's consequent uncertainty about how to classify them, makes the McLeans quickly drop out of history. They are, even in the area at the time of Bowering's childhood, relegated to the margins of the Canadian imagination, much like Canada itself is relegated to the margins in a larger North American cultural context. Even in 1940s and 50s "McLean country," American myths seem more interesting to the author and his playmates: "We didn't play McLeans and Lawmen. We played USA cowboys and Indians" (Ibid.). This situation is addressed by Bowering's novelistic treatment of the McLeans. In it he excavates the story of the Canadian West against overpowering imported narratives of an American frontier, an act that the novel repeatedly likens to the digging up of bones, using the Kroetschian idea of the writing of Western Canadian history / literature as an act of archeology ("Arkeology"). At the same time the novel draws attention to ways of dominant history writing and storytelling, as well as racist patterns within the Canadian West (see chapter 5). In all this, despite his self-conscious stance, Bowering uses the trope of the "Mild West," writing Canada's history into the story of his marginalized "half-breed" characters. Despite his ironic distance, the novel upholds an image of a mostly peaceful Canadian West, at least one that seems peaceful to white men. Where random, non-racist and non-systemic violence occurs it is more often than not related to an American presence: "There were still a lot of Americans around," we are told, "so guns went off from time to time" (58).

The casting of brutal Americans, and / or setting off of peaceful Canada against the lawless and violent U.S.A. does not only appear in novels, but also in the influential

movie *Grey Fox* (1982),[101] which tells the story of historical American train robber Bill Miner (ca. 1847 – 1913), and the recent, much less influential, Canadian Western parody *Gunless* (2010). The latter shows the American protagonist, played by Canadian *Due South* star Paul Gross, unsuccessfully trying to stage a duel in a Canadian small town only to eventually adopt the "Mild West" ethos in the final "shoot out" against his vicious American pursuers. The villains, once again, are given over to the Mounties and escorted out of the country, back where they belong.

Canadian texts do not only criticize the "cultural imperialist" Americans, however, but also their former colonizers. Robert Kroetsch has observed with regard to Rudy Wiebe's take on the British arctic explorer Sir John Franklin: "His incompetence and his arrogance, as an agent of the master narrative of empire, positions him as the embodiment of what modernism attempted and assumed: a unitary truth" ("Arkeology" 308). Kroetsch's reading of Wiebe's novel has a parallel in the larger argument Walter Pache has made about the appropriation of the "American invention" of postmodernism. In his article Pache described Canadian postmodernism, which he sees as a transnational borrowing from the U.S. (although Pache due to the time of writing does not use the term transnational), as "a tool against modernism and its implication of literary domination" and sees its central function in Canada as "'invent[ing]' [...] a collective past" (64). To this end postmodernism in general and the Western in particular can be directed against the American "colonizer," even if it is originally taken over from the U.S.

Depictions of arrogant British characters are employed in Fred Stenson's *Lightning* and Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Last Crossing*, in which the "agents of colonial rule" are, through their words and actions, closely associated with the empire's moral codes and beliefs. They are portrayed as incompetent, obnoxiously arrogant, paternalizing and dogmatic.[102] Both *Lightning* and *The Last Crossing* criticize their British characters' colonial stance by confronting them with morally superior and, in the end, more successful characters.

The protagonist of Fred Stenson's *Lightning* is a Texan cowboy, Doc Windham, who along with his two friends – Dog Eye, and hare-lipped Lippy – is hired for a cattle

[101] Cf. Blaine Allen's reading of this "key film of the early 1980s" (73) and the way in which it sets off the U.S.A. from Canada, the American train robber from the friendly Canadian lawman (esp. 73-76).

[102] To be fair, Vanderhaeghe is aware of the danger of simple stereotyping, as I will later discuss with reference to *The Englishman's Boy*, as in *The Englishman's Boy*, there are different types of "colonizers," like Chance and Hardwick, the one dimensional Americans, who are opposed by the more insightful Rachel and Shorty, Addington is only one of the British officers in the book. His brother, Simon, who quite literally "goes Indian" by joining an Indian tribe, is his almost exact opposite, becoming "Canadianized" through his encounter with the harsh Canadian winter in chapter 2 of the novel. Despite his sympathetic stance, Simon, in his own way, also colonizes the New World, as I will briefly discussed in Chapter 5.

drive north into Canada. Windham, despite being a cowboy, is not a typical Western hero; instead he is a master bowler turned freemason who cherishes books and judges his adversaries by phrenology. He spends his life fearing the revenge of Overcross, a mad miner whom he left for dead after a confrontation years ago, but who has survived and follows him lusting for revenge. Windham searches for a long gone lover, whom, contrary to typical genre expectation, he never finds. Instead, in Canada he meets both Overcross, who by now poses as a German opera singer, as well as a new love – another man's wife. After Windham gets rid of Overcross in a final showdown, Esther leaves her husband, Windham's former employer, the arrogant Englishman Victor Prieston. In Prieston, Stenson depicts an arrogant British cattle baron, who ignores all sensible suggestions from his employees, particularly the competent protagonist. Victor Prieston, living up to his name, constantly preaches about the superiority of everything English. He prefers English cattle on the sole basis that they are, like himself, from the "superior" country. When Doc Windham informs him that American cattle are far better suited for the rough Canadian winters, he reacts with a mixture of arrogance and blatant ignorance of his business: "That leaves me wondering what you think quality is in a cow, Mr. …? I'm sorry I've forgotten your name" (271).[103]

Throughout the novel Prieston becomes such a disagreeable character that the reader is relieved when his Canadian wife, estranged by his alarming lack of care for her and his constant remarks about the superiority of England over her native Canada, finally leaves him for the "Canadianized" American Doc Windham. Like the Gaunt brothers in *The Last Crossing*, Prieston essentially fails to uphold – or rather introduce – his Victorian ideals of class distinction and British superiority into the much more egalitarian Canadian West. Because he holds on to his displaced ideals, he loses his wife, as well as his cattle. In an orgy towards the end of the novel, he and his English friends become, like Addington Gaunt of *The Last Crossing*, "[f]ailed monsters." As Overcross (the accomplished monster) remarks: "[t]here's nothing more pathetic" (Stenson 413).

Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Last Crossing* shares a similar view of its British characters, treating them as arrogant agents of a colonial empire who misinterpret the Canadian West they encounter. Reinhold Kramer notes that Vanderhaeghe, while writing *The Englishman's Boy,* "at first […] had in mind a set of Canadian / British differentiations, but that at some point a more visceral need to differentiate Canada from the U.S. asserted itself." Vanderhaeghe's original protagonist, "a preRaphaelite painter

[103] It is peculiar that Stenson has his British gentleman use the American past participle. One would assume that Prieston more likely would have bitten his tongue off than have used it, sharing in all likelihood Mrs. Stark's contempt for such Americanisms, as leaving "the *u* out of *honor*." (Wister, *Virginian* 50).

in Europe who was looking for his brother in the West," (3) makes his appearance as the protagonist of his later novel, *The Last Crossing*, which in fact sets off Canada from England. While the author's "need" to differentiate Canada from the U.S. seems to have been more immediate at the time of writing *The Englishman's Boy*, as Kramer speculates, it did not entirely replace the "need" to "differentiate" his country from Britain, but simply delayed it until his next novel.[104]

In *The Last Crossing*, the historical Métis trapper Jerry Potts (1840 – 1896), Canada's most colonial subject, "created" yet rejected by the white settlers, is mistreated by the imperial Victorian English *bête humaine*, Addington Gaunt, throughout the novel. *The Last Crossing* tells of a number of characters, alternating viewpoints throughout. Two central characters are Charles and Addington Gaunt, two English brothers sent to America by their father to find their missing brother, Simon. They are joined by Lucy Stoveall, a woman searching for her sister's murderer, Jerry Potts, Custis Straw, a burned-out Civil War veteran who is in love with Lucy, and a few minor characters. Whereas Addington is consumed by his syphilis, and finally, as a result of his arrogance, killed by a grizzly bear he decides to fight in a sportive competition without firearms, Charles eventually finds his brother. Simon Gaunt has fled society for a sexual relation with an "ambiguously gendered" (Wyile, "Doing" 64) Crow *bote* spirit in an ironic reference to the typical Western motive of malebonding, Fiedler's "vision of individual, white masculinity that recognizes its close spiritual [but never physical] bond with the Indian male" (Grace, "Western Myth" 153). Lucy's quest for vengeance ends after she asks her admirer, Custis Straw, to kill the two Kelso brothers, who she mistakenly believes to have killed both her husband and her sister (her sister was in fact murdered by Addington after having raped her in an attempt to cure his syphilis). Custis pretends to kill the younger brother, but spares his life since he is innocent of the murder of Lucy's husband.

One of the most symbolic scenes in *The Last Crossing* is a confrontation between Addington Gaunt and Jerry Potts. This fistfight ends a prolonged period of tension between the two which results from Addington's attempts to force Potts to accept his leadership, despite the fact that the latter's much greater competence should make him the natural leader of the group in the wilderness. Significantly in this confrontation, too, Addington only defeats Potts because the scout is simultaneously attacked from the back by another white character, the sycophantic American Caleb Ayto. Abused by

[104] This is not only telling in as far as the priority of Western Canadian cultural defense goes, but also significant for the Canadian condition, which always seems to do a better job defining what it is not as opposed to what it is in positive terms. Interestingly, it mirrors the diagnosis D.H. Lawrence had reached about the America of his days, finding words which today ring much truer to the Canadian condition: "It is never freedom till you find something you really *positively want to be*. And people in America have always been shouting about the things they are *not*" (15; emphasis in original).

white people both verbally and physically, Potts is nonetheless not defeated. Thinking of the innocent Custis Straw who tried to defend him, Potts, in an act of moral superiority, returns to the expedition, to "save white men from themselves" (210).

Throughout his contact with Addington, when he does not directly contradict his British employer, Potts's speech is an ironic act of "subversive colonial mimicry" (Wyile, "Doing" 68), expressed in such statements as the double-tongued affirmative: "You cracking smart, Cap'n" (Vanderhaeghe, *Last Crossing* 165). The effect of these statements and the two men's actions and decisions is to expose Addington's imperial arrogance, as Herb Wyile observes: "Especially through juxtaposition with the capable and unassuming Jerry, Addington is portrayed as the epitome of imperial bluster: self-important, bullying and belligerent" (Wyile, "Doing" 67).

Even more symbolically, Addington, while being a pest to almost everybody around him, also poses a quite literal threat to the New World: he is a carrier of disease. Believing that sex with a virgin will cure him, he rapes and kills yet another marginalized figure, Lucy Stoveall's little sister, Madge: female, defenseless and young enough to be a virgin, she becomes a silenced woman mistreated by the "(agent of the) Empire." Addington is depicted as a wild animal or a human vampire, which, proves to be an accurate description of his relation to the New World. Under the mask of his civilized bearing he is driven by only two primal urges: a lust to kill and a desire for sex.

> Creeping in the house shortly before dawn, he is well pleased. He sniffs his hand, the salty blood that bathed it when he cut the deer haunch to pieces and scattered it in the wood, his gift for the foxes, the ravens. Somehow the blood reminds him of the smell of a woman on his fingers. Sexual congress. He holds his fingers beneath his nose and breathes it in, drinks in the memory of sweet Pearl, his best girl. (Vanderhaeghe, *Last Crossing* 30)

The former colonial power shows up in a more abstract guise in works such as Sharon Pollock's play *Walsh* and Rudy Wiebe's novel *The Temptations of Big Bear*. While these works initially pit the more peaceful Canadian Indian policy against the more directly oppositional American war of extermination, as I discuss in chapter 5, its characters have to learn that the colonial power is no more humane than the military force of the United States. By juxtaposing, well-meaning, even likeable Canadian characters against the depersonalized institution of the Canadian and eventually English metropolis, representing colonial rule, they manage to criticize both 19th century Indian policy and its source, an inhumane colonial power.

The use Canadian authors make of the American Western in their writing of Westerns that are almost but not quite the same – transnational borrowings which do not lose sight of the "local" – is best summed up by the "second Indian" in George

Bowering's *Caprice*: "Do not assume all the invader's ways, but make use of the particulars that will bring strength to the people" (128). The second Indian thus expresses a way of "postcolonial" thinking that is more promising and more realistic than a simple rejection of outward influences and retreat into one's "own" culture, and one which reflects the transnational connections already undeniably at work in 20th century Candian culture. It is the spirit of Bowering's second Indian that is representative of the particular brand of Canadian postmodernism / postcolonialism which lies at the heart of the identity politics of the Canadian Western.

3.4.2. The Counter-Myth of the "Mild West"

The notion of non-violence and the "Mild West" is almost inseparable from the way in which the "colonizers" are criticized, since most criticism of Americans originates in their inclination towards violence. In a Western context such violence seems an almost "natural problem-solving technique," being such a central part in the original Western formula. This violence becomes noticeable and objectionable through its juxtaposition with the non-violent, more civilized Canadian West. The notion of nonviolence is one of the few points in which the Canadian Western meets the "Northern." Both share a "feminine" rejection of violence (cf. Grace, "Comparing Mythologies" 25). This rejection is time and again stressed by juxtaposing American violence and Canadian non-violence, as in Stenson's *Lightning*:

> Doc raised his arm and pointed at the Colt Dragoon weighing down its holster off a nail in the wall. "Sometimes I miss Montana," he continued. "Down there, Victor'd open his big mouth and tell everybody how much better England is than America. At the very least somebody would threaten to kill him. You get a lot of bad behaviour down there, way worse than here, but at least it don't go unchallenged."
> Jim blew a thin stream of smoke. "That's a lot to put up with, just to keep Victor quiet." (368-69)

The counter-myth of the "Mild West" was originally associated with the myth of the Mountie as protector of the Canadian West from lawlessness and American aggression. It is so deeply rooted in the historical representation of the Canadian West that the idea of the peaceful Canadian nation has become its own national myth (cf. D. Francis, *National Dreams*). This contrast between peace and violence in the literature of the Canadian West has a long history. Dick Harrison, for instance, juxtaposes the American and the classic Canadian Western protagonist:

> The Western hero resolves the conflict between civilization and savagery by a salutary, almost surgical, application of violence which tilts the balance of power in favour of civilized law and order. By reaffirming masculinity, individualism, and the inevitability and superiority of progress he may articulate "primary cultural values" of American society, but

> his actions could never express the spirit of the Canadian West. The Mountie hero resolves the conflict between civilization and savagery too, but in a different way – not by using violence but by denying it. (*Unnamed Country* 162)

The Mountie, originally the hero of Ralph Connor's and other's attempts at distinct Canadian Westerns in the early 1900s, however, is no longer the protagonist of works set in the Canadian West. The Mountie image has not aged well. Now TV serials such as *King of the Royal Mounted* (1940), *King of the Mounties* (1942), *Dangers of the Canadian Mounted* (1948) and *Canadian Mounties vs. Atomic Invaders* (1953) have made way for online spoofs such as *Mountie Martin and the Space Diamonds* (2008). Mounties as heroic character have been discredited ever since a series of scandals in the 1970s, according to Francis. Inquiries into the extent to which "the force was breaking the law in its relentless pursuit of 'the enemy within'" by spying on First Nations, French, and Black Canadian citizens perceived as potential troublemakers seriously damaged the reputation of the Mounties in Canada. In the wake of this scandal they became, according to Francis, "more a figure of fun than an authority figure" (Francis, *National Dreams* 50). Today the RCMP's image remains shaken as allegations of misconduct or inactivity of the force regularly come from various First Nations groups. In 2011 the force also faced much publicized charges of sexual harassment against a number of its female employees. Even primarily sympathetic portrayals such as the American-Canadian co-production *Due South* (1994 – 1999), keep an ironic distance to their Mountie character. While Constable Fraser (Paul Gross) is constantly more effective in his problem solving than his guntoting American counterpart he is also a source of amusement with his overly formal, slightly quixotic attitude.[105]

The persistence of the "Mild West" image (which also runs through *Due South*) is the only link to earlier Mountie images. On the whole, Mounties seldom play a major part in contemporary Canadian Westerns, or are the target of ridicule: "[A]ll that Mountie stuff. That is just the government version. That's just what some grownups and government people are trying to get across," says infantile Canadian wouldbe outlaw, Loop Groulx in Bowering's *Caprice* (221). Instead of being attributable to the Mounties, the peaceful nature of the West seems to be inherent within the people. Whereas Americans are inherently violent, Canadians are peaceful.[106] If conflict arises it is only in the form of good-natured fist-fighting seen as "a tradition" (Ibid. 54). "If

[105] Its comedy elements certainly also explain the success of *Due South*. The displaced Mountie, Constable Fraser, is as out of place in modern day Chicago as his deaf wolf hybrid Diefenbaker. While he is competent in solving crime, he is meant to be more of a curiosity and the target of wellmeaning humor than the awe-inspiring figure of authority Cameron tried to create.

[106] As mentioned Bowering's *Shoot!* explores and exposes this peaceable kingdom myth with regards to Canada's treatment of its mixed race and First Nations citizens, an argument I develop in more detail in chapter 5.

this were a gunfight back in Utah or Arizona," by contrast "one of them would have been dead by now" (Ibid. 27). While there is almost always an ironic undertone in such statements, their frequency and use in the plot nevertheless underscores the notion of America as a violent place, while Canada is imagined if not as entirely peaceful at least as much less violent. Killing somebody, even somebody who "had it coming" is wrong in the Canadian West as Caprice and numerous others realize as good Canadians: "Before she had the gun, she knew there were religious and moral reasons against vengeance" (194).[107]

Like *Caprice*, Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Last Crossing* also sees violence critically. It does this by linking violence to its central theme, which, as Herb Wyile has argued, is that of honor and ethics ("Doing"). Custis Straw refuses to kill one of the Kelso brothers, because he is not convinced of his guilt (a doubt which seldom exists in the traditional Western where moral oppositions are usually clear), and because his experiences in the American Civil War have told him enough about violence to reject it. In contrast to the American Western hero, who is also frequently wary of violence, but "has to" resort to it in the end, Custis heads the lessons he has learned in the Civil War. When Lucy wants to thank and congratulate Straw for allegedly avenging her sister and husband, he brushes her off with the comment: "I don't care to be congratulated for shedding blood" (Vanderhaeghe, *Last Crossing* 379). It is particularly Straw's juxtaposition with the violent Englishman Addington that shows his moral superiority. Straw "comes much closer than Addington and Charles [the self-proclaimed gentlemen of the story] to the chivalric ideal" (Wyile, "Doing" 65).

Even Ondaatje's Billy the Kid, despite the historical Billy's Mexican-American origin and Ondaatje's rejection of easy Canadian nationalism mentioned earlier, can be read as a Canadian character, at least if we are willing to approach waters previously tread only by the much-maligned thematic criticism. In many critics' interpretations Billy becomes a mirror image of his author: "Billy the Kid, outlaw as artist, and Michael Ondaatje, artist as outlaw" (Scobie quoted in Barbour 37). Billy's story is in this view a representative of a favorite Canadian genre, the *Künstlerroman*.[108] As an artist, Billy is, as Frank Davey, observes:

[107] Ironically in this sentiment meant to set her off, Caprice mirrors the classical American Western hero, whose "wise" use of violence and restraint to go for his guns is one of the distinguishing marks between him and the villain (cf. Chapter 6).

[108] Cf. Groß, Kloos, and Nischik: "Die andere erwähnte Spielart des kanadischen Romans, die nach wie vor von großer Bedeutung ist und vor allem die Rolle der schreibenden Zunft konzentriert, ist der Bildungs- oder Künstlerroman." (244). See also D. Williams.

> a careful, articulate, and extraordinarily perceptive hero – a man more eager for love and the pastoral dream of the Chisum ranch than for the bleeding, angry, and exploding forms that insist themselves upon him. (Davey, "Michael Ondaatje" 224)[109]

Pat Garrett on the other hand is portrayed as a brutal American frontiersman. Most of the violent acts depicted in the book are attributable to him. As an adversary to the artistic and sensitive Billy, Garrett is presented in a more rationalizing, violent form – he is the "sane assassin" (Ondaatje, *Collected* 29) who does everything to improve his efficiency, learning to drink in order to be able to stay sober and alert at all times. Needlessly torturing and humiliating his former friend Billy after he has captured him (76-79), he is the real villain in the story. In contrast, as Scobie argues, Billy is drawn more to the peacefulness and community (the Northern, again) of the Chisum ranch and Angela D than to the violence he is subjected to by his surroundings.[110] He is really a victim of his violent environment. According to Scobie,

> [n]one of the apologists for Billy as a poor misunderstood child driven against his will to violence have ever provided him such a beautiful and fully realized context for his "true nature": but Ondaatje succeeds in doing so without in the least sentimentalizing Billy. ("Two Authors" 199)[111]

3.5. Writing Against the Counter-Myth: *The Englishman's Boy*

In contrast to many of the works employing a "Mild West" myth, Guy Vanderhaeghe's novel *The Englishman's Boy* deconstructs the traditional Western and its underlying assumptions of a national identity from a Canadian perspective. Vanderhaeghe at first seems to exploit the typical binarism of Americanness vs. Canadianness, and a number of critics have consequently read the novel as an example of a more or less direct Anti-Americanism.[112] While Vanderhaeghe's novel is without a doubt above all a critique of Hollywood's expansionist appropriation and misrepresentation of other's histories,

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[109] In contrast McMurtry's *Anything for Billy* paints a different picture of Billy, as I explore in more detail in chapter 6. The "artist" in McMurtry's novel, if he can be called an artist, is the narrator, Mr. Sippy.

[110] Note that Garrett, who is also present at the Chisum ranch, is excluded from the communality of the place, falling asleep during the drinking and conversation while the others socialize. In another instance while Billy solves the "problem" with Sallie Chisum's cat who has become trapped under her house, Garrett is merely watching lethargically (Ondaatje, *Billy the Kid* 44-45).

[111] There are of course different interpretations, Reinhold Kramer for one seems to almost resent Ondaatje's un-Canadian focus on Billy the kid: "Those who, like Ondaatje, desire a greater explosion of irrationality must make their beds with American jazzmen or American kids" (11).

[112] Cf. Verena Klein's, Reinhold Kramer's, and to a certain extent Martin Kuester's articles. Kramer has to stretch his categories quite a bit to fit the novel into a simple American vs. Canadian formula, and Klein in her final sentences has to admits: "… it should always be borne in mind that the action of both novels takes place on both sides of the border […] In other words, Canada is not flawless either – but this needs to be examined elsewhere" (222).

Native American history, as well as Canadian, it does not insist on a Canadian moral superiority. In fact "Canadian" and "American" are not so much nationalities into which one is born and which bear certain characteristics, but rather ways of interpreting and constructing one's identity, as I will argue. As such they are much closer to the fluid concepts outlined by contemporary theorists of national identity than the old essentialist categories as which they are often understood.

To achieve its effect of questioning essentializing national identity construction the novel uses not only the 'American' myth of the West, but also the historical Cypress Hills Massacre which occurred June 1 1873, a much lesser known event which, nevertheless, played a crucial part in Canadian national identity construction by contributing to the creation of the North West Mounted Police (NWMP). While much of its focus is on Hollywood's construction of an American identity, its untruthful ways of representing the past to construct a present applies equally to Canada, for as Martin Kuester observes:

> the Mounties are of course a Canadian historical myth in their own right, their existence having given rise to the claim that the settlement of the Canadian West was very different from that of the American frontier: orderly, lawful, peaceful, without any more massacres of the kind described in *The Englishman's Boy*. (286)

The Cypress Hills Massacre "lies at the base of one of the central myths about Canadian identity and one of the widespread distinctions between the American and the Canadian West, if not of the Canadian self-image as a peace-loving people taking pride in being different from the more aggressive United States" (Ibid. 287). This view does not hold up to Vanderhaeghe's examination of historiography and myth making.

Vanderhaeghe's novel features two main plot lines. The first, set in 1873, tells of the eponymous Englishman's boy, a young American working as a manservant for an English gentleman who hunts in the American West. After the Englishman dies, his boy joins a group of wolf hunters to escape a town in which he has gotten into a fight with the local hotel-keeper. The wolfers pursue two Assiniboine who have stolen their horses. The group, which consists of Canadians as well as Americans, is lead by the cruel American Tom Hardwick. After the wolfers cross into Canadian territory they provoke the Cypress Hills Massacre. They slaughter an Assiniboine band, gangrape a young woman, and – after a failed attempt by the Englishman's boy to protect her from more violence – burn her alive in her hut.[113]

In the following, I will focus mostly on the analysis of the second plot line, which in a number of aspects is quite obviously inspired by Nathanael West's *The Day of the*

[113] On Vanderhaeghe's use of sources cf. Wylie "Dances," 35 and 48-49, endnote 6.

Locust.[114] Like West's novel it is set in Hollywood in the 1920s where the narrator, Canadian Harry Vincent, works as a title writer for silent movies. Like West's Tod Hackett, Harry is a failed artist selling out to Hollywood, and like Tod he has an ill-fated infatuation with a Jewish flapper, Rachel Gold, who like Faye Greener in West's novel, is utterly disinterested in the protagonist, falling instead for men with power, money or good looks. Harry's luck seems to change when the American movie producer and studio head Damon Ira Chance hires him to find Shorty McAdoo, an old-timer who now works as a cowboy extra. Chance assumes that Shorty will be able to provide him with an "authentic" account of the Old West, which Harry is to turn into a screenplay for Chance's next film. The pretentious producer wants to create the great American movie, an American "Odyssey," a historical film about the frontier which is to unite an American population he sees as on the brink of being overrun by foreigners.[115] As it turns out, Shorty and the Englishman's Boy are the same person, and when Shorty finally surrenders his story, it is a less than heroic one. Chance decides to ignore the facts and urges Harry to rewrite history to suit Chance's fascist ideology. Harry Vincent drops out of the picture but surrenders the notes, which relate Shorty's narrative. The resulting movie, *Besieged*, is completed according to Chance's "creative vision," which means that the Indians provoke the attack and the Indian rape victim becomes the villain who sets her own hut on fire. In this second metaphorical rape, Chance thus takes on a role parallel to Hardwick's, who initiated the massacre, a connection which is also stressed by the novel's structure, which alternates the two plotlines and synchronizes the climaxes of both plot lines, "serv[ing] to synchronize a critique of the wolfers' attack on the Assinibione camp with a critique of what amounts to Chance's repetition of the outrage" (Wyile, *Speculative Fictions* 60). Shorty fails once again to protect the Indian girl, despite his weak attempts to buy back his story from Chance. He does, however,

[114] The connection between the two novels not only becomes clear through their similar setting (1920s Hollywood), character setup, and the final scenes, as discussed in the main text, Vanderhaeghe furthermore opens Harry Vincent's narration in chapter 2 with an obvious homage to West's opening of *The Day of the Locust*. West's novel begins: "Around quitting time, Tod Hackett heard a great din on the road outside his office," and describes Tod watching a parade of actors in historical costumes who are being "herded" to their set, an army of cavalry and foot, a mix of hussars, Hanoverian light horse, English infantry, "the black infantry of the Duke of Brunswick, the French grenadiers," and Scottish soldiers (241). This scene is referenced in the first page of Harry Vincent's narration. Thinking back thirty years, the narrating Harry conjures up a scene of his younger self looking out his office window. "History is calling it a day," he opens and goes on to describe a grotesque parade of Hollywood actors and extras dressed as legionaries, Joseph and Mary, lady maids from Elizabeth I's court, Aztec warriors, and veterans of the American continental army at Valley Forge, set against the modern day "asphalt roadway" (Vanderhaeghe, *Englishman's Boy* 5).

[115] American historian Richard Slotkin in his novel *The Return of Henry Starr* uses a similar backdrop for his questioning of notions of popular history / myth writing, racial relation and so forth, when his protagonist, the little known historical outlaw Henry Starr (1874 – 1921), is hired by "the movies" to lend authenticity through his relation of his past adventures. In Slotkin's account, too, Hollywood's need for myth making obscures history.

confront the producer after the movie's premiere, and Chance and his Irish thug Fitz are killed by Shorty's slowwitted protégée Wylie in an ironic variation of the classic Western's final shootout scene, and another homage to West's *Day of the Locust*, which ends with a violent riot in front of a movie house.[116] As Harry reports, Chance's picture flops and is forgotten, and in the end both Harry and presumably Shorty flee to Canada.

The main storyline is framed by two chapters, which work as a counternarrative to the tale of victorious, if morally decrepit, white aggression. These relate the story of Fine Man and Broken Horn, the two Assiniboine who steal the wolfers' horses. In the final chapter, which tells of Fine Man and Broken Horn's grand return to their band, it is made clear that the victims of the massacre were not the Assiniboine who stole the wolfers' horses, and, in a reversal of the typical Western plot, the natives for once return home victoriously, even if others paid for their deeds.[117]

In *The Englishman's Boy*, national characteristics are not, as implied in the American and Canadian myths of their Wests, linked to some mysterious national quality of blood, soil or divine support in a project of bringing about progress (Manifest Destiny). Rather national identities are presented as acquired (imagined) images of the self, inventions that can be changed and – at least in the novel – do not necessarily coincide with the nationality of one's passport. A reading taking (national) identities for granted thus, as Klein admits, ultimately remains unable to provide a coherent image, since it cannot acknowledge the novel's complexity and ambiguity. There is in the end, as Alison Calder remarks, no "moral, 'Canadian' high ground" ("Unsettling" 100) to which the protagonist Harry Vincent can retreat. The novel rejects easy oppositions between "good" Canadians and "bad" Americans, oppositions which ultimately perpetuate the classic Westerns' simplifying morality with different players under the same black and white hats. Rather, Harry is complicit with Chance, the American producer, more than any other Americans are. *The Englishman's Boy* problematizes the issues involved in any nation building through myth making and Othering, first and

[116] West's view of Hollywood, in which he himself was involved as a screenwriter, seems relevant in that *The Englishman's Boy* shares West's critical stance. In one powerful passage preceding the final riot in front of a movie theater, the observations of West's narrator links Hollywood's "lies" to the American mass's predicament during the Great Depression and the presumed emptiness of their lives:

> Their [the people's] boredom becomes more and more terrible. They realize that they've been tricked and burn with resentment. Every day of their lives they read the newspapers and went to the movies. Both fed them on lynchings, murder, sex crimes, explosions, wrecks, love nests, fires, miracles, revolutions, war. This daily diet made sophisticates of them. The sun is a joke. Oranges can't titillate their jaded palates. Nothing can ever be violent enough to make taut their slack minds and bodies. They have been cheated and betrayed. They have slaved and saved for nothing. (381)

[117] I discuss the relevance and success of this strategy of a narrative frame in chapter 5.

foremost by problematizating historiography.[118] The novel thus serves as a warning directed at its audience, Canadian or other, against the building of a monolithic, simplified and exclusionist national identity, implicitly advocating, I would suggest, a more pluralistic, even transnational model.

The Englishman's Boy is full of references to nationalities. There are not only Chance's and Hardwick's imperialist "American" attitudes, but, more importantly considering the novel's origin in a Canadian literary discourse, Harry Vincent's Canadian identity. While the setup would seem to lend itself to an easy dichotomy between good, democratic Canadian and bad, imperialist American identities, not many of the characters in *The Englishman's Boy* follow this "ideal." For one, no character is portrayed in an overly positive light. The most likeable and reliable character (except perhaps Harry's highly self-conscious narratorial voice writing thirty years after the fact) is Harry Vincent's love interest, Rachel Gould, who "drinks too much", and is interested in the wrong men.

The lack of unbroken, positive "hero types" serves as a first warning against any easily preconceived notions of identity; Shorty is not like John Wayne, as Reinhold Kramer has claimed. He may be "a silent male," who "knows horses," but he does *not* "kill if he must" (Kramer, 13). Whereas he is involved in the massacre, shooting back at the attacking Assiniboine, in the novel's climactic shootout in front of the movie theater he simply wishes "a say" (321). Similarly, the reason for Shorty's silence is not a John Wayne-like machismo, but the ghosts of the Assiniboine he killed 50 years ago, which still haunt him. When Shorty does talk it is a confession brought forth while hugging a stove, not a cool lecture to a foreigner addressed as "pilgrim," a position of weakness which links him more to Harry Vincent, whose own "confessional narrative" (Bölling 84) makes up the novel, than to a triumphant John Wayne story. Shorty may possess the skills of a frontiersman, since he once was one, but he lacks the imperial attitude which in the Western goes with it so naturally. It is worth remembering that it is the young, simple-minded hot-head would-be cowboy Wylie who shoots "the villains." Wylie after all is inspired by a classic American cowboy image and is the only character who adores McAdoo as an unbroken frontier hero. His actions consequently follow the typical pattern of justifiable violence promoted in Hollywood's frontier pictures. In the end Wylie is yet another victim of the Western myth he wishes to believe in: as Harry Vincent relates at the end of his narrative, Wylie "hanged himself in jail" (324).

[118] I will examine the aspect of history and historiography only in passing where it relates to the idea of nation building. Herb Wyile's insightful essay "Dances with Wolfers" gives a fuller exploration of the problematization of historical representation in *The Englishman's Boy* in light of Hayden White's and other's thoughts of the narrative, non-objective nature of history.

In the following I wish to develop the point of inconsistent and unsure national identities by focusing primarily on the characters of the American movie producer Damon Ira Chance and the Canadian Harry Vincent, exploring Chance's views on film making and history, and his nationality, as well as Harry's character and the reason he is drawn in by Chance's determinacy, before ultimately realizing its utter lack of humanity, which leads him to attempt to distance himself from Chance and his project.

Chance's view of the film he wishes to produce is a bizarre variation and continuation of American historian Frederick Jackson Turner's ideas about the merging of immigrants into a new American people on the frontier. At the end of the 19th century Turner proclaimed: "The frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization" ("Significance" 21), and: "In the crucible of the frontier the immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race, English in neither nationality or characteristics" (Ibid. 31). Bereft of an actual frontier to make European immigrants into Americans, Chance sets himself up as Turner's heir, trying to make immigrants into Americans with his movie about the frontier. At their first meeting, he explains to Harry Vincent what he sees as the problem of a lack of Americanness in Hollywood: "How can English writers author American movies?" (16). What he overlooks in his obsession with Americanness, as Harry points out, is that he himself is about to hire a Canadian for his patriotic project, a point I will come back to later.

In his ambition Chance likes to compare himself to legendary director D. W. Griffith, "the man who has given America to the Americans" (18). Griffith, according to Chance, has "filled America's spiritual emptiness *with* a vision of itself" (18; emphasis in original). What Chance admires in Griffith are two things, firstly his American subject matter, and secondly his handling of "historical facts." He sees Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, a film notorious for misrepresenting American history and glorifying the Ku Klux Klan, as a factual account of the American past, "history written in lightning" (106), as he states quoting president Woodrow Wilson: "It was pure genius on [Griffith's] part to advertise his motion picture as fact" (18).

Combining what he calls the "poetry of fact" with the emotional power of the new medium, film, he sees himself unifying the nation in the movie theater, "[t]he classroom of the American spirit" (108-09). Evoking metaphors of the frontier, Chance praises the new medium's revolutionary potential for uncovering an "American spirit," he sees lacking in traditional American culture:

> The American spirit is a frontier spirit, restless, impatient of constraint, eager for a look over the next hill […] The American destiny is *forward momentum*. What the old frontiersman called westering. What the American spirit required was an art form of forward momentum,

> an art form as bold and unbounded as the American spirit. A *westering* art form! It had to wait for the motion picture. The art form of *motion*! (108; emphasis in original)[119]

Chance wants to forge an imagined community out of Americans and immigrants by presenting to them, following Griffith's model, a supposedly factual history of their past; a narrative they can identify with, and one which will unite them as a nation.

Despite Chance's doubtful historical and societal picture and the implications this has for his own film's "poetry of fact," Harry initially works for Chance. He is compelled by both Chance's "cultural self-confidence" (Kuester 290), expressed in his project to forge a nation in the cinema, and his money, which he needs to pay for a nursing home for his sick mother. Since Chance speaks with a "conviction" and "sincerity, which is almost moving" (110), Harry continues to accept Chance's project even when it becomes obvious that Chance's values and his idea of the "American spirit" he wants to force-feed Americans and immigrants with to unite them through the subliminal power of cinematic images, are more than a little flawed. He even defends Chance against his friend Rachel: "Chance's ambition is to go beyond entertaining lies, to make a great film, a truthful film" (159). Chance's truth, however, is not Shorty's eyewitness truth but a preconceived, "psychological truth," a "poetic truth" (252) in which "the enemy is never human" (256).

In contrast to the domineering Chance, Harry is portrayed as an exceptionally weak, passive character, throughout most of the novel. He "exhibits little judgement or discernment on his own account" (Hamilton 144), a fact that Rachel comments on in one of her prophetic moments:

> I'm afraid for you, Harry, because you don't know what you want and you're weak. You lack the courage to take responsibility for your intelligence. You actually prefer writing title cards rather than scripts because then you're not responsible for the end result. That makes you a blank-filler. (179)

Rachel's insight foreshadows Harry's reaction, a mysterious sickness forcing him to inaction, after he finally realizes Chance's intentions, but it also explains Harry's uncharacteristic energy when he works in the service of Chance's vision.

There is more to the character constellation than Chance's forceful conviction and Harry's weak personality, however; after all Guy Vanderhaeghe chose to make his protagonist not just a weak character, but a weak Canadian. He juxtaposes Chance's expansionist, monolithic idea of his identity as an American with Harry Vincent's stereotypically uncertain Canadian identity. David Staines describes Harry Vincent as

[119] What Chance overlooks is, of course, that the "American spirit" he describes is not so new after all. Even in the 1920s the frontier myth had been around for quite a while.

"a relocated Saskatchewan native whose own moral passivity and stalled writing career render him the stereotypically Canadian foil to the American's powerful revisionist impulse" (1151). Harry initially displays a deep insecurity about his identity as a Canadian.[120] After he joins Chance's project, Rachel asks him: "[W]hy is a Canadian so concerned with teaching Americans how to be American?" Harry's reaction is revealing; he becomes angry, and, in an act of pathetic fallacy, cries out:

> Because I chose this place. Canada isn't a country at all, it's simply geography. There's no emotion there, not the kind that Chance is talking about. There are no Whitmans, no Twains, no Cranes. Half the English Canadians wish they were *really* English, and the other half wish they were Americans. If you're going to be anything, you have to choose. Even Catholics don't regard Limbo as something permanent. (181; emphasis in original)[121]

It is remarkable that Harry sees the only choice for a Canadian as becoming either British or American. There is, at this point, no third option. He recounts a memory from his childhood when he watched the Saskatchewan River break up in spring with people looking at it and cheering. The image becomes a metaphor for Harry's uncertain Canadian identity, when he muses:

> [m]aybe I understand that my memory is the truest picture of my country, bystanders huddled on a riverbank, cheering as the world sweeps by. In our hearts we preferred the riverbank, preferred to be spectators, preferred to live our little moment of excitement and then forget it. Chance doesn't want Americans to forget to keep moving. I don't think that's ignoble. (181-82)

As such statements make clear, Harry Vincent is a Canadian by birth, but he despises what he sees as Canada's uncertain nationality. Harry has fled his country for the more linear, dedicated U.S. and when thinking about his native county he finds only harsh words for it. Whereas Canadians are "bystanders huddled on a riverbank, cheering

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[120] It is worth pointing out that Harry is not only marred in his nationality, but also physically crippled. When he introduces himself he looks at his reflection in a window describing what he sees: "a tall, thin, gangly, big-nosed, big-eared young man nervously smoking and fidgeting with his wirerimmed spectacles. A very ordinary, common young man whose only uncommon feature can't be detected in the glass at the moment. My limp" (7). Harry's remark on his limp gains a special prominence by being the last word in this paragraph and reflects on Harry as a character. Just as his limp troubles him despite being not immediately noticeable, so does his Canadian nationality, which Chance fails to notice inhibit his feeling of self-worth. Harry is cripples both physically and in terms of his national self identification.

[121] On a meta-textual level, this comment in a text from the 1990s by a Canadian author on Canadian identity and culture gains a highly ironic connotation and is reminiscent of Woody Allen's paraphrase of Groux Marx's protest that he would never want to belong to a club that would have someone like him for a member (*Annie Hall*). Linda Hutcheon describes this as "deconstructive irony," quoting Robertson Davies who "is said to have claimed that the enormous advantage of coming from Canada is that it allowed one to write 'about the whole world without the curiously provincial limitation of believing one was at the centre'" (*Splitting Images* 19). This is a benefit that Harry Vincent, the narrator, eventually learns to embrace.

as the world sweeps by," Harry Vincent longs for the "expansive" American spirit: "[a]nd everything the word implies. Energy, optimism, confidence" (180). What he fails to see at this point are the less positive connotations of this "expansive" American spirit, which he is already enacting. The colonial appropriation and destruction that can be seen not only in the wolfers' massacre of the Assiniboine in the "Whoop Up Country," but which in the end also "colonizes" and falsifies Shorty's story of conquest and horror into a great American narrative, are inextricably linked to the "expansive" American project Harry has dedicated himself to.[122]

Clearly what Harry sees in Chance and his project is an opportunity to reinvent himself as a more determined and less insecure person by redefining his identity. He projects his personal weakness onto his nationality and attempts to remedy his lack of personal determination and profile by dedicating himself to a stronger national identity, in fact tries to merge with a national community. After he is hired by Chance, Harry states: "Because of Chance, for the first time in my life I felt myself gratefully moving to the centre of something important, admitted to an inner circle" (33). Harry embraces the appeal of overbearing constructs like nationalism to become part of a larger unity, while failing to realize that such an idea, when followed to its extremes, is also at the heart of fascism's appeal of the disappearance of the individual into a larger unit, the *Volk*.

While Harry, unlike Chance, is no fascist, he is a person so uncertain of his identity that it makes him seducible. As a character in Canadian literature he also exemplifies the supposed anxiety of an entire generation of Canadians. In a statement from Brian Moore's Governor General award winning novel *The Luck of Ginger Coffey* which sounds like an illustration of Harry's anxieties, one of the characters states: "Leave Canada out. There you have the Canadian dilemma in a sentence. Nobody wants to talk about Canada, not even us Canadians. […] Canada is a bore"
(Moore quoted in Goetsch 122). In his shared desire to "leave Canada out" Harry Vincent is the ideal projection space for an American identity; in fact, in a comparison between Canadians and Americans Harry Vincent states: "I have found that Americans, by and large, recognize no distinction between us. Why should I?" (111). This is the motto of his temporary appropriation of an American identity.

When learning that Chance wants him to assist in finding Shorty, Harry at first "feel[s] some guilt" (110) for not revealing his Canadian nationality. As it turns out, however, Harry misjudges his own position – Chance has indeed picked the perfect man

[122] In one of Vanderhaeghe's many symbolizations, this violence on a national and metaphoric scale is repeated on a personal and more graspable scale when Chance and Fitz break into Harry's home at night while he is there, acting entirely natural and without guilt when discovered, thus symbolically also "colonizing" his flat (292-98).

for his job. Harry is so dedicated to the task of finding a story that is supposed to provide the key to the American identity Chance wants to forge, because this search mirrors his own search for a predefined identity he can immerse himself in. As a result he does not shy away from immoral behavior: since he knows about Shorty's disdain for anybody associated with the movies, he lies, claiming to be working on a book to obtain Shorty's trust. In addition he starts to exert more and more pressure on Shorty to force him to share his story, which the old man is at once reluctant and aching to tell.

While he was born Canadian by accident, lulled in by Chance's rhetoric, Harry has long become "American" by choice. Not only has he fled his native country to go to Hollywood, the myth-inventing identity forge of people like Chance, his pursuit of Shorty is much more than a job for him, it is a search for his own story and his new "American" identity, which Chance's project promises. In his eagerness and impressionability Harry actually believes in Chance's idea of a monolithic American nation – at least until it clashes completely with Shorty's narrative.[123] He prefers to be "a small part of something big" (both Chance's movie and the American nation) to being "a big part of something small" (both Canada and his own life) (180).

Harry's project of reinventing himself as an "American" ultimately fails. History turns out to be more complex than Chance's preconceived vision allows for and ultimately Harry Vincent has to realize this, too. When Chance reveals his disdain not just for immigrants, which Harry could comfortably ignore, but also for Jews, Harry loses his certainty in Chance's vision, as he is reminded of his Jewish love interest Rachel (254). When Chance tries to force Harry to make the Assiniboine rape victim into the culprit of his movie, Harry quits mentally and shortly thereafter officially.

Yet the damage is done and Harry is already complicit in Chance's violation of Shorty's story. As Alison Calder observes, "Harry, the Canadian adrift in Hollywood, is both victim and victimizer, vulnerable to Chance's manipulations while complicit with Chance in stealing and reversing Shorty's story" ("Unsettling" 96). Harry deceives Shorty, victimizing both Shorty by stealing "his" story and metaphorically the murdered Assiniboine who in death become prey to frontier imperialism a second time. Harry is furthermore ultimately responsible for Wylie's final descent into murder and his suicide. After all Harry is the one who gives Wylie a gun in one of his attempts to persuade Shorty to speak about his past.[124] Moreover, had Vincent not allowed Chance

[123] In this regard he resembles Charly Looking Bear's father in Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*, who after the death of his wife cannot imagine any place he wants to be except for Hollywood, even though Hollywood continuously condemns him to the same role of the Indian savage, a role which not only misrepresents his heritage but also his physique: he has to wear a smelly rubber nose in order to gain what seems to white audiences an "authentic" Indian profile.

[124] Without too much imagination, Harry's fear of and failure with the gun can be seen as yet another sign of his failing in his attempted self-Americanization. At the risk of oversimplifying slightly, one

and Fitz to take the notes of his conversation with Shorty, notes which are necessary to fill in the details of Chance's misrepresentation of Shorty's story, Shorty and Wylie would not have confronted Chance. As Chance tells Vincent in no uncertain terms:

> …you can't deny your responsibility, pretend you had no hand in this. Even Judas had a part in Christ's teaching. Have you forgotten our conversations? I cannot emphasize enough how important they were to me. To speak to someone with the intelligence to understand what I was saying, someone who could grasp my ideas in a way that Fitz could not – *that gave me the faith and heart to continue*. And then the way you played McAdoo, discreetly, delicately, so he hardly realized the hook was in his mouth – well, Fitz couldn't have done it and neither could I. I have no doubt that I have you to thank for McAdoo. (297; my emphasis)

Adding insult to injury, Chance makes Harry not only responsible for the things he has done, but also claims that Harry has been instrumental in motivating Chance. Chance concludes: "[Y]ou may wash your hands of me, Harry, but not your part in my picture. That is for the record" (297-98).

By taking the easy way out and abandoning the entire movie project, Harry Vincent also abandons what little control he might have had in protecting Shorty's story from the grossest violations. In the weeks following his resignation, he "remains woefully unwilling or unable to scrutinize his own complicity as the increasingly sinister chain of events unfolds around him" (Staines 1151). Harry's attempt to clear himself of any and all responsibility for the movie by simply resigning and abandoning the entire project without the least attempt to limit the damage, mirrors his earlier attempt to reinvent himself by adopting a new predefined national identity provided by Chance, rather than finding an authentic identity for himself.

Chance, through his association with the Hollywood movie industry and his repeated insistence on making a quintessentially American movie, becomes the clearest symbol for an "American" self-stylization. His views, such as "the enemy is never human" (256), not only draw a strong parallel to the acts of the text's other American "villain," the leader of the wolfers Tom Hardwick, whose Manichean racism is never as well expressed as in this line by Chance, but more generally represent a dangerously simplistic binary view, which – while by no means an exclusively American trait – is nevertheless frequently a part of the American way of interpreting the world through the lens of nationalist self-interest. Despite tendencies and views that sometimes borderline-fascist ideology Chance is nevertheless not simply "evil," in the essentialist sense. He is not a willful manipulator. Instead the novel slowly unveils the full range of

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could make the argument that guns are deeply rooted in American history and culture. Guns are not only a central part of the Western, but more importantly a part of the constitutional heritage of the United States: as is well known the Second Amendment to the Constitution guarantees "the right of the people to keep and bear Arms." Harry Vincent, the Canadian, seems to have no connection to the weapon, a fact that is only emphasized in that the American Wylie is a natural marksman.

his delusions. In fact, Chance does not hide his views from Harry or the reader. On the contrary, he sees Harry as an accomplice and a necessary part to his project. Far from being ashamed of his views or hiding them for tactical reasons, he is so blinded by his vision that he does not see the problems implicit in his approach. It could even be argued that Chance in the end does not so much willfully misrepresent the past, as completely misinterpret it. He is so imprisoned in his own ideology that he digs for a "deeper" (in fact preconceived) truth he believes he will arrive at when discarding some of the facts Shorty supplies in his narrative. In this approach he is playing the part of nation builder, imagining an ideal community, and in his disregard for facts that do not suit him he is perhaps closest to the Canadian politicians and nation builders Harry eventually finds out about (s. below).

While Chance is by no means a sympathetic character whose death the reader would pity, Chance in the end becomes a victim of his own simplistic ideology. Chance is so convinced of the truth of his version that he refuses to talk to Shorty when Shorty tracks him down after the premiere of his movie. When Fitz tries to shove Shorty aside, Wylie shoots both Fitz and Chance. The perversity of Chance's self-conception becomes apparent, once again, when he marks himself as a martyr with his dying breath addressing Harry: "[W]hen we talked […] I could not bring myself to tell you everything. […] The consequences of truth. […] Artists … visionaries … they always find a way to kill us, Harry. Always" (322-23). Even though he cannot answer Harry's question who "they" are anymore, this is irrelevant – we can imagine who they are, since Chance has on his deathbed become another stereotype of Americanness – the *paranoid* American who constantly sees himself pursued by "them" whoever "they" might be.[125]

After the murder, both of Chance's surviving victims, his "disciple" Harry, and his "main" victim Shorty McAdoo flee the country. Canada seems to become for a moment the ideologically "virgin land" that Shorty sees in it early in the book. He claims it is what America used to be, that is a country that has not yet been dominated by people like Chance and their imposing pictures of society, a country where there is still space left.

Yet Canada is also compromised. For one, Harry Vincent remains in the shadow of America, in the form of Hollywood, even after "escaping" from it: he manages a movie theater in his native Saskatchewan which ironically screens American films. The

[125] The theme of Chance's paranoia is not made particularly explicit in the novel, but runs through it as an undercurrent. It informs Chance's fear of the immigrants and his Jewish colleagues in Hollywood, and on a much lower level breaks out occasionally in his insecurity, as in a scene in which two laughing flappers pass Chance and Harry "deep in private conversation, and when they go by, one of them laughs." Chance immediately assumes "they were laughing at me […] because of how I am dressed" (230), a remark which again hints at Chance's misinterpretation of his environment.

whole novel can thus be read "as an allegory of the Canadian situation in a world that has been dominated by the United States ever since the days of the Wild West and its frontier," as Martin Kuester has suggested (291). Yet the issue of nationalities is more complicated in that the novel eventually undermines the clear differentiation between Americanness and Canadianness that Canadians like to make.

As I have argued, Harry is a "Canadian" who reinvents himself as an "American." His position as a lead actor in the story's crime of appropriating and misrepresenting the story of the Assiniboine girl could be seen to highlight a historical Canadian complicity in the creation of Hollywood's images, of the West as well as of other areas of chauvinist national identity constructions. Harry's role as aide to Chance can be linked to the historical role of Canadian actors, screenwriters, cinematographers and so forth, who were and are involved in producing Hollywood's image of America.

One of the cues to the complexity with which nationality is treated, and which forbids an easy reading of the novel as simple Anti-Americanism is Chance's identity. Chance, the great believer in the American movie, which can only be made by Americans, is himself not a "real" American, and neither is his double Fitzsimmons, the Irish American who enforces his master's every wish. Chance is not a Texan cowboy, but, ironically, a rather sophisticated, if ruthless, Jamesian hybrid. Harry Vincent describes him as "a middle-aged Henry James character who had spent most of his life living abroad in Europe" (7). He is like James himself, an "international" American with European learning. Ironically, Chance, who has only recently come from Europe, aims to teach American-ness to natural born and raised Americans. In this light, Chance's Americanness loses its essentialist quality, and Vanderhaeghe's use of the "American" as his villain gains an ironic edge. Chance's identity we realize is as much a performance, a way of interpreting "his" personal history, as Harry Vincent's project of discarding his uncertain Canadian, for an "expansionist" American self – a self that Harry only really acts as when working for Chance and pressuring Shorty into providing him with the story he needs for Chance's project. The difference it seems is merely that Chance is the better performer. The oddity of Chance's American patriotism, which Harry Vincent comments on early in the novel, throws the genuineness of his nation building project and its naturalness in question. When Chance expresses his disdain for European scriptwriters in Hollywood and shares his contempt for what he sees as "Henry James's traitorous nonsense about the ineffable superiority of Europe," Harry remarks that Chance's conviction "seems at odds with the rumours of his life spent abroad, as if a Henry James character were launching an attack on James himself" (18).

This reinforces the point that Chance's view of history and of nationality is not an expression of a supposedly pre-existing "American spirit," as Chance himself claims (108), but the result of a one-sided, monologic, and paranoid interpretation of his

surroundings. Lacking a frontier to make immigrants into Americans, he decides to Americanize them in the movies by making them swallow his version of history: "Convert the strangers with lightning! […] The lightning of pictures! American pictures! Make the Sicilian living in New York American. Make the Pole living in Detroit American. Convert all those who can be converted – damn the rest!" (253). Chance's Americanness is a misguided "self-defense" against the complex reality of a modern pluralistic and transnational society; his answer is a monoglossic and totalitarian one: "convert those who can be converted – damn the rest." [126] This rest, in Chance's view, includes various ethnicities and groups by definition, as Gordon Bölling observes: "Cast into the role of enemy, Native Americans, just like immigrants and Jews, are excluded from Chance's racist conception of a unified nation" (87-88). Indeed Chance even likens them linguistically when he claims that "the Indian tribes, like the Jewish tribes, would not face the facts," i.e. that they had been "defeated" by the victorious "white," non-Jewish, (and non-tribal) "race" (252).

In the novel, the movie format Chance chooses for his forceful conversion, this "*westering* art form," is not only the vehicle of Chance's view of Americanness, but is further associated with his monoglossic totalitarianism. As Chance argues,

> there's no arguing with pictures. You simply accept or reject them. What's up there on the screen moves too fast to permit analysis or argument. You can't control the flow of images the way you can control a book – by rereading a chapter, rereading a paragraph, rereading a sentence. A book invites argument, invites reconsideration, invites thought. A moving picture is beyond thought. Like feeling it simply *is*. The principle of a book is persuasion; the principle of a movie is revelation. (107)[127]

This, it should be noted, is a markedly postmodern position, and one shared by other authors discussed in this study. In his "notes on post-realist fiction" George Bowering, for instance, remarks:

> The post-modernist novelist admits the power of the reader. He is sitting with the book before him, & may if he feels like it, skip twenty pages, or rip out the last chapter on his way from the book store. The movie-goer has no such power. He can stay or go. The reader can go back to his favourite scene a hundred times. His literal experience is spatial. (Bowering, "Painted Window" 30)

While Vanderhaeghe attacks and unmasks the Hollywood apparatus as an image of America and its falsification of historical fact which falls prey to nation building,

[126] In the following I borrow Bakhtin's concept of mono- versus heteroglossia and the dialogic as developed in his *Dialogic Imagination*.

[127] To totalize the impact of his opus, Chance, like some of his contemporary filmmakers, goes to a lot of pains. Like legendary director Cecil B. DeMille, Chance collects all the facts and then discards the ones that do not suit his preconceived notion of the truth (cf. Wyile, "Dances" 50, endnote 9). This narrative strategy once again underscores Vanderhaeghe's claim that facts are not the same as "truth."

Canada ultimately does not fare better. As Harry learns from the history books he consults, the Cypress Hills Massacre was used by members of the Canadian Parliament to condemn the wolfers as "American cutthroats, thieves and renegades." However, "Nobody seemed to mention that among them were Canadian cutthroats too" (326). By suppressing the facts and stylizing America as the violent Other, Canada commits the same epistemological violence that Chance is guilty off. The novel explores the massacre's use used as a justification for the creation of the NWMP, and the reason for its mythic "long march" West to secure the Western territories for British-Canadian interests under the guise of protecting the land and its native population from "American cutthroats." The massacre is thus instrumentalized for one of Canada's own national myths, the "mythic act of possession," as Harry calls it, of the Canadian West through the NWMP (326). The rationale behind using the massacre seems no less selfish than "America's" use of it in Chance's motion picture, the representation is almost as flawed. By highlighting its imperial aspects and carefree use of facts, the novel discloses Canada's national identity construction, just as it had earlier done with America's. As Herb Wyile observes,

> Harry's reflections undercut any binary between the history of the America West and the history of the Canadian West, suggesting that the stereotype of the peaceful and orderly settlement of the latter is no less constructed, ideological, and mythic than the triumphal spirit of the former. ("Dances" 36)

Harry's return to an identity as a "Canadian," like the novel, ends as it began with the image of the Saskatchewan River. The difference is that, after the cathartic telling of his story, Harry now seems able to accept his identity, even though he is still haunted by his past, much as Shorty McAdoo was throughout the novel's main story line: after leaving Hollywood he breaks off his personal contact entirely, becoming "a stranger" (324) in Rachel's words.

Harry's reminder to himself while he looks at the Saskatchewan reflects on the larger issue of representation: "[T]he map of the river is not the river itself" (326), Harry remarks. Similarly both history and myth, and the central aspect of national identity constructed through them, are never essential, but always an abstraction. Like a map they create a territory rather than represent it.[128] Most importantly the image of the map as construction of the river can be linked back to the issue of national identity, which the river symbolizes throughout the novel, through the quote I opened this chapter with:

[128] Cf. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of mapping which they set off from tracing: "What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious" (13).

"Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it *invents* nations where they do not exist" (Gellner in Anderson 15; Anderson's emphasis).

The way out of the simplistic and falsifying constructions of nations and history, is only suggested in the novel. It is Harry Vincent who is, at least in part, associated with a dialogic counter model: the novel he writes about his and Shorty's experiences tries to reestablish some of the voices that have become obscured by American and Canadian nation building. The novel format, as Chance's sentiment quoted above suggests, allows real communication rather than dictatorial acceptance.[129] It can thus form the basis of a less totalizing alternative identity. The novel's politics then are mirrored in its form. Whereas the Harry of the main narrative continually attempts to justify his actions, it is obvious that he is not easily absolved of guilt – and at least in his older self he is aware of this: ultimately Harry's absolution is only brought about by his act of writing about his experience years after the fact – the narration which forms the metadiegetic level of the novel. Harry's writing mirrors the cathartic effect of Shorty's telling, yet, by telling it himself, he is spared the abuse and misrepresentation of his story Shorty has to bear.

As the novel makes clear simplistic self-stylizations in the form of easily adopted prefigured national identities are not an option. Returning ultimately to the image of the river as a metaphor for Harry's existence in Saskatchewan, *The Englishman's Boy* suggests the reinterpretation of a Canadian anxiety over the lack of a clear national identity as a chance for a more dialogic identity which is not spelled out explicitly in the novel, but is certainly unlike the monoglossic and totalizing identity that both Hollywood and the 19th century Canadian government share. *The Englishman's Boy* then provides an alternative way of conceiving of and critiquing national identity within the framework of a Western novel. Through its transnational connections both in form and plot, the novel shows that, while contemporary Canadian culture cannot undo or reverse the complicity of Canadian actors to the making of an American national(ist) myth, the questionable patterns of Canadian identity building through the suppression of Canadian complicity are not an option either. Vanderhaeghe instead self-consciously points out the cultural patterns that lead to the creation of such violent mythologies as those of the Wests, whether they are highlighted as in the American model or suppressed as in the Canadian self-identification of a "Mild West." By bringing the historical facts back to light and pointing to the cultural construction and narrative patterns necessarily involved in their telling, the novel warns of the dangers of the creation of a simplistic group identity and does penance for some of the "wrongs" both nations have historically been involved in, often being linked transnationally, e.g. through the movement of

[129] Again, the basis of my argument is informed by Bakhtin's thoughts in *The Dialogic Imagination*.

Native groups or commodities which criss-crossed the border. Vanderhaeghe's novel thus provides a questioning of national identity which goes beyond both that of the American revisionist Westerns discussed above and that of his fellow Canadian writers who construct Canada as not-America through a "writing against the colonizers" and the use of a Canadian counter myth of the "Mild West," which they pit against an expansionist American frontier narrative.

CHAPTER 4
CHALLENGING THE WHITE WEST: AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE REVISIONIST WESTERN

4.1. Race and Ethnicity in the Western

If one thinks the Western is or should be an interpretation of the 19th century with at least some basis in historical reality, an assumption frequently made by viewers and critics alike, most traditional Westerns' depictions of race and ethnicity are a skewed affair. Whereas in the historical West there were people of different national and ethnic backgrounds, the popular Western usually excludes them. When non-AngloSaxon characters appear they are almost always limited to minor roles, and not infrequently a source of humor; rarely are they portrayed in a non-stereotyped way, as fully realized human beings. Mary Alice Money mentions many of the stereotypes common in traditional Westerns: There are "hordes of savage Indians, lazy [and cowardly] Mexican peasants, vicious Mexican bandits, several stupid homesteaders with German or Scandinavian accents, a few Mormon sex maniacs, and an assortment of simple-minded but loyal Negro ex-slaves" (113). One could add to the list the ever amusing "chinaman" with his funny accent, who is either a cook, the owner of a laundry or part of a horde of workers building the railroad.[130]

[130] The representation of Asians in Westerns is perhaps even more problematic than that of African Americans which this chapter focuses on. Whereas there are a number of good African Americans revisions of the Western in both novels and films, as I will show in this chapter, Asians have fared more poorly in the genre. While there are a few recent examples of Westerns with central Asian characters, Jackie Chan's comedy Western *Shanghai Noon* (2000), the TV mini-series *Iron Road* (2008), and the book and film version of *A Thousand Pieces of Gold* (1981 and 1991 respectively), which can arguably only be called a Western if one is willing to stretch the definition of the Western quite a bit (cf. Patricia Terry's comparative reading of novel and film and how they revise the frontier myth), there are generally so few examples of strong, central or meaningful Asian characters in Westerns that Arthur Dong, curator of the exhibition Hollywood Chinese, could in an email communication (26 July 2011) only come up with two more, rather exotic examples. Dong mentions *Walk Like a Dragon* (1960) and *Rider on a Dead Horse* (1962), as well as the character Hey Girl, played by Lisa Lu, featured in twenty one episodes in the late-1950s and early 1960s in the TV series *Have Gun – Will Travel* (1957 – 1963).

In the early 2000s Chris Holmlund also commented on the ongoing trend of excluding Asian characters from meaningful roles even in what she calls the "nouveaux westerns" of the 1990s, films that generally were fairly aware of their treatment of Native American and African American characters:

> When Asian characters do appear, as is the case in *Posse* and *Escape from L.A.*, it is only in bit parts, in the background, exactly as before. (*The Ballad of Little Jo* is an exception.) This is astonishing for several reasons: Hong Kong martial arts films are a strong influence on many nouveaux westerns; Asians constituted a significant population in many areas of the Old West; Asians are today the second largest group of new immigrants in the U.S. (66)

Even if one does not believe that the Western is indebted to historical accuracy, and instead interprets it as a universal, archetypal, psychoanalytical, or mythic narrative, or as a national allegory, as critics have suggested at various times, one might still assume that such a narrative should, at least occasionally, address the concerns of most major groups in U.S. society. Furthermore, even if one denies the Western its grounding in history, an important connection between the Western and a popular, if not an academic, understanding of history cannot be denied: through its presentation of a mythscape supposedly reflecting the 19th century U.S. West, the narratives the Western tells reflect back on history and shapes the perception of at least those readers' and viewers' without any other connection to the "history" of the frontier. As a result even today, at a time when multiculturalism, racial and gender equality are broadly accepted as ideals, the image of the historical winning of the West still finds many of its most memorable images in the Western genre, and is consequently often imagined first and foremost as a story of white men shooting and defeating savage red men, occasionally "befriending" a noble racial Other. The heritage of ethnic, as well as gender, inequality is so deeply engrained in the Western formula that John Cawelti speculates that it might have been one of the major factors contributing to the genre's decline in popularity:

> The Western's decline reflects the increasing ambiguity that writers and directors feel about the racial and gender stereotypes that long dominated the popular Western. In addition, the impact of the was [sic] in Vietnam and the ending of the Cold War deeply eroded the Western's acceptability as a myth of America's role on the international scene. ("Post(modern) Westerns" 20; slightly rephrased in *Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* 117)

Mary Alice Money in her thorough discussion of the evolution of the Western in the 1960s and 1970s also finds only one TV series with an Asian main character, *Kung Fu*. The fact that the protagonist, a Buddhist monk who, like many traditional Western heroes preaches peace, but is forced to use his violent skills in each episode's showdown, is played by a Caucasian actor, David Carradine, makes the TV series exploitative nature more than obvious. As Money argues, the series

> is an obvious attempt to capitalize on contemporary interest in Eastern philosophies and meditation, as well as the peace movement. Ironically, *Kung Fu* also exploits another current interest, in the ritualized mayhem of the Oriental martial arts. No matter how pacifist the hero acts, at some point in each episode he is forced to slaughter several villains in a spectacular kung-fu scene. (118)

The Western novel seriously addressing and revising Asian stereotypes still needs to be written, as Rosenberg and Harald noted in 1991: "The reader must still wait for the Mexican or Native American cowboy to receive similar fiction status [to that of the Black cowboy]" (23). Indeed, most of the occurrences of Asian characters in the novels discussed in this study, even racially conscious ones such as the novels discussed in this and the following chapter, adhere to old stereotypes and continue to use Asians mostly as comic relief characters or symbols of exploitation reflecting on white society, e.g. Anne Cameron's depiction of the Chinese railroad workers discussed in chapter 6, or Justin Allen's "multi-cultural" Western discussed below.

Even today after there have been popular Westerns substituting white heroes for nonwhite heroes in all major Western media (cinema, TV, and novels), [131] the image of the "winning of the West" often remains the same, as many a frustrated historians has found: "In American popular culture and much traditional scholarship, the story of America's westward movement is a tale of two races – white men and red skins – that sometimes cooperate but mostly collide" (Weber vii).

The Western, the transporter of this image of history in the form of a national narrative, has, for the longest time, been one of the most racially exclusionist narratives in U.S. culture. Philip Durham and Everett Jones in 1965 questioned the white image of the West by looking at "the negro cowboy." Writing at the time of the African-American civil rights movement they speculated on the reason for the lack of African-American cowboys in Westerns, in the clear hopes that following a "rediscovery" of historical African American cowboys, as undertaken in their book, the cultural image of the West would follow suit and become more diversified. Durham and Jones' explanation for the lack of non-white heroes they observed in novels and films was that the cowboy, as an American folk hero, "unlike other folk heroes, [...] is a kind of nameless Everyman" (227), a conglomerate of all the actual frontier "heroes," Indian fighters, miners, cowpunchers and so on. As such, they argue, his image could not be marked by any racial or other distinctive national, ethnic or religious – and it could be added gendered – feature which would identify him as anything but a "norm" (in fact normative would be the more appropriate term) American: "He could not be a Swede, a German or an Englishman – though all of these were real cowboys – and he could not be a devout Mormon, Catholic or Jew. Like an 'ideal' Presidential candidate, he was expected to be a white, Protestant American with whom most Americans can identify" (228).[132]

[131] Money 113-35 discusses many examples of "Ethnic Heroes," and Diana Tixier Herald's *Genreflecting* includes entries for "Native Americans," "Native Captives," and "African Americans in the West" (see below in more detail).

[132] It seems worth pointing out in passing that the identifiers white, American, Protestant, and male are not generally seen as the distinctive identifiers they are, but instead are so internalized as "the norm" that they are perceived as non-marking, and non-ideological – making them of course highly ideological from a critical or "minority" perspective. What is so peculiar about identifying a white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant male as the "norm" and as the ideal American is that most Americans do not fit within this grid. There are by far more Americans who are *not* male *and* white *and* Protestant *and* Anglo-Saxons than there are WASP males. The definition of the "norm" is not based on a majority, but on a position of hegemony. It reflects historical developments, which in turn re-inscribe cultural and economically dominant positions. Even if such observations are by no means novel or revolutionary, and the "norm" has been contested for a while, hegemonic relations are slow to change, and the image of the "non-marked" norm as white, male, Christian (if maybe no longer necessarily Protestant) has not changed that much, although variations are now possible in some respects, allowing, for instance, an African-American man to become president.

Durham and Jones follow this discussion with an attempt to explain the persistence of the image of the white Anglo-Saxon cowboy. Given what they perceived as "a continuous decline in American bigotry," they speculate that "ignorance of history is the most important reason that the Negro cowboy does not ride in fiction":

> Americans have assumed that because Negroes have not been in Western fiction they were never in the West. The prairie was different from the city, said one writer, for there the Jew, Negro and Italian never came. This attitude Americans accept as history, and what they learn is strangely incomplete.
> The modern world learns about itself through its fiction, somewhat inaccurately. (Ibid.)

As Durham and Jones note, this construction of a white West replicates itself in the fashion of a vicious circle:

> Writers and casting directors who have studied the old West and who know something of its diversity believe that they must respect the ignorance of their audience. They fear the incredulity of readers and viewers. […] They fear that the accurate representation of the Negro's role in the opening of the West would paradoxically seem to be a falsification of history. (229)

Fifty years later, the American West is still mostly white. Looking at the history of the film Western, there are a few recognizable non-white actors like Woody Strode, Graham Greene or Chief Dan George, but none of the major Western stars are black, Native American, Chinese, Mexican or of any other non-Caucasian ethnicity. Likewise there have to my knowledge not been any major popular writers of Westerns who were not white. On top of the fear of audience incredulity Durham and Jones speculate about, Blake Allmendinger has given a lack of historical sources and a contemporary lack of interest by ethnic writers as a reason for the lack of ethnic writers and stories within the "cowboy community":

> Unfortunately, the cowboys' own art does not always provide a full sense of what life was like for each man who worked on a cattle ranch. We know that Native Americans, Hispanics, and African Americans hired on as vaqueros, or cowboys, although they seldom left written records or trustworthy statistics to indicate the extent to which they influenced history. […] Men of color, unlike their white peers, don't tend to write cowboy poetry in the twentieth century, either, for whatever reason, nor do noncowboy black authors tend to write about black men and women out West, with the exception of Ishmael Reed, whose novel *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* (1969) speaks out against this odd silence. (Allmendinger, *Cowboy* 12-13)

While there seems indeed no major author of ethnic Westerns, it is nevertheless not quite as hard to find examples of Westerns with non-white "interest" today as it was fifty years ago, and there seems in fact to be a small market for more diverse Westerns. The newest edition of the popular "reading guide" *Genreflecting*, for instance, lists

twenty one Western novels under the heading "African Americans in the West" (Herald 116-17). An even greater number is given under the heading "Native Americans" and "Indian Captives" (94-98). While these numbers indicate an increasing interest in non-white heroes by readers of popular fiction (there were only four novels listed under the original heading, "black cowboys," in the first edition of *Genreflecting* published in 1982 [Betty Rosenberg]), it reflects the ongoing marginalization of Asians and latinos in the Western genre that *Genreflecting* does not include a list of "Asian" or "Mexican [American]" Westerns.[133]

Durham and Jones expressed the hope that: "Perhaps one sign of [the] new maturity [of the Western after the Second World War] has been the appearance of a few Negroes in stories about the West" (226). Indeed, there is a development in Western novels and films towards a broader inclusion of other races. Writing ten years after Durham and Jones, Mary Alice Money finds a number of ethnic heroes in popular Westerns written and produced during the 1960s and early 1970s. Money sees in these Westerns not so much the setting straight of the historical record which Durham and Jones had hoped for, but a public interest of readers to see more diverse groups in an adventurous setting: "The main reason for the change seems to be less a concern for historical authenticity than contemporary Americans' growing pride in their various racial, religious, and national backgrounds" (Money 113). As such many of the cultural products she discusses – novels, films and TV series – according to Money constitute a lip service to the ethnic group their respective heroes are supposed to be a part of rather than the challenge to inaccuracies in the Western canon or the serious engagement with that groups' history and its representation in the Western which the revisionist Western, as defined in this study, aims for.[134]

A recent example of this trend towards the replacement of white heroes with ethnic ones in texts that nevertheless do not engage with potentially uncomfortable underlying truths of different ethnic realities or past racial injustices is Justin Allen's recent young adult novel *Year of the Horse* (2009). Allen's work is clearly a novel written to suit a contemporary taste for a diverse West. The white author's protagonist is Yen Tsu-lu, the child of Chinese immigrants. Other characters include a wild mix of all ethnicities – blacks, Native Americans, Mexicans, and whites –, but there is almost nothing to distinguish them. Tacked onto this colorful mix of characters is a strong heroine and – capitalizing on the time's interest in magic, vampires and the supernatural (following the success of the *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* sagas) – a shapeshifting

[133] *Genreflecting* for the most part covers popular Western novels and what the authors in an earlier edition called "realistic portrayals" of Black cowboys, most of the authors listed in *Genreflecting* are not discussed in this thesis, the only exception is Durham's *Gabriel's Story*, discussed below.

[134] Cf. Money 113-35 for her critical assessment of the texts she examines.

gunslinger. This approach merely changes the color of the same one-dimensional, unambiguous cast of characters to cater to contemporary preferences for ethnic heroes, an approach which Money has linked to 1970s exploitation films (114). This form of lip service threatens to be almost as harmful as earlier exclusion or stereotyping. It obliterates rather than engages and addresses past injustices in a manner which celebrates its contemporary readers' supposedly greater awareness of racial issues without, however, pointing to racist contingencies. The merry pseudo-multiculturalism of such works furthermore bears the threat of replacing old, negative stereotypes with new "positive" ones, rather than providing a chance to include more rounded and fully realized non-white characters and cultures.

In this chapter I will examine novels which more seriously and profoundly engage race and ethnicity in the Western. Most of the texts examined here can be called truly revisionist in that they critically engage issues of racism and racial representation. I will limit myself to examining the revision of images of African Americans in this chapter, as exemplary of how the revision of a race which has been excluded from the traditional Western, despite its presence in the historical West functions. The choice of this group over others, such as Mexican Americans, has a number of reasons I will briefly address.

African Americans constitute not only the largest racial minority in the U.S.A. with around 12 % of the population, but were also historically a major presence in the American West after the Civil War, that is the years which traditionally lend the Western its setting.[135] Despite their historical presence African Americans have been largely excluded from the stories told about this region, as I will show in more detail below. More importantly, however, African Americans began to emancipate themselves, challenging a racist, segregated American society on a large scale throughout the late 1950s and 1960s in the Civil Rights and Black Power movement,[136] a time which coincided roughly with the beginning of the revisionist Western, impacting the development of the genre by raising racial awareness among authors and filmmakers. This new awareness changed the Western. Even if many authors and filmmakers did not suddenly begin to incorporate strong African American or other ethnic character, a number of texts in American literature and film in the late 1960s and early 1970s began to more aggressively rewrite racial depictions in the Western by including strong African American heroes to challenge old misconceptions and

[135] E.g. Allmendinger, *Imagining* xi-xiii, and *passim*; de León; Katz, *Black West*; Moos; Riley; M. K. Johnson, *Black Masculinity*, and numerous others.

[136] The 1960s also brought forth other emancipatory movements, such as another wave of women's rights advocates, and the Red Rights movement, which further challenged the white- and male-dominated American society the Western traditionally reflected and reinscribed.

stereotypes and incorporate contemporaneous ideals of a post-segregation U.S. or address racist contingencies.

Canada, in contrast, has had a very different history of race relations. Slavery, which was never as wide-spread in Canada as in the U.S. to begin with, was abolished throughout the British Empire in 1834, and black men in Canada have had the right to vote since 1837. As a result there was no Black Power movement in Canada, and black Canadians never gained as much prominence and attention as African Americans did during their emancipation movement. For historical reasons, Canada also has a much smaller black population. African Canadians today constituting only
2.5 % of the population, which makes African Canadians only the third largest visible minority in Canada. As a result of their less pronounced role in the historical West in Canada, and their smaller number in the Canadian West (1.4% in Alberta and only 0.7% in BC in the 2006 census), their small market share as members of Canada's reading public, the relatively small number of African Canadian writers, and the lesser popularity of Westerns in Canada in general, black characters play no role at all in the Canadian Western, whose target of revision are usually other parts of the genre, such as the issues of national identity and gender discussed in chapter 3 and 6, or a revision of Canada's historiographic mythology regarding the treatment of First Nations North of the 49th parallel, as discussed in chapter 5.

4.2. The Black West

> In the evening I went out to a movie, a picture of frontier life with heroic Indian fighting and struggles against flood, storm and forest fire, with the out-numbered settlers winning each engagement; an epic of wagon trains rolling ever westward. I forgot myself (although there was no one like me taking part in the adventures) and left the dark room in a lighter mood.
>
> Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*.

The first African Americans arrived in the western part of North America in 1528 as slaves of a shipwrecked party of Spanish conquistadors. After being rescued, one of these black slaves, Estevanico,[137] returned in 1539 with an expedition intended to locate the legendary Seven Cities of Cibola, where the streets were supposedly paved with gold, finding the cities, if not the gold, only to be killed by its residents (Katz, *Black West* 3, 7-13, Billington and Hardaway 1). Others followed, the most famous being perhaps York, William Clark's slave and an important member of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Especially in the late nineteenth century, after the end of the Civil War, the

[137] Estevanico is referred to under many different names. Apart from Estevanico, Katz gives the names Esteban, Estevan, and Stephen Dorantes, after his owner Andres Dorantes (*Black West* 7), but others use different names, Robert Franklin Gish's character LaVonne Bishop in his short story "Nueva Entrada" briefly discussed in the next chapter, for instance, calls Estevanico, Esteban the Moor.

era most relevant for the Western, African Americans were a major and important presence in the Western United States, as numerous historians have established. The exact situation of African Americans in the West is uncertain, however, and numbers of black cowboys, for instance, vary greatly between authors. Durham and Jones claim that more than five thousand African American cowboys out of perhaps 35.000 in total worked in the West in the years following the Civil War (3), but fail to provide any sources to substantiate their claim. Others even speculate that one in five cowboys was black (Allmendinger, "African Americans" 916), but it seems that such numbers are for the most part mere assumptions.[138]

Whatever the actual numbers of black cowboys might have been, they left little to no written evidence. There are some photos and other evidence of famous black frontiersmen, such as Jim Beckenwourth, Nat Love, Isom Dart or the mixed race Cherokee Bill, but the only well-known account written by an African American cowboy is Nat Love's *The Life and Adventures of Nat Love, Better Known in the Cattle Country as "Deadwood Dick"* (1907), in which the author suggests that he was the source for Edward Wheeler's dime novel creation "Deadwood Dick" and claims to balance the account given by Wheeler.[139] While the sources on African American cowboys are slim to say the least, a better documented black presence existed in the two African American Cavalry regiments. The Ninth and Tenth Cavalry, called the "Buffalo Soldiers" by the Cheyenne, and two infantry regiments, the Twenty-Fourth and Twenty-

[138] William W. Savage, Jr. challenges such assumptions: "[T]here is no such thing as cowboy demography, and no one knows how many cowboys there were, or how they were distributed by age, ethnic origin, or geographical location." Savage examines at some length Durham and Jones' number, which he classifies as "an assumption" the book was based on which was later "widely accepted as a conclusion" (6-7). Savage also questions Saunders' estimate of 35,000 cowboys by calculating it against the number of cattle driven (which is the only halfway reliable number available).

[139] On Love's *Life and Adventures* cf. M. K. Johnson *Black Masculinity* 100-17 and Allmendinger, *Imagining* 67-59 as well as *Ten Most Wanted* 17-31. Blake Allmendinger examines the argument that Wheeler's Deadwood Dick might be black, but despite following some markers that identify him as "dark," concludes that "[t]here is no textual evidence [...] that Deadwood Dick is literally 'black' or that he extends his protection to racial minorities" (*Imagining* 67). While the former claim is certainly true as any casual reader of any of the *Deadwood Dick* novels will notice, Bill Brown, an authority on the dime novel, has a different assessment of Deadwood Dick's role as a protector of minorities:

> The Deadwood Dick series marks the moment in the dime novel's history when the Indians, however stereotyped, no longer function to unify the white population. When, in *Deadwood Dick's Claim; or, The Fairy Face of Faro Flats*, the outlaw hero fights in the name of granting a Crow Indian his land rights, the Western seems eager to compensate for the damage done in history, and in literary history, of the frontier's extension. In subsequent Deadwood Dick novels, the Indians join the ranks of the oppressed who need to be defended by the hero. (B. Brown 34)

Fifth Infantry, were a major presence in the West.[140] Many immigrants to the West were also of African American descent. Particularly after the Civil War many blacks seem to have gone West in the hope of getting away from the prejudiced society of the Restoration South. While their numbers are at least documented by the U.S. Bureau of Census – rising from just under 60,000, almost all slaves in Texas, in 1850 to almost a million all over the West by 1910, and doubling from just over 220,000 to over 450,000 between 1870 and 1880, the years which most often are the setting of the classic Western (Billington and Hardaway 259),[141] – given the low education of many of these early settlers, other documents detailing their daily experience remain few, details in many areas scant.

4.3. African Americans in the West

Despite the presence of African Americans in the historical West and their various contributions to its history, ranging from work as cowboys and farm men and women,[142] to the violent displacement of the indigenous population as part of the United States Army, the presence of African American characters in the traditional Western is limited. When black characters appear in Westerns they are usually marginal, like Tom Doniphon's faithful but silent black confidant Pompey in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), whose main role in the movie is palming his hat in dolefulness and being paternalized by Senator Ransom Stoddard (James Stewart).[143] Despite a few early examples of more central African American characters in Westerns, ranging from Herb Jeffries "C-minus" western series *Harlem on the Prairie* (1937), *Two-Gun Man from Harlem* (1938), *The Bronze Buckaroo* (1938) and *Harlem Rides the Range* (1939), featuring a black singing cowboy in the tradition of Gene Autry and Roy Rogers, and an all black crew (cf. Allmendinger *Imagining* 68-71), via *Look-Out Sister* (1946) to

[140] Cf. Bold, "Rough Riders" 275, and in more detail the seminal studies by William Leckie, revised as Leckie and Leckie, and Arlen Fowler. Cf. also Glasrud and Searles, paricularly Glasrud "Western Black Soldiers."

[141] African Americans thus follow roughly the general trend of settling in the West. They make up 15.2%, due to the high number of slaves in Texas in 1850, and stay at 1 in 10 inhabitants (9.5 %) of the Western American population in 1870 and 1880, according to Census Data, before dropping to 5 % in 1910, due to the high immigration into the West whose overall population increases four times, while its African American population only doubles.

[142] One area which is even less well-researched than that of African American men is that of African American women in the West. Next to no serious research was conducted before Taylor and Moore's essay collection *African American Women Confront the West 1600 – 2000*. In the Western, African American women are also almost non-existent.

[143] While the way Pompey is treated by Stoddard in fact seems important for its reflection on the Jimmy Stewart character, as Wolfgang Hochbruck has suggested to me, this does not make the character himself more central to the movie. His primary function is still to shape and reflect on the white characters, Doniphon and Stoddard.

John Ford's A-Western *Sergeant Rutledge* (1960),[144] it is only in the early 1970s, an era of increased marketing towards a black audience, as seen in the new Blaxploitation genre, that a number of Westerns with major African American characters are being produced. These include Paul Bogart's *Skin Game* (1971), E. W. Swackhamer's *Man and Boy* (1971), and Sidney Poitier's *Buck and the Preacher* (1972), as well as quite a number of Blaxploitation Westerns, including the cycle *The Legend of Nigger Charley* (1972), *The Soul of Nigger Charley* (1973), and *Boss Nigger* (1975) featuring Fred Williamson.[145] Nevertheless in 1974, Mel Brooks could still use his protagonist's race and his resulting "exoticism" in a white West as a source for humor, and expose the West(ern)'s racism through the shocked reaction of the white bigots in his *Blazing Saddles*. As late as 1993, Mario van Peebles opens his black Western *Posse* with a frame narrative establishing an African American presence in the West through pictures of black or mixed race frontiersmen, including Nat Love, Isom Dart, and Cherokee Bill.

Far from being merely an academic question of historical veracity, there is a strong political dimension to the representation of African Americans in Westerns, as well. William Katz relates a telephone conversation he had with Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes about a school book on black contributions to American history he was writing in 1967. After he had shared his plans for the book Hughes gave him only one single piece of advice: "Don't leave out the cowboys. [...] That's very important" (*Black West* xi). Clearly, the image of the Westerner, especially the cowboy, as the universal American (and in the popular imagination still a predominantly positive figure in 1967) is at the heart of Hughes' insistence. His insistence must be seen as part of a larger struggle for equal rights, and for the inclusion into a national mythology, which ignores all non-whites.[146] The Western, for the longest time a national narrative of the U.S.A., is part of a larger trend of symbolically excluding blacks and other non-whites from parts of society, as Durham and Jones state:

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[144] John Ford's *Sergeant Rutledge* (1960) features Woody Strode as one of the protagonists. While the film certainly casts Strode in a prominent role and shows his character in human and empathetic terms, it is significant that Strode only gets fourth credit, after the white hero and heroine, as well as Billie Burke, who has a very minor comic-relief role in the film. In fact, Strode's name does not even appear on the official movie poster, although his likeness is prominently featured next to his white co-star Jeffrey Hunter. The main protagonist in the film is instead his white officer and defense attorney (played by Hunter), who not coincidentally also "gets the girl" at the end of the film – Rutledge on the other hand gets his life, his reputation restored and, with some quite disturbing connotation, his regiment of Buffalo Soldiers, which he calls "my home, my real freedom, and my self respect" and without which he sees himself as "nothing but a ... swamp-runnin' nigger."

[145] Other Blaxploitation Westerns of the late 1960s and early 1970s include *100 Rifles* (1969), *The Red, White and Black* (1970), *Take a Hard Ride* (1975), *Joshua* also known as *The Black Rider* (1976), *Kid Vengeance* (1977), and the obscure *Thomasine & Bushrod* (1974). I am indebted to Andrew Nelson for his intimate knowledge of rare 1970s Westerns, including Blaxploitation Westerns.

[146] Cf. also Dan Moos's *Outside America* for a book length treatment of racial and ethnic exclusion in the process of transforming the American West into a national space.

> For all non-white audiences of the Western the situation indeed remained for the longest time as described by historian Frank P. Graham in an article – longer even than in other media: "Negro children in school, in the library, at the moving picture, and over the radio, see and hear, and learn about white people. The picture in the school primer is always a picture of the white child. (quoted in Durham and Jones 230)

To change the image of America's past as seen through white eyes then can become one of the objectives of a racial revision of the Western.

The political dimension of the lack of a black presence in the popular image of the West becomes even more obvious when one turns to the establishment of the West and the white cowboy as the symbol of a racially exclusionist national mythology around the turn of the 20th century, both the time of the establishment of the Western formula, as discussed in chapter 2, and a time which Durham and Jones have described as "the 'nadir' of white-Negro relations in America" (223). Christine Bold in an excellent piece of scholarship has recently examined the tales of war adventure and the winning of the West used by Theodore Roosevelt and a number of his contemporaries to promote their political agenda. In her article "Where did the Black Rough Riders Go?" she argues that the "Spanish American war was a key moment in the development of U.S. imperialism and in the development of the popular western," which found its image of "the Anglo-Saxon gentleman cowboy *par excellence*" in Roosevelt's Rough Rider (274; italics in original).[147]

As Bold shows, Roosevelt's account changed from including and honoring the African American Ninth and Tenth Cavalry, the Buffalo soldiers, who repeatedly rescued his group of cowboy adventurers (cf. Bold, "Where" 276 and footnote 7), to deriding and excluding their contributions to the war effort, and by extension the Western experience. Bold links Roosevelt's and other white opinion maker's changing attitude to the unprecedented positive press coverage the black troops were receiving in a time of uneasy racial relations and surging nationalism. According to Bold "the black military presence in Cuba," Costa Rica, the Philippines, as well as in the 19th Century American West, threatened a process of extending "the ideological reach of the western" "by challenging white superiority on the western frontier [the other main field where the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry were employed; J.F.] and the imperial battlefield" (Ibid. 274). Consequently "writers promoting white supremacy," such as the "members" of what Bold calls "the frontier club," including not only Roosevelt, but also Owen Wister, Frederick Remington, as well as politician Henry Cabot Lodge, and editor Caper

[147] There were of course no African Americans among Roosevelt's Rough Riders, and Bold never claims there were in her article. She instead examines the involvement of the all-Black 9th U.S. cavalry, who saved Roosevelt's impetuous troops more than once in the Spanish-American War, and the way in which Roosevelt continually "white-washed" his adventure tale of his military engagement, excluding the Black presence in his war experience more and more.

Whitney, tried to counteract these narratives which began to surround the African American veterans after the war (Ibid. 279, cf. also Bold "Rough Riders").

In Owen Wister's case his championing of the white cowboy seemed to result from his racist infatuation with the Nordic Anglo Saxon and a spite for all other "races," which finds its clearest expression in his article "The Evolution of the Cowpuncher," rather than an underlying political agenda. As Durham and Jones observe, "*The Virginian* is not necessarily an anti-Negro book because it contains no Negro characters. What it expressed, rather, as does most of Wister's work, is an admiration for the Anglo-Saxon, for the conquering white man, for the noble Nordic" (222). In Roosevelt's case in contrast, his process of exclusion and the construction of the image of a white Westerner as the quintessential American, became an increasingly political issue. As he himself became more and more of a public figure and his campaign as a candidate for the office of Vice President became more immediate, Roosevelt tried to turn the image of the small, sickly and bespectacled "sissy" the press had in the past painted him as, into that of a tough, manly Westerner, an image linked closely not only to his ranch life in the West, which he wrote about in his *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail*, but also to his much publicized military exploits with his Rough Riders.[148] This is the context in which Bold examines Roosevelt's changing account of the war from his early speeches about his involvement in the war in which the black soldiers were mentioned as "brave men, worthy of respect" (quoted in "Rough Riders" 277), to the eventual publication of his magazine articles and later collection *Rough Riders*, in which, according to Bold, "we can see how AfricanAmericans became the motivating absence in white myth making" (Ibid. 278). Bold shows how by adopting a "naïve perspective" of the youthful adventurer, Roosevelt can foreground the courage of his Rough Riders while relegating all other participants to "shadowy, unraced presences coming and going at the edge of the action" (Ibid. 281).[149] The "whitewashing" of the West carried out by Roosevelt on the "frontier" of the Spanish-American War, and by Wister in the Western proper, is perpetuated by countless imitators of their narratives in mainstream culture, who are often far removed temporally and/or spatially from the actual 19th century West and thus frequently merely reframe the stories they have read. Bold discusses one early prominent examples when she looks at the juvenile magazine *Rough Riders Weekly*, published during Roosevelt's presidency, which closed the connection between the

[148] Cf. Gore Vidal's amusing account of Roosevelt's many attempts to make himself into a "man" through hunting, jingoism and so forth in "Theodore Roosevelt: An American Sissy."

[149] For the Western proper a similar narrative techniques of exclusion is used in Owen Wister's AngloSaxon West in *The Virginian* and his other writings, in which he even excludes the Native American presence to an arrow sticking out of the Virginian, a plot device which forces Molly to nurse the Virginian and allows them to come closer.

Spanish-American War and the American West by featuring the white hero Ted [!] Strong who returns to the West from military action in Cuba and the Philippines (Ibid. 282).[150]

As Bold's work shows, the exclusion of African Americans from the West(ern) is an important example of how, in the words of Dan Moos, "the restriction of access to avenues of power in American society could be implemented so as to corral Americanness into a more tightly controlled and codified social system." As Moos argues this codified system allowed no racial Others. "The American West in particular became a place where difference was suppressed for the sake of an imagined national cultural cohesion" (2).

4.4. African American Characters in the Revisionist Western

Before the late 1950s, African American characters in Westerns were few and far between. Durham and Jones found only a few examples of black cowboy characters in fiction, none of them protagonists. They mention that Zane Grey's novel *Knights of the Range* (1936) features a black cowboy, Ride-'em Jackson, "who was treated more or less like the other cowboys" and who reappears in Grey's 1940 sequel *Twin Sombreros*, under the name "Nigger Johnson" (Durham and Jones 252-53), and briefly discuss Allan R. Bosworth's short story "Stampede!" (1950), as well as Walter van Tilburg Clark's seminal *The Oxbow Incident* (1940), in which Sparks, the black "preacher" has "only a minor role physically but play[s] a major part symbolically as the conscience of the others" (Ibid. 227). While Durham and Jones somewhat overstate their case by ignoring the much more outspoken Davies as the group's conscience, Sparks inclusion in the narrative and the way his character is depicted certainly stands out. Durham and Jones also mention Tom Lea's *The Wonderful Country* (1952), and Genevieve Greer's *The Aristocrat* (1946), but add that these two are "not 'Westerns'" (Ibid.). Curiously, they fail to mention William Eastlake's classic 1958 novel *The Bronc People* with its African American characters, Alastair Benjamin and his father "the Gran Negrito." Going back further, they comment on the dime novel's tendency to include black characters "only insignificantly in their plots" (220), an observation upheld by other

[150] Durham and Jones observe a similar trend in the continuation of the hero's Anglo Saxon background, established by Wister. They argue that the success of the pulp works following Wister's work prevented subsequent authors from broadening the ethnic scope of their heroes: "The product [the (white) pulp Western of the 1920s] was successful, and so it seemed foolish to vary the formula. An important part of that formula, just as it had been for Wister, was the Saxon pluck of the hero" (225). While the conservativeness of popular formula fiction is certainly a strong element, other factors contributed. Two obvious explanations are that heroes reflect their audiences in popular literature, and a white hero would have appealed to readers who at least felt white and the hegemonic position of whites in the nation and thus the national narrative in the early 20th century.

critics.[151] Even today African American characters remain rare in mainstream Western fiction. According to Bernard Drew there are "almost no Afro-Americans to be found in Western series" (13). Drew mentions only three series in which black characters appear and adds that in none of them as are they central characters.

Given the almost complete absence of central African American characters in Westerns of the first half of the 20th century and their 19th century dime novel precursors, it seems appropriate that a number of writers and directors of revisionist Westerns have chosen to actively revise the roles of African Americans in Westerns, to remedy the absence or marginality of black characters. The revisions of African American characters in the Westerns I will examine below seem to have three major potential goals: the setting straight of the historical record which blacks have been written out of, the connected political goal of inclusion of African Americans into a national mythology, and the possibility to comment on contemporary issues and historical contingencies in race relations.

While the revisionist Western has provided a number of revisions of non-white characters, in more or less radical forms, many novels do not make race a central issue. Nevertheless, there seems a more general awareness of racial and ethnic diversity even in these texts. Even novels which are not primarily concerned with the depiction of race begin to incorporate African American characters. Charles Portis' *True Grit*, for instance, mentions two African Americans in passing, the Ross' neighbor and employee, and Yarnell, the black smith, and includes one Chinese character of minor importance, Lee. There are also mixed race characters and Indians mentioned, one of whom is hanged. As in many Westerns of the time, they are present and not presented in bad terms, but are of no real importance, either.

Nevertheless, the Western, even in its revisionist form, remains a genre dominated by white male writers. The almost complete exclusion of African American and other ethnic cowboys and Westerners from the classic Western has made the genre so "white" that most African American writers and directors seem to have no interest in using or approaching the Western as a genre, although their reluctance is not as strong as that of Native writers, addressed in the next chapter. Among African American filmmakers, a group not very large to begin with, only a few, Mario van Peebles, Herb Jeffries, and Sidney Poitier, have tried their hands at the genre. In fiction, too, African American authors remain rare, the three discussed here are Ishmael Reed, Percival Everett, and David Anthony Durham, but the list grows somewhat larger, if one looks at the frontier more broadly, as Michael K. Johnson and Blake Allmendinger have done in their

[151] Cf. Allmendinger *Imagining* 67: "In his research on pulp fiction, one critic [Michael Denning] discovered that there were no nineteenth-century dime novels aimed at African American readers."

monographs. African American poet, Sterling A. Brown has also used the Western in two poems in his collection *The Last Ride of Wild Bill*. While I will not discuss his work in detail, the poems warrant a brief discussion. In "The Last Ride of Wild Bill," by referring to one of the iconic Western heroes, "Wild Bill" Hickok, Brown makes the parallel to the Western obvious, even if his hero clearly is not the historic, white Hickok, but an urban black "gangster." The poem mixes a classic Western yarn of a pursuit and the suggestion of a duel with an urban car chase. The Western sheriff turns into the modern day police.

Brown also uses the Western in another poem in the same collection, "A Bad, Bad Man," in which John Bias, "a squinchy runt, / four foot two" becomes in the cowardly "crackers'" tale a "giant nigger" of epic proportions when he chases them away from a lynching he accidentally stumbles into carrying a sour look on his face and a giant pistol while looking for his, supposedly cheating, wife. The poem's opening stanza, with its typical ballad topos – "Forget about your Jesse James, / And Billy the Kid; / I'll tell you instead what / a black boy did" – suggests the irrelevance of the mythic outlaw heroes Jesse James and Billy the Kid when their actions are compared to race violence against African Americans in the United States. The rest of the poem pokes fun at the white lynch mob's cowardice and the ever increasing exaggeration of John Bias's size in their tale. Tony Morrison likewise includes a brief passage focusing on the pioneer past of the inhabitants of the all-black town Ruby, in her novel *Paradise*, but has even less interest in writing anything resembling a Western, revisionist or not, than Sterling Brown. She briefly notes that while marching West the black pioneers are "robbed of their rifles by two cowboys" (98), introducing both the idea that black pioneers existed and that they were subjugated to racism, but the novel's main focus lies on the current, 20th century reality of black people, particularly the lives of the women in the covenant outside of Ruby, and the misguided path that this "paradisiacal" town takes. *Paradise* is not a Western by a long shot, not even a Post-Western, as Isabel Salto-Weis has suggested without adequately substantiating her claim, but a tale of a black town, which in parts refers to the frontier myth, as Michael K. Johnson has shown (59-68).

In the following, I want to discuss examples of Westerns in which the race of its African American characters is more central to the novel. The works I examine in more detail are John Seeyle's *The Kid*, Jerome Charyn's *Darlin' Bill*, both written by white authors, as well as Percival Everett's *God Country*, Ishmael Reed's *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down*, and Anthony Durham's *Gabriel's Story*. Seelye's novel shows that the inclusion of an African American as a central character even in a postmodern parody of a Western does not necessarily lead to a significant revision of racial images. Charyn's novel, on the other hand, uses its African American character to unmask the flawed "logic" of slavery and racism through its narration. Reed and Everett include major

African American characters to write a black presence into the Western, while attacking many of its generic traditions. They provide the most radical example of a direct revision of racial depictions in the Western. Anthony Durham's *Gabriel's Story*, the last novel examined, presents a post-racial approach. It can be understood as coming out of what Michael K. Johnson has in another context called a "post-soul aesthetic" ("Looking" 29). As I will show it is an example of a post-revisionist stance, which P.E.S. Babiak has defined to describe the Clint Eastwood movie *Unforgiven*, and which I also identify in some of Larry McMurtry's works. African American characters are included in such works, and their historical and generic treatment, brought to the fore by historiography and earlier more radically revisionist texts, is not denied, and sometimes forms a part of the characters background, but it is not the central concern of the novel or film.

4.4.1. John Seelye's *The Kid*: Parody without Revision

John Seelye's novel *The Kid* shows the inclusion of an African American as a central character, and one whose race is of some importance to the novel, does not necessarily result in a radical revision of racial relations in the Western. Even though others have celebrated the novel as a superior revisionist Western (cf. Money, Cleary "Saddlesore" and "John Seelye's *The Kid*"), focusing particular on its intertextual engagement with much of the American canon, I will argue that the novel is unsuccessful in revising the Western in terms of its racial roles.

The plot of Seelye's short novel is fairly straightforward and rather predictable. The novel is set in Fort Besterman, a small town in Wyoming, at the end of the winter of 1886 / 87, the famous winter which ended the traditional cattle trade in the West for good. Most of the remaining inhabitants of Fort Besterman are those cowboys too stubborn or too stupid to recognize that the cattle days are over. The novel is told by Winky, aid to a one armed Captain who stayed behind when the army left the town's fort. The Captain sees his role as the keeper of law and order, a position he is helped in by an old layman known as the Judge. The novel opens when a blond kid and a giant deaf "African," Ham, come into town. Out of boredom "the resident devil" (33), a Texan named Fiddler Jones,[152] starts to harass the gentle kid. When he tries to stop Ham and the kid from leaving the saloon, he is killed by Ham with a single blow. A lynch mob immediately forms but the Captain insists on a regular trial to be held. During the trial the kid's grief and a well-worded defense by a gambler who had earlier been mistreated by Jones, melt the cowboys' hearts, who, as we are told, are "a terrible sentimental

[152] Fiddler's name is almost certainly a play on literary critic Leslie Fiedler's name. The book is dedicated to Fiedler whose theories are referred to in a number of cases, as explored below.

bunch, especially when they are liquored up" (98). The Captain takes the role of prosecutor and delivers a speech reminiscent of both Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis and Melville's Captain Vere (cf. Cleary, "John Seelye's *The Kid*" 31), favoring law and civilization over the "primitive" notion of friendship, which leaves the cowboys confused. The Judge, a thinly disguised version of Huck Finn, who still favors his heart over the norms of society, on the other hand rules that "they's got to be exceptions [...] or the world would be so damned civilized a body'd be better off dead" (108).[153] Consequently he finds Ham not guilty. Unfortunately, the mob outside the makeshift courtroom has not heard the verdict and the judge's passionate defense of

[153] John Seelye has a long relation with Twain's most famous work. Seelye's first novel *The True Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, was a rewriting of Mark Twain's classic novel, undertaken, in part, as an attempt to save *Huckleberry Finn* from his fellow critic's attacks. Seelye, speaking in the guise of Huck Finn, in the novel's Introduction charges them with gutting Twain's book to the extend where nobody who had followed the critical debate could enjoy it anymore, being unable to "forget the sight of all them damn parts [into which critics have dissected the book] laying around" (xi). Thus Seelye's Huck makes the book's intent clear at the outset:

> Well, it was kinder sad, in a way, with [...] people saying it was a good book they guessed, but it had terrible weaknesses, and nobody really able to enjoy it any more except children. So I thought to myself if the book which Mr Mark Twain wrote warn't up to what these men wanted from a book, why not pick up the parts – the good ones – and put together one they *would* like? [...] Mark Twain's book is for children and such, whilst this one here is for crickits. And now that they've got *their* book, maybe they'll leave the other one alone. (xii, emphases and spelling sic)

The Kid, Seelye's second novel, also continually seems like a "book for the crickits." Unlike *The True Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* it is less an extended meta-critical comment than a string of literary allusions and intertexts, referencing among others Melville's *Billy Budd*, James Fenimore Cooper's *Jack Tier* and Walter Van Tilburg Clark's *The Ox-Bow Incident*, the Old Testament, Leslie Fiedler's theories on the American novel, and others (cf. Cleary "John Seelye's *The Kid*"). It thus remains "an extended academic joke" (Money quoted Ibid. 26). Furthermore *The Kid* remains heavily influenced by Twain, in particular his *Huck Finn*, featuring now not one Huck, but three heavily Huck-inspired characters: the first is the Judge, an old alcoholic, but still morally "good" version of Huck Finn, who, it seems, "light[ed] out for the Territories ahead of the rest" as he had proclaimed at the end of his adventures (Twain, *Adventures* 366), becoming a respectable citizen in an unrespectable place. The judge is emotionally troubled, still waiting for Jim and Tom Sawyer, to come from the East. It is suggested that he waits for a Black man to come West, and hopes that Ham might be this black man (Jim). The connection between the Judge and Huck is made even clearer through an epigraph taken from Mark Twain's *Autobiography*, in which the author comments on the fate of the boy whom Huck was based on: "I heard, four years ago, that he was justice of the peace in a remote village in Montana, and was a good citizen and greatly respected" (quoted in *The Kid*, n.p., cf. Cleary, "John Seelye's *The Kid*" 25). The second version of Huck is the vernacular narrator Winky, "a regular vernacular encyclopedia of the West" (Bulow 77), whose tone is clearly inspired by Twain's narrator. The final reference is found in, the Huck-Jim pairing of the novel's main characters, the deaf Ham and the eponymous Kid, "Blondie," whose relation is also quite clearly an ironic allusion to Leslie Fiedler's theories about men escaping women and finding a dark soul mate as put forward in his influential *Love and Death in the American Novel*. For those who need the additional clue, this is made clear through the novel's dedication to Fiedler, and Fiedler's oft-quoted belief that the West should be understood as "more of a joke," which serves as the novel's final epigraph (once again Cleary discusses this in detail in his article and his dissertation, as does Money in her dissertation 101; Ernest Bulow remarks wryly: "This cute little book seems to be an answer to the question of what kind of literature can be produced by an overdose of Leslie Fiedler, if anybody ever asked" [76]).

friendship, and proceeds to hang Ham. In the final ten pages of the novel, the corpses begin to pile up: when Ham tries to resist the mob, a villager, Lafe Chancellor, bashes in Ham's head with a crowbar. The Captain arrests Lafe, but before he can bring him to the jail the kid appears with a shotgun, kills Lafe and is in turn shot from an upper story window by the Judge. When Winky and the Captain check on the Judge, they find that the Judge has killed himself (116). As the townspeople get ready to bury the five corpses, two people to a coffin to save wood, they realize that the kid is really a girl, and – out of an irrational fear of posthumous miscegenation – refuse to bury Ham and the kid in one coffin.

The success and humor of Seelye's novel have been variably assessed by different reviewers, ranging from David Madden's judgment of *The Kid* as "an extremely fine novel" (78) to Ernst Bulow's dismissal of it as "maudlin mawkish melodrama" (78). There is no doubt that Seelye's novel relies too heavily on intertextual references, and the inclusion of cultural tidbits, which the chatty narrator Winky and his idol, the Captain, engage in. Given its constant hyper-awareness of literary history and critical discourse it is perhaps no surprise that Seelye's *The Kid*, despite being occasionally amusing, is ultimately not successful as a novel. Its preoccupation with its own virtuoso combination of countless sources seems self-indulgent rather than providing additional meaning, as Cleary has claimed in his argument that the novel's allusions produce "effects which are more versatile and pointed than the mere parodying of familiar Western conventions" ("John Seelye's *The Kid*" 24). The use of intertextuality is not so much interested in creating deeper meaning, however, but in inviting readers to congratulate themselves for their intimate knowledge of American literary and critical history.

What excessive self-awareness the novel has in regards to its own position as a fictional text, it lacks in terms of its treatment of race. *The Kid* is at best partially interested in revising racial roles and stereotypes, and remains largely unsuccessful in this arena. Amid the stylistic and intertextual fireworks, the novel's allusions and its narratorial high jinks, camouflaged as Winky's naïveté, the promising constellation of a deaf-mute African American character amid racist cowboys loses focus. Seelye certainly, at times, refers to the prejudice of a 19th century Western society against non-whites and, to a lesser extent, women. Bradley, the barkeeper of Fort Besterman, who is himself married to an Indian woman, for instance, at first refuses to let Ham enter his bar, and Fiddler Jones repeatedly makes derogatory remarks to the kid regarding Ham's skin color. Yet the book does little to critically engage or rewrite these stereotypes. Ham and the kid are continually confronted with society's racism, but both meekly accept it.

The fact that 19th century American society was racist should surprise not even the most casual or uneducated reader of Westerns, and thus seems unexciting from a

racially revisionist standpoint. What is more the novel itself can, as I will argue, in some ways be said to replicate the very stance it seems to criticize by dwelling too much on Ham's exoticism by making him into a mostly passive figure at the mercy of his contemporaries. While this could still, in theory, be an effective technique to criticize the victimization of African Americans in the Western, and Western American or 19th century society in general, the novel does little to evoke sympathy for Blondie and Ham. Its characterizations remain on the most superficial level, and the absurdity of the novel's ending, like most of the novel, clearly aims at evoking amusement rather than compassion.

Unlike his literary idol, Mark Twain, however, Seelye does not manage to expose and undercut the racism of the society he depicts, or, more importantly, the one he writes in. Unlike Jim, Ham is less a fully realized character than a *deus ex machina*, "a magic nigra" (42), as one of the characters in the novel calls him, who seems to possess supernatural powers which allow him to find cards in Monte games, hidden coins, and veins of gold. Despite his obvious preference for non-violence, Ham's most remarkable action in the novel is to kill Fiddler Jones with a single blow, an act which potentially alludes to John Steinbeck's gentle giant Lennie Small in *Of Mice and Men*. Apart from this action of violence, Ham is an object of conversation rather than an acting individual, let alone a fully defined subject. He follows "Blondie's" requests, despite obviously knowing better.

What ultimately makes the novel's revision of racial stereotypes fail, however, is its narration. Winky, the narrator, is too distanced from the other characters to evoke any real sympathy for the kid's or Ham's fate, their unique situation and problems are mostly lost on him. Instead, Seelye makes his narrator a constant source of jokes and literary allusions, a distant observer rather than a part in, or even a compassionate reporter of, the novel's unfolding catastrophe. Furthermore, while Winky may not be a violent racist of the lynching kind like the rest of the town, he is no less of a racist. Throughout the novel he remains what could be called a more "benevolent" racist than his fellow Westerners, always willing to set Ham, whom he frequently identifies as an "African" rather than a "nigger" off from his stereotypical images of other "darkies." Unlike Huck Finn, however, who at least realizes the humanity of his friend Jim, even if it is left up to the reader to extrapolate from Jim to all African Americans, Winky never questions or overcomes his own racist preconceptions. While he pays occasional respect to Ham's "African" heritage, his first description of Ham to the Captain makes the tone of the narration clear. Ham "ain't *old*, if you know what I mean. There ain't no cotton in his wool" (20).

Winky is of course opinionated and unreliable in his observations, as another of Seelye's countless *Huck Finn* references makes clear. Winky concludes, after seeing

the kid and Ham speak in sign language, that the kid must be deaf, because "who ever heard of a deaf-and-dumb nigger?" (20). Even a reader who does not catch the reference to Jim's deaf-mute daughter in *Huckleberry Finn* will be wary of Winky's judgment, following the revelation that it is indeed Ham who is deaf.

As in all matters, Winky freely shares his contentions about racial relations in his description of Ham. He describes him as

> a pleasant enough looking nigger, with a wide, open face, not all scowls and stubbornness like some you see. Especially since the War, you know, which give them a lot of fool notions about their worth. Used to be a nigger *knew* what he could bring, in dollars and cents, and that kept him satisfied and quiet. (42)

Ham, in contrast, is "proud of hisself, walking high even though he was wore out." Winky interprets Ham's bearing as a result "of being allowed into a white man's saloon, instead of being all upset because he was kept outside for so long" (43). It is up to the reader to speculate that Ham's posture is at least as likely an act of defiance by the only black man in a room full of malignant and racist white men, but this realization adds little to Ham as a character. When Blondie instructs Ham on his task of finding the silver dollar one of the cowboys has hidden while both were outside the saloon Ham "got very serious-looking, like a nigger will when you give him some small thing to do and he acts like he's hanging on every word you say, only he's likely to come back in about ten minutes and ask you to tell him all over again. It's their way, and you can't learn them any different" (43). While such remarks are of course instances of irony and even manage to be occasionally amusing in their self-righteous preposterousness, they do little to question Ham's role within society. The narrative's goal is always comic effect, and it is hard to see if it is only the narrator Winky who accept Ham's role in society or if Ham, too, accepts his lot for he certainly does not put up any resistance.

Given Ham's role in the novel it seems ironically fitting that Seelye chose to make Ham a deaf-mute for indeed he has no voice – neither in his society, nor in the narrative. As a result of Winky's narration, the reader who, like everybody except the kid, is shut out from Ham's thoughts and feelings, develops minimal empathy for Ham and remains untouched when Ham and Blondie are finally killed. While Winky's and the other town members' attitudes, could be seen as representative of their times, Seelye's novel is not a realist novel and even less a novel written in the 19th century. In fact, Seelye's goal is clearly to achieve as many comic effects as possible and he gladly sacrifices realism for a joke. "Blondie," who, as we later learn, was most likely Ham's lover, for instance, is paraphrased by Winky as complaining that talking in signs "wasn't the same as hearing another voice, and hearing only your own sounds about drove you looney. Besides, the nigger was as black as the rest of that place [where Ham and Blondie spent

the winter; J.F.], and wasn't no more company than a shadow" (47), an unlikely comment considering the intimate relation between the characters.

At the end of the novel, the reader can only suppose that Ham is a tool in Seelye's homage to Leslie Fiedler. The character pair of the kid and Ham, it seems, were chosen less for their intrinsic interest than to closely fit the character pair of white and dark male Leslie Fiedler describes as typical of American novels following Cooper. These two men, according to Fiedler, in their relationship of non-sexual masculine love form an "anti-female alliance of outcast and savage" (*Love and Death* 211, quoted in Cleary, "John Seelye's *The Kid*" 27), substituting the woman of the East for "the natural man, the good companion, pagan and unashamed – Queequeg or Chingachgook or Nigger Jim" (Fiedler, *Love and Death* xx-xxi, quoted Ibid. 36). When it turns out that the kid, contrary to Fiedler's model, is not a man fleeing female society for a Western wilderness, but a woman disguising as a man – supposedly for fear of the repercussions society's awareness of Blondie's and Ham's miscegenation would have – Seelye's homage has come full circle: "Readers familiar with Fiedler's thesis cannot help but think that Seelye has conned his mentor, dutifully following a step-by-step guideline of the male-male/black-white/man-boy relationship, only to turn his concoction upside down with the final disclosure of Blondie's sexual identity" (Cleary, "John Seelye's *The Kid*" 38). The Fiedlerian might indeed chuckle, but Blondie's gender is revealed so late, and is in itself so cliché-ridden, overused, and predictable, the fifth in a series of six or seven plot twists within as many pages, that it seems irrelevant, merely another authorial sleight of hand, rather than the thoughtful criticism and turning of tables it could have been. What is more, the potential of exploring more effectively the irrational fear of miscegenation haunting not only society at large, but running through the genre of the Western,[154] remains unexplored. A brief comment by Winky only humorously exposes the paradox of his fellow townspeople's shallow racism and the fear of miscegenation they display in refusing to bury the kid and Ham in one coffin after finding out that the kid really is a white woman. Winky's argument, as always, is one of practicality rather than humanitarianism or the sudden realization of equality:

> Well, goddam [sic] it, we had to knock one of them boxes back down and build two more, just because some people didn't want no white woman buried with a black. It was silly, and I said so. "Lord knows," I said to the Captain, "they spent considerable time laying together before this." (118)

[154] The Western's fear of miscegenation can be traced back centuries. Even before the genre existed, the captivity narrative, one of the sources the Western draws on, is heavily inspired by this fear of a mixing of dark man and white woman. Of course the "dark male" is usually an Indian. C.L. Sonnichsen has commented on this trend underlying the Western: "If the white captive survived and had a child by her Apache captor, she was likely to be despised and rejected when she got back to her own people – especially by her husband" (Sonnichsen, *Hopalong* 76).

Ultimately, Seeyle, despite incorporating a black character in one of the major roles in his Western, continues to write very much a white Western. This goes as far as perpetuating the myth of a white 19th century West. When he first hears about Ham, the Captain comments: "[T]here couldn't be more than a dozen black men in the whole Territory, to say nothing of the great wide West, and half of them are extinct" (24). While the study of African Americans in the West has only in the past decades become a more thoroughly researched area, their presence was not exactly a secret when Seelye's book was first published in 1972. Durham and Jones' book *The Negro Cowboy had* come out in 1965, and black cowboys had been incorporated into literature not only by Ishmael Reed, but were also mentioned in Michael McClure's Introduction to his play *THE BLOSSOM, or Billy the Kid* (p. 7). They were furthermore beginning to be included in a growing number of films. Most confusingly, Seeyle himself seemed aware of African Americans in the West in 1972, as his article "When West Was Wister," published the same year as *The Kid*, shows. In it Seelye dwells on Wister's racial bias:

> That the real cowboy was as often Negro or Irish or Swedish as English in his origins did not hinder Wister [in promoting his cowboy's Anglo-Saxon heritage; J.F.], any more than the presence of two black regiments in the Cuban campaign darkened Roosevelt's white-on-white "consensus." (32)

All the more surprising then that Seeyle would replicate this bias. Although his Captain might not have been aware of the thousands of African American soldiers stationed in the West, for, despite being moved as close to Wyoming Territory as Dakota and Montana Territory in the 1880s, they were generally stationed further South, he would without a doubt have been aware of the presence of black cowboys, considering Fort Besterman is described as a cow town (or ex-cow town). That Seeyle then chose to stick with the traditional myth of a white West for yet another humorous line rather than depicting, as part of his debunking of the Western, a more mixed West seems like an unfortunate choice.

4.4.2. Exposing the Logic of Racism in Jerome Charyn's *Darlin' Bill*

A more successful revision of black characters in a Western setting is found in Jerome Charyn's *Darlin' Bill*. Although Charyn's novel, which has been unjustly ignored by both critics and readers ever since its original publication in 1980, does not feature a black character as central to the novel's plot and conflict as Seelye's Ham, it does include an African American character, whose portrayal is worth examining in more detail. Particularly in the novel's first part, Archibald, a former free man from Boston, is a victim of the racist logic of his new "home" in pre-Civil War Galveston, Texas,

where, like other African Americans, he has been captured and enslaved by the town's authorities. Charyn succeeds where Seelye fails: whereas Seelye does not undercut the "benevolent" racism of his narrator and sacrifices Ham's potential for the sake of humor, Charyn manages to expose the contradictory logic of racism through the narration of Sally Blackburn without sacrificing the humor of his tale. In Sally's attempts to defend the racism of her father and the other white "aristocrats" of Galveston and to reinterpret it into charity, Sally involuntarily exposes the very hypocrisy of the slave holders, who – while hiding behind a mask of civilization – violate black people's rights; often, as in the case of Sally's father, despite their better knowledge.

Darlin' Bill is the story of the narrator, Sally, and her misadventures. Sally is born as the daughter of one of the leading men in Galveston, Texas, before the Civil War. Shortly after the War during which her father dies from an epidemic, her mother marries her off to her former teacher, an ignorant impostor and borderline pedophile, who has taken on the name "Doctor Henry Ovenshine" after a man he had assaulted in the East. Her new husband, Ovenshine, is not good for much more than hunting after other ladies' skirts and the couple has to flee several towns in the wake of Ovenshine's amorous mishaps. Sally in the meantime becomes paramour and finally nurse and confidante to "Wild" Bill Hickok, who, as the novel progresses, is increasingly troubled by episodes of blindness, as well as – when Bill is away on one of his other romantic conquests or vanishes altogether – a former Union soldier whom she had met during the Civil War in Galveston, Captain Tristram "Silver Spoon" Shirley (named thus by the arrogant Southerners who suspect that he will steal their silverware if given half a chance). The novel ends in Deadwood after Hickok's death, when Sally leaves her reformed husband Ovenshine behind to further explore the West as an independent woman.

While much of the novel is a humorous send up of the myths surrounding Hickok and the image of a patriarchal West (cf. the novel's discussion in Chapter 6), the beginning of the novel in particular addresses racial concerns. Archie, the first character introduced, is a well-educated former free black man, from Boston, "where they educate the colored boys" (4). He is owned by Mr. Blackburn, Sally's father, with whom he continually discusses John Locke, the only subject Sally's father seems to have any serious interest in. The subject of the talks seems no coincidence, for the English philosopher in many ways mirrors Sally's father. Both, despite their philosophical egalitarianism, hypocritically support the system of slavery for their personal gains. Locke, despite opposing slavery in his philosophical writings, held investments in the slave-trading Royal African Company. He was also involved in drafting the Fundamental Constitution of the Carolinas, which, among other things, gave a master

absolute power over his slave.[155] Mr. Blackburn similarly is uneasy about slavery on a purely ideological level. He would much rather treat Archie as his son than his slave, giving him his "name to wear [...] Archibald Aloysius Blackburn" (14), but Archie rebels, preferring his freedom to Blackburn's name. At the same time it is suggested that Blackburn owns other, less educated, slaves with whom he cannot discuss Locke. More importantly Blackburn also uneasily supports "General" "Nicaragua" Smith, a buffoonish character who cannot even get off his horse without Archie's help (6-7). Smith and the other white racists of Galveston use Blackburn's house to plan a military expedition which is supposed to turn Nicaragua into Ishmael, a country they wish to establish for the sole purpose of circumventing the earlier ban on the transatlantic slave trade – a parodic reference to both the historical Walker Expedition of the 1850s and potentially the narrator of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, arguably the most famous Ishmael in American culture. In Charyn's book, the endeavor to take over Nicaragua with one gun boat led by the inept "general" is humorously ill-fated from the beginning.

Finally, Blackburn also indirectly supports the crooked business of catching free blacks on the wharf and enslaving them, a plot most of the leader of Galveston seem to be involved in, through his purchase of Archie. This crooked business of "pirating colored sailors," we are told, works because all officials either partake in it or ignore it: "The general grabbed colored boys off any ship that called at Galveston, and the chief justice [Morrisey, a veritable racist in his own right; J.F.] signed them off into slavery, right under the noses of the federal troops" (14).

It is through Sally's attempted defense of her father and the slaveholder society he belongs to that the novel most clearly exposes the logical contradiction and attempted moral justifications of such "lazy racists" as Mr. Blackburn, who get swept along by their society. When she relates Archie's background, Sally seems to realize the moral wrong of her father's position at some level and attempts to defend it: Archie "was a sailor until they 'stole' him from the wharves. *But it wasn't pa's fault*. If pa didn't buy him, Archie would have gone to some plantation and died of malaria" (4). The language of this statement, particularly the indignant "It wasn't Pa's fault", and her putting the word "stole" into quotation marks is reminiscent of a small child defending a wrong, which, even in its not yet fully developed moral sense, it knows is not defensible. The logic of Sally's argument is flawed. When her father becomes a savior by rescuing Archie from a hard life and horrible death on a plantation, the twelve year old narrator ironically twists the facts so much she makes a philanthropist out of her slaveholding father. The fact that he is an essential part of the system, responsible through his

[155] On the contradiction of Locke's theoretical writing and personal action, cf. James Farr's article "'So Vile and Miserable an Estate'" and his earlier "Locke, Natural Law, and New World Slavery."

economic support for the enslavement of more free African Americans, is not mentioned. Through its naïve narrator's obviously flawed argument, the narrative thus manages to unmask the logic of any argument which tries to distinguish the "good" slave holder from the "bad" system of slavery and to remove the blame from the people who ultimately supported it.

Whereas Mr. Blackburn opposes slavery in principle but supports it in practice, "General" "Nicaragua" Smith, who on ideological grounds does not consider the African American Archie an equal, later accepts him as a person. When Archie shows up again he is known as the "black Wild Bill," the pride of "Nicaragua" Smith's band of outlaws, which also includes Sally's estranged husband Ovenshine. The former military leader of the crusade for the slave-holder nation of Ishmael, leader of the resistance against the Union forces in the Battle of Galveston, the novel's parody of the historical battle of Galveston and – as we learn – a former Cyclops of the KKK has now, like Blackburn, come to embrace Archie like a son – although a decidedly selfish note remains in his pride.

Despite Sally's humorous narration and her continuous ridiculing of Smith's band of "tin men," there is a darker side to *Darlin' Bill*'s portrayal of Archie's development. When he realizes he cannot escape into freedom and that Blackburn despite his high moral talk of John Locke does not want to let him go, if he is not willing to stay, Archie becomes "bad," trying to force Blackburn to let him go: he begins to steal and increasingly violates the laws, to the great dismay of his owner, who continues to bail him out of jail. Eventually Archie is given up as a hopeless case and left in jail. When Blackburn wants to see Archie at his deathbed, Archie is already embittered, preferring to go back to jail after Blackburn's death rather than living in the hypocritical society of Galveston. In jail, as we later learn, he learns to be a twogun man by practicing his draw with a wooden pistol, since he has nothing else to do. When Archie is reintroduced into the narrative as the "black Wild Bill" by the proud "Nicaragua" Smith, Sally is everything but hopeful, allowing Charyn a dig at the celebrity cult of the Western:

> I tittered in that roll of skin around my heart. Desperate people loved to play Wild Bill. You had Wild Bill of the Mountains, Wild Bill of the Plains, Blue William, Billy Thunder, and now the black Wild Bill of the Cyclops Guerilla Circus [one of Sally's sarcastic terms for Smith's band of outlaws; J.F.]. (177)

Archie as it turns out is indeed desperate, he is disgusted with society and has been driven into outlawry alongside his earlier racist captor "Nicaragua" Smith. As Sally remarks, "Archie just couldn't escape that old cyclops" (177), a symbol of Archie's inability to escape a racist society. Archie feels he has to stick with the General, since there is nothing left for him in the East, even if Smith once again plans to use him, this

time in an attempt to build his posse's fame on Archie's victory in a duel against Hickok. When Sally tries to argue with Archie he is set on his course, as Sally has to realize: "Arch was a bandit like the other tin men. He belonged in the cyclops' circus. But I couldn't help it. I loved Arch. He was more family to me than my own mama" (182). Archie is killed when he hesitates to see whether the original Wild Bill is indeed blind, as Sally has earlier told him. Even Hickok is aware that Archie was the faster gun, however, as he admits to Sally: "...something was wrong with your brother. A boy that quick shouldn't have come up slow ... why was he watching my beard?" Sally on the other hand realizes her part in Archie's death: "I was the girl who slowed his arm. [...] I dropped the poison in Archie's ear" (187). Archie's death, though not exactly somber in tone, constitutes the closest thing to a truly tragic moment in the otherwise humorous novel. In contrast to many of the caricatures like Smith, Ovenshine and others, the reader perceives in Archie a human being who has been driven to despair and ultimately to his untimely death by an unfair society. Society's racism shows its ugly face in the town's reactions to Archibald's death. The undertaker refuses to bury his corpse until Sally pays him 10 dollars and the mayor refuses to even mention Archie's presence in the town's Minute Book:

> You couldn't find one nigger bandit in any of the chapters the mayor had written. He put a notice on the town board. *Mad dog shot outside the Alamo, October the 2nd.* That was it. No Archibald Aloysius Blackburn had ever come to Abilene. (186, italics in original)

This act of exclusion from the official records constitutes the final comment on the racial bias of both the writing of (Western) history and the Western genre. Black gunfighters existed, the novel suggests, but even as it killed them white society refused to record their deeds or even their presence, and it often continues to do so.

4.4.3. Inside the Racist Mind: *God's Country*

Percival Everett's *God's Country* works similarly to Charyn's novel in a number of ways. Although the issues of racism and the hypocrisy of white racists, which Charyn only dealt with in passing, are clearly one of Everett's main foci. Everett's narrative technique is similar to that used in *Darlin' Bill*, but more over the top. Like Charyn, Everett chooses to depict his African-American character through the eyes of a white character. In contrast to Charyn's Sally, who is on the whole a sympathetic and mostly insightful narrator, Everett's Curt Marder is much more limited, and everything but sympathetic. Marder is lazy, stupid, greedy, cowardly, and incompetent. Above all, he is a racist who is so caught up in his paradigm of white superiority that he fails to realize that all wrongs in the novel come from white characters, whereas non-white characters,

Indians, as well as, most prominently, the second major character, the African-American scout Bubba, continually bails him out.

God's Country begins as Marder witnesses the burning of his house, the abduction of his wife, and the shooting of his dog by a group of white men dressed up as Indians. While largely unimpressed by his wife's abduction, seeing his dog's death brings Marder, who from the outset is clearly not a typical Western hero, to pull his gun, although he is too cowardly to intervene. What confuses Marder greatly is that his house is burned by what looks like white men shooting arrows, but Marder does not trust his senses, wondering: "What if they was Indians dressed like white men to cast suspicion the other way?" (4). When Marder rides into town no one seems too eager to help him. Most people instead remind him of how much money he owes them. Eventually Marder has to bury his hopes of raising a posse, and instead hires the black tracker Bubba to find the men who have abducted his wife. They are followed, to Marder's disgust, by a girl posing as a boy whose parents have been murdered by the same men.

Despite Bubba's skills, their search never amounts to much, since they are continually sidetracked. By the end of the novel, Marder has gone through a hilarious parody of many of the motions of a typical Westerner's journey: he has met George Armstrong Custer twice, first selling a tribe of friendly Indians to the cavalry, later, when Bubba decides to murder Custer in retaliation for his genocide, catching the commander in "ladies' unmistakables" (182). Marder has also been arrested for robbing a bank, and, on Bubba's insistence, they have twice freed Jake, the girl accompanying them. Both he and his horse have been buried in the ground to their heads by some mountain men, whose only means of expression are the sounds "yuk, yuk, yuk," a situation from which Marder is again rescued by an Indian. Over all this excitement, Marder has more of less forgotten about his wife, whom he was never too eager to find in the first place. Instead Marder sees the pursuit as more of an obligation dictated upon him by the code of the West, and very soon his zeal to secure the reward money offered for the outlaw's leader is his main incentive to keep up the chase. In more carnal matters, his main energy goes towards pursuing a prostitute, who despises him once she finds out he has no money. When Bubba and Marder eventually find the white men they have been pursuing, Bubba refuses to attack them, since they are holed up in a canyon, and Marder has long since gambled away the spread of land he had promised to transfer to Bubba as payment. The novel ends with Marder watching Bubba ride off, after the protagonist has failed to kill his tracker.

The feature of Everett's novel at once disturbing and hilarious is certainly Curt Marder's unreflecting feeling of racial superiority, as well as his skewed image of himself and everyone around him. To narrate the novel through Marder's extremely limited verbose voice provides an effective narrative device to expose the racial bias of

the traditional Western and the flawed logic of unreflective racists, while avoiding a moralist, accusatory or melodramatic stance. Instead, "Everett creates the unsettling interior experience of racial hatred" (Krauth 319), yet manages to be screamingly funny iabout it. The effect of Marder's malicious naïveté is heightened by setting Marder's ignorance and incompetence off against the insight and competence of Bubba, his most frequent target of feelings of racial superiority. In contrast to Marder, Bubba is, as Leland Krauth points out, "race-wise from the first. He knows that he will always be seen as a lesser human no matter how accomplished he is" (320). While Bubba repeatedly saves Marder from himself, Marder never changes or even questions his feeling of superiority. Although the reader is led to believe that Marder might begin to appreciate Bubba and Big Elk's tribe on a human level after he witnesses the injustice at Custer's senseless slaughter of Big Elk's tribe, the location of which he has earlier sold to the cavalry for 100 dollars, or when Bubba knocks out a racist soldier in a Trading Post and Marder comments: "it was one of the most satisfying things I ever witnessed in my life" (177). Marder's preconceptions always set in and limit him immediately afterwards. After he watches Bubba punch the soldier, for instance, he adds in the next sentence: "Immediately, though, the horror of it set in" (177).

Any questioning or criticism of societal values is unintentional on Marder's part. He picks up the soldier's earlier racist remark: "Had to free [the niggers] to kill 'em. Cain't be runnin' round destroyin' people's property" (176), when he berates Bubba: "You have gone and done it now. You done killed government property" (178), but the irony of his words surely escapes Marder. For most of the book Marder instead oscillates between blurting out his racist thoughts, frequently calling Bubba "nigger" or "boy" or asking a Jew who could dig him out when he is buried to the neck, "where are your horns" (117), and trying to outsmart Bubba by lying or withholding information, such as the fact that he has lost the land he promised to pay Bubba with to a card sharp early in the novel. When a body is found and Bubba expresses his fear that he will be hanged despite his innocence, Marder slyly notes: "I didn't say nothing, just remembered the times when I'd seen niggers in the street and felt just the way he was describing, like they was entertainment just waiting to happen" (92).

Much of the novel is highly ironic at the expense of its narrator, often contrasting Marder's unreflective prattle with the reader's reflections and racial awareness. There is no sign of moral woes or intended irony when Marder almost realizes the injustice of observing about the location of a homestead:

> It was a fine place, green, gently rolling, and twisting through it was the sweetest river you'd ever put sight to. It was the kind of place that almost made you understand why the Injuns was so mad about white folks taking over. (19)

Underneath its comic narration and deconstruction of Marder, there is a more traditional aspect to the novel, as Krauth notes: "The prevailing spoof of the Western is so prominent that one almost overlooks the fact that Everett recreates some of the form straight." As Krauth argues, "what Everett finally does in *God's Country* is recuperate the Western hero" (320). As Krauth suggests, Everett installs Bubba as his Western hero. A central scene in this installment as in many Westerns is a duel.[156] When a famous gunfighter, Raleigh Dunnick calls Bubba a "nigger," Bubba challenges Dunnick disregarding the gunfighter's protest that he "ain't gonna participate in no fair fight with a nigger" (200), a statement that suggests that he would have had no objection to an unfair fight or a lynching. Conventions are turned on their head, when Bubba wins the duel. His skin color means that the rules of the gunfight, according to which the winner can claim self-defense and walks away unharmed, do not apply to him. There can be no "fair gunfight with a nigger," since the "nigger" always loses. Marder makes this clear when he blurts out: "You killed Raleigh Dunnick. In a fair gunfight. Where'd you learn to shoot like that? In a fair fight. They gonna hang you for sure" (201). Instead, however, the opportunistic Marder becomes the town hero, implausibly explaining away his earlier crazed flight with the naked Dunnick at his heels, while Bubba is lucky to get away with his life, once again not gaining any recognition for his skill, one of the novel's many critiques of Western society's racism and Marder's opportunism.

There is more to Bubba's character than his installment as the novel's hero, however. According to Krauth, "Everett [...] reenacts one general pattern of black history in America: the movement from acceptance and pacific accommodation to defiance and militant confrontation" (Krauth 320) through Bubba's development. Whereas Bubba initially takes Marder's insult, he increasingly puts up a resistance against being treated as a lesser human or being called a nigger. The gunfight "brings the racial tension of the novel to a surprising – traditional – climax, one surcharged with a sense of justice" (Ibid. 321), offering, like the traditional Western a regeneration through violence (in Slotkin's terms) for its black protagonist. "[I]t feels," claims Krauth, "as though in this single killing, Bubba has avenged his race" (321).

While Bubba is a version of the classical Western hero as far as his skill and heroism are concerned, the ending of *God's Country* suggests a reading that is different from the one Krauth suggests. The novel's final scene, which gives *God's Country* a sudden twist and seriousness, is preceded by a conversation in which Marder and Bubba share their respective dreams for the future. Bubba's dream is to have "one day where I ain't got to worry about a white man decidin' I looked crosswise at him, one day where I ain't got to worry just 'cause I hear a rider behind me, one day where I ain't called a

[156] Cf. Chapter 6 on the centrality of the gunfight in many Westerns and its use in the revisionist Western.

boy" (216-17). Marder dismisses Bubba's dream: "That ain't much of a dream" (217). And Bubba's resigned response, "Shame, ain't it," implies that however small his dream might seem from a white perspective it is unreachable for him as a black man. It is clear, however, that Bubba's dream is all that counts, Marder's shallow, materialistic, and self-centered dream in contrast is meaningless. In staying with his earlier character, Marder wants "a lot of money and to be able to tell folks what to do and to have me a nice, big spread and to have my name mean somethin'" (216).

In its last two pages the novel becomes an allegory, as Marder finally turns into a personification of racist white America, Bubba into one of mistreated black America. Marder, who in the earlier conversation displayed something resembling genuine human interest, shoots Bubba in the back for disobeying him, commenting: "It was as if some kind of blind historical urge and that black man in front of me weren't no kind of real human being, just a thing" (218). To his surprise, however, he fails to kill Bubba, despite emptying his revolver into the black man's back, repeatedly shooting Bubba off his mule. Bubba turns around, but refuses to kill Marder, just as he had earlier refused to kill Custer. Instead he declares that he does not have "enough interest in" Marder to kill him. Furthermore, Bubba realizes that Marder as a person matters little, for even if he killed Marder, there would be other Marders, as Bubba tells his adversary before leaving: "[Y]ou or someone who looks like you or thinks like you or is you will find me and you'll burn me out, shoot me or maybe lynch me. But you know something? You cain't kill me" (219). In this statement Bubba comments on the history of racial violence following the Reconstruction, including the lynching of blacks. Despite the violence he will suffer Bubba, a more general symbol for African Americans, cannot be killed or defeated. This message of defiant resistance is ultimately empowering contemporary readers, and thus goes far beyond the Western's classic ending of the defeat of the bad guy in its extended racial dimension.

Everett's novel thus ultimately suggests that for the African American Bubba the frontier does not fulfill its promises of unrestrained freedom and liberty, it is as racist as every other place in America.[157] Michael K. Johnson has comment on a lack of exceptionality of the frontier in Everett's other work, focusing on the novel *Wounded*, but his observations are equally relevant to *God's Country*:

> The homely West has become unhomely [Freud's *unheimlich*; J.F.], no longer the transformative frontier of Frederick Jackson Turner but rather that of a combat zone where different groups of people stand in conflict with each other – and no longer an exceptional place: "Everyplace is the frontier" [the novel's last line of dialogue]. ("Looking" 52)

[157] Michael K. Johnson has examined the idea of the frontier as a space free of race restrictions and racial oppression in (male) African American author's writing about the frontier in his *Black Masculinity*.

As Johnson's quote suggests, Bubba in the end realizes that wherever he will retreat to, his experience at the physical frontier will be repeated: there will always be a Curt Marder who shoots or lynches him for no reason other than race hatred and a sense of power and superiority backed up by an unjust society, which can regard black people as "entertainment just waiting to happen" (92).

As the novel's final scene shows, Bubba is not "a reincarnation of the deathless Western hero" as Krauth claims (321). To Everett, it seems, there can be no African American Western hero who functions according to the same established white codes outside the most commercial paperback novel. At least when the aim of a text is to meaningfully reflect history, contemporary race relations or a unique African American culture, as is the case in Reed's Neo-Hoodoo Western discussed below, there always enters an aspect of race and racism into the image, which transforms the narrative.[158] Rather than being a black version of America's Manifest Destiny, Bubba is an abstract incarnation of black America or, perhaps, African American history. He is overlooked, mistreated, or ridiculed, and when he threatens white America's privileges, like all dispossessed people is met with violence.

4.4.4. Towards an Egalitarian Neo-Hoodoo West(ern): *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down*

Ishmael Reed's *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* (*YBRBD*) is an even better example of Michael K. Johnson's claim that African American texts using the frontier myth involve a "double movement, a play on white mythology, a recuperation of black history and literary or artistic tradition" (*Black Masculinity* 6) than Everett's *God's Country*.[159] On the one hand Reed's novel presents a critique of American society in the 1960s, on the other it is a revision of the Western employing an African American aesthetic, Reed's own technique of NewHoodoo. Robert Eliot Fox claims that "the most successful actualizations of neohoodooism as a practice are [Reed's] novels *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* (1969), [...] *Mumbo Jumbo*, and *Flight to Canada* (1976)" (625).[160]

Written in 1968, *YBRBD* comments on the then ongoing Vietnam War, as Todd Tietchen has shown, and on an often racist, hostile, and ignorant society black

[158] Both Allmendinger *Imagining* (especially Chapter Five) and M. K. Johnson *Black Masculinity* discuss the ways in which African American author's and filmmaker's versions of the Western differ from white models while building on them in more detail.

[159] The following discussion of Ishmael Reed's *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* is based on and reuses parts on an article published elsewhere (Fehrle "We Have No Leaders").

[160] Schmitz famously labeled Reed as yet another Postmodernist and follower of Burroughs, but one with less skill: "When the Pope arrives near the end of the narrative […] the book dissolves into lectures" (134); "Yellow Back Radio thus turns into a book about Neo-HooDoosim. And every explanation, every concealed footnote, betrays the artifice of the myth" (135).

Americans were facing in the late 1960s. The novel's political concerns with its contemporaneous society are emphasized by temporally conflating the 19th century mythical West with mid-twentieth century America through various characters and groups identifiable as belonging to a 1960s political environment (e.g. the youth and counterculture movement), and the introduction of technological gadgets, such as helicopters and TVs. While Michel Fabre speaks of "at least three telescoping centuries" (18), the main part of the story is an amalgam of the beginning of the 19th century (Thomas Jefferson is president and has sent Lewis and Clark to the West, who briefly appear and have sex with the villain's mail-order bride), the second half of the 19th century, possibly the 1870s (colts are mentioned, as is John Wesley Hardin), and the 1960s (helicopters, radios, TVs, CCTV etc.). There is also a medieval pope who plays a role in the last part of the novel, as well as some bits of other myths and genres, such as amazons and ray guns, tossed in here and there.

YBRBD focuses on the Loop Garoo Kid, a black cowboy and one of the survivors of a traveling circus, which was attacked at the novel's outset by a group of cowboys working for Drag, the evil cattle rancher. In retaliation, Loop takes revenge on Drag and the town of Yellow Back Radio. Shortly after the initial massacre of the circus, Loop is caught by his old rival Bo Shmo and the neo-social realist gang. Before Bo and his henchmen can bury Loop in the desert, Chief Showcase, the local Indian, "Chief Cochise's stand-in" (57), arrives in a helicopter and scares the neo-social realists away. For the rest of the novel Loop hides out in a cave in the mountains and, except for brief appearances in town, hurls his Vodoun curses down on the town, summoning for instance giant sloths which trample Drag's herd. Several prominent historical figures including Lewis and Clark and John Wesley Hardin show up and are ridiculed, but only the arrival of Pope Innocent in the novel's final part leads to Loop's capture when Drag hires two black renegade "artists" to take away a mad dog's tooth Loop wears as a protective charm. Loop's execution is prevented when bugles sound and government troops arrive in taxis under Field Marshal Theda "Doompussy" Blackwell, whom Chief Showcase has tricked into believing Drag was dead and the town ready for the taking. The cowboys are eliminated by the government troops' ray guns and Drag Gibson falls into a pit filled with his cannibalistic swine when he steps backwards to get into position for a quick draw duel against the Field Marshall. As Blackwell reads his decree to annex the town to the East, amazons appear out of the hills and eliminate the government troops. Chief Showcase and many of the surviving townsfolk follow the children who have survived the earlier attack on the circus to the Seven Cities of Cibola, while the Pope take off on a ship pursued by Loop.

As this brief plot summary suggests, Reed's novel twists and turns at every corner, making it much more than a straightforward revision of a Western. His technique

effectively evades the trap inherent in any revision of a popular genre, particularly one as strongly ingrained in the popular imaginary as the Western; that is the chance that the original genre works through the text's attempts to write against it. Instead, Loop laughs at his opponents and, implicitly, the entire Western genre. When Loop dresses as a cowboy, he wears black buckskin with pink fringes (81), an ironic reference to the 1950s singing cowboys with their buckskin and fringes, and during the novel steals Drag's green horse, enacting a role Mikhail Bakhtin has ascribed to the clown in the late medieval carnival: "Civil and social ceremonies and rituals took on a comic aspect as clowns and fools, constant participants in these festivals, mimicked serious rituals …" (*Rabelais* 5). Not only Loop's dress, his behavior, too, is different: his weapon is not a six-shooter, but a bullwhip,[161] and, more importantly, his Hoodoo curses, which, as one of Reed's artist/sorcerers, he brings forth in the form of poems (60). His technique is one of evasion and subversion rather than direct confrontation.

Just as Loop is not a classic cowboy, the novel likewise sets itself off parodically from the cheap 1920s and 30s pulp novels or yellow backs it refers to in its title, stories which it is inferred are among Drag's preferred reading material and which inform the antagonist's lack of imagination. As the novel's title suggests it is a "broken down" version of the Western, a novel which disassembles the Western's elements and puts them back together in Reed's own "radio" voice, transforming familiar Western elements into a text that in the end is entirely non-Western in its complexities and contradictions. When Loop's Hoodoo curses start to affect the town, the doctor tells Drag: "Yellow Back Radio is breaking down" (58), including a direct reference to the novel's title in the text. Just as Loop causes the disintegration of the Western town Yellow Back Radio, likewise Reed dismantles the Western genre. Reed has provided a further explanation of the novel's title, discussing its various elements in his "self interview":

> I based the book on old radio scripts in which the listener constructed the sets with his imagination; that's why "radio"; also because it's an oral book, a talking book... There's more dialogue than scenery or description. "Yellow Back" because that's what they used to call Old West books about cowboy heroes, the were "yellow covered books and were usually lurid and sensational," so the lurid scenes are in the book because that is what the form calls for. [...] "Broke-down" is a take off on Lorenzo Thomas's [Modern Plumbing] "Illustrated." When people say "Break it down," they usually mean to strip something down to its basic components. *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* is the dismantling of a genre done in an oral way like radio. (quoted in Fabre 22-23)

Reed's "radio" novel proposes a system of egalitarian beliefs and practices which stands in sharp contrast to the Western's traditional ideology. Its egalitarian vision, found in

[161] In this respect Loop resembles another unusual protagonist in the revisionist Western, George Bowering's heroine Caprice who, like Loop, also expertly combines a bullwhip with a sharp tongue.

the eclectic and universal concept of Neo-Hoodoo, the politics and aesthetics of which Reed develops in the novel through his style and his protagonist is contrasted with the Manichean system the Kid's antagonists personify.

The novel's form and politics are the result of Ishmael Reed turn to Vodoun in the 1960s. This black folk tradition practiced primarily in the Caribbean, was carried over by black slaves into the American South under the name Hoodoo.[162] According to Helen Lock:

> When Voodoo arrived in the southern United States, it became HooDoo: Voodoo in a diluted form, still operating under a Catholic "front." In Ishmael Reed's hands it became Neo-HooDoo, a rediscovery of the fundamental Voodoo aesthetic translated into a specifically North American context. Neo-HooDoo retains the subversive function of Voodoo culture, but in literary rather than primarily visual terms. (69)

"Hoodoo," in Reed's own words, "might be called Vodoun streamlined" (*Shrovetide* 10). Like the historical religion of hoodoo, Neo-Hoodooism is defined strongly by its flexibility. It incorporates influences from numerous sources and discourses and distrusts essentialist claims of one truth, making it central to the novel's egalitarian vision. In Hoodoo, as in Reed's novels, a "free and familiar contact" is at play between the various elements incorporated into the system, as Reed explains in his "catechism of d neoamerican hoodoo church" (*Conjure* 41-42).[163]

Neo-Hoodoo provides Reed with an aesthetic for his works which could be identified as his own African American postmodernism. In *YBRBD* the mixing of sources Neo-Hoodoo adopts from Vodoun results in a black vernacular Hoodoo Western with science fiction elements and amazons. Neo-Hoodoo also provides a theory / ethics / religion for Reed's characters. As in many of Reed's early novels, the protagonist in *YBRBD*, the cowboy hero Loop, is a follower of the principle of Neo-Hoodooism. As the novel opens, Loop is an apprentice to Zozo Labrique, a "charter member of the American Hoo-Doo church" (10). Zozo gives him the mad dog's tooth, which later in the novel protects him from Drag's attempts to capture him, and teaches him about the secrets of Hoodoo. His flexibility and subversive use of dominant traditions makes it impossible for his more rigid opponents to catch him. Loop combines his mad dog's tooth with an incantation of the "Black Hawk American Indian houngan of Hoo-Doo" (64). His personal loa (Vodoun spirit) is Judas Iscariot, "the hero who put the finger on the devil [i.e. denounced Jesus Christ; J.F.]" (61). Loop thus employs the

[162] There are many spellings of Vodoun: Voodoo, Vodoun, Vodou etc. each with its own problems, negative, neutral or other implications. I will use Vodoun to refer to the traditional (Haitian) Voodoo/Vodoun practices, which Reed draws on, while using (Neo-)Hoodoo(ism) (a word whose spelling varies widely within Reed's work) to refer to Reed's own system.

[163] The close connection between art, life and hoodoo is expressed in Reed's "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto": "Neo-HooDoo believes that every man is an artist and every artist a priest" (*Conjure* 21).

main strength of Hoodoo, its flexibility, a strength exemplified not only by the "women priests [who] name Loa after their boyfriends" (153), but also by Julia Jackson, who "make[s] all [her] own stuff. It saves money and it's as good. People who has to buy their stuff ain't using their heads" (Reed, *Conjure* 21). The flexibility of Neo-Hoodoo Loop uses as a weapon is reflected in Reed's own transformation of the Western into a form that is both his own and, despite its recurrent use of traditional Western props and stock situations, soon transcends anything resembling a traditional Western.

Reed's protagonist stands for Neo-Hoodoo's potential for transformation and versatility. His transformative power is already suggested by the Loop Garoo Kid's name, an altered version of the "Loup Garou Kid" of Reed's earlier poem "I am a Cowboy in the Boat of Ra," (*Conjure* 17-18). His name refers to the French word for werewolf, i.e. a shape-shifter. Loop's characteristic as a shape-shifter is apparent in his changing roles and his subversive use of his enemy's systems throughout the book. As is the case with Everett's novel, Reed's protagonist also develops from acceptance of an unjust system and attempts to make the best of a racist, segregated society, to open resistance and rebellion. Accordingly, Loop, like Bubba, stands in for the larger history of African Americans. As the novel's first page informs us "he wasn't always bad […] Once a wild joker he cut the fool before bemused Egyptians, dressed like Mortimer Snerd and spilled french fries on his lap at Las Vegas' top of the strip" (9), but when the traveling circus in *YBRBD* is attacked and most of its members are killed, the Loop Garoo Kid "comes back mad" (29) and, with the aid of the more sneaky Chief Showcase, turns the town of Yellow Back Radio into his arena. After Drag's cowboys attack the circus, Loop's actions begin to threaten the system rather than being contained within it. He destabilizes ready-made assumptions and upsets Drag's system of control. In the process he destroys hierarchies by frequently abasing the dignitaries of the Western town of Yellow Back Radio.

Despite its anger and radicalism, the novel does not develop black politics in a direction where slitting the throats of all white people is the only option, as proclaimed, for instance, by Clay in Amiri Baraka's drama *Dutchman*. Although Neo-Hoodoo is essentially black in origin, it does not exclude others on account of their race, as one of the novel's opening quotations attributed to Henry [Red?; J.F.] Allen, but most likely one of Reed's own inventions, makes clear:

> America … is just like a turkey. It's got white meat and it's got dark meat. They is different, but they is both important to the turkey. I figure the turkey has more white meat than dark meat, but that don't make any difference. Both have nerves running through 'em. *I guess Hoo-Doo is a sort of nerve that runs mostly in the dark meat, but sometimes gets into the white meat, too*. (*YBRBD* 5; my emphasis)

Allowing the possibility that Hoodoo can also run through "the white meat" sets Reed off from many of his contemporary African American authors, who violently rejected white culture. In fact, as Patrick McGee points out, Reed has a fairly wide and differentiated understanding of race and social position in his writing: "For Reed, 'blackness' is a dimension of a larger cultural process or formation that he sometimes identifies as multiculturalism" (10). McGee later adds: "For Reed, the term 'Afro-American' is less an ethnic marker than a political one which entitles the subject to align him- or herself with a formation that is international and multicultural" (24). Neo-Hoodoo is a perfect example of this position, it is a system and a strategy which, while "black" in origin is also "Afro-American" in Reed's broader sense, drawing on all kinds of influences, white, black, and in the case of *YBRBD* also red.[164]

Reed's more complex understanding of race as a political stance is also reflected in his lack of racial idealism. In an interview Reed has stated his refusal of seemingly easy answers to racial problems: "Life is very easy when you can blame everything on white people. It induces a real laziness, I think, intellectual laziness and a lack of sophistication. I find that there are black slave masters, too" (Northouse 14).

[164] Despite the general thrust of Reed's work to uncover and ridicule oppressive structures and thought patterns, there is one aspect I will not discussed, but which needs to be at least briefly problematized: as so often in Reed's work, women are not equal parts of his egalitarian world. With the exception of Zozo Labrique, all women in *YBRBD* are mannish, threatening and unsavory like Drag's zombie wife or the big-talking, moose-hunting, and de-gendered Big Lizzy, or sexually omnivorous and untrustworthy like Black Diane / Mustache Sal / Mary, the mail-order bride, whose demise is without much imagination readable as a punishment for her sexual energy and independence. *YBRBD*'s male gender roles are equally problematic. As Patrick McGee writes, Reed "appears to share with [the Black Power and Black Arts movement, and it should be added the Western] an overprivileging of masculinity as the signifier of political freedom" (69): while Loop and Chief Showcase shine through their sexual prowess, their opponents are portrayed as effeminate "sissies," either impotent or homosexual and – more often than not – both, who spend their time either crying or ogling at the ethnic "super-lovers." This characterization of Drag (whose ranch is called the Purple Bar-B), Doompussy and the others suggests, as Tietchen writes, "both gender bias and homophobia," and as a result "risks reproducing the bias against homosexuality present in the classic Western he hopes to critique" (338). As is well-known Reed has had a long-standing feud with many feminists, one of his feminist critics, Michele Wallace, has summed up some of the short-comings of Reed's concept of Neo-Hoodoo:

> [A]lthough Neo-Hoodoo, as it occurs in Reed's poetry, fiction, and essays, rejects the stifling duality and reification of Western rationalism in order to question the automatic devaluation of the black male, as well as other nonwhite males […,] it does not confront the preeminent social instance of binary opposition: gender role. (183)

YBRBD does not escape this blind spot running through much of Reed's writings, which other critics have commented on, and whose notoriety has obscured not only the many positive aspects of his work, but also Reed's numerous personal achievements.

I wish to refer the interested reader to Patrick McGee's examination of women and gender roles in Reed's work in his *Ishmael Reed and the Ends of Race*, 46-53 and 58-73. What makes McGee's account so valuable is his obvious appreciation of Reed's prose and his simultaneous uneasiness about the treatment of gender issues in Reed's novels. Rather than accepting the easy answer of many feminists to condemn Reed as a misogynist whose work should be avoided in the first place, McGee explores and tries to understand the gender aspects in Reed's fiction.

Consequently, in *YBRBD* not all African Americans are automatically right or "good," a belief that would result in the same monocultural bias the novel is directed against, only with reverse roles. Reed's skepticism of an equation of skin color with moral qualities manifests in various instances. Jake the Barker, a member of Loop's circus troop, for example, is the first to fall for the idea and the promises of the "anarcho-technological paradise" of the Seven Cities of Cibola,

> where robots feed information into inanimate steer and mechanical fowl where machines do everything from dig irrigation ditches to mine the food of the sea help old ladies across the street and nurture infants […]. A place without gurus monarchs leaders cops tax collectors jails matriarchs patriarchs and all other galoots who in cahoots have made the earth a pile of human bones under the feet of wolves. (24-25)

What Jake fails to realize in his enthusiasm is not only his descriptions' eerily close proximity to what plantation life must have seemed like to a Southern slave owner, but also that in the circus he has already found a society that is as close to an ideal society as he is every likely to find, as I have argued elsewhere ("We Have No Leaders"). Jake thus partakes in exactly the intellectual laziness Reed distrusts. He blames the disbelief in the Seven Cities of Cibola – the result of a misinterpretation by the Spaniard Marcos de Niza – on white people: "stupid historians hired by the cattlemen to promote reason, law and order – toad men who adore facts – say that such an anarchotechnological paradise […] is as real as a green horse's nightmare," (25).[165] The message of Jake's proclamation is tricky, since it turns out to be selfcontradictory: the "paradise" Cibola exists, but it is repulsive rather than paradisiacal, rendering both Jake and the historians wrong and right at the same time. When Jake returns in the end claiming to have found the "anarchotechnological paradise" promised by the Seven Cities of Cibola, it turns out to be a "really garish smaltzy" place heralded by a "Chicken Delight" truck (170). The paradisiacal is instead the grease of a postmodern (understood here in Frederic Jameson's sense as "late Capitalist") promise of a consumer culture in which others do the work.

Whereas Jake might only be a "fool" blinded by the appeal of "eros" (25), as he allows, Loop's black assistants, the "pseudo-Black pseudoartists" (R. M. Davis, "Scatting" 412) Jeff and Alcibiades, are more clearly misguided. They do not believe in Loop's power as a houngan or the powers of Hoodoo, ridiculing its rituals. Unlike Loop they "comb [their] hair" (a symbol of black acceptance of and attempt to emulate white aesthetic standards in the 1960s), thinking that Loop's hair "[l]ooks like

[165] The inclusion of the Seven Cities of Cibola introduces a connection to Estevanico, who, as mentioned, was the first African American in the Western United States. The fact that Estevanico's attempt to find the Seven Cities of Cibola eventually led to his death might serve as another marker for Jake's misguidedness.

buckwheat or alfalfa" (61).[166] As Alcibiades, rising above his role and into an analysis of his own character, explains: "With gossip columnists invading our skulls you should not be surprised that we ridicule anything we can't understand" (65). As this passage makes clear Jeff and Alcibiades are stand-ins for the unthinking, easily manipulable parts of (African) American society in the 1960s. They eventually sell Loop for ten dollars, a bottle of wine and a stagecoach ticket East where they hope to create some more of their commercial pseudoart. As the novel announces at its opening, they "call him brother only to cop his coin and tell malicious stories about his cleft foot" (9). Jeff and Alcibiades thus expose the notion of a supposedly secure and loyal collectivity based on skin color as an illusion; they abandon the promises of a Neo-Hoodoo community, and once again clarify its "black" nature: Neo-Hoodoo is a conscious political stance, not a group based on race.

The main focus of the novel's ridicule is the novel's villain, Drag Gibson, the traditional Western cattle baron and, in Reed's use, a stand-in for America's oppressive (white) upper class, and by extension on the absurdities and injustices of American society. Life on Drag's ranch is a farce of the Western's traditional depiction of ethnicity. While Loop acts from the periphery and Drag's ranch does thus not include an African American presence, Drag keeps the other "oppressed people," "chinaboy" and Chief Showcase, around, in order to feed his illusion of running a "democratic household" (56). For Drag this means that he allows "chinaboy" and Showcase to constantly insult him and his guests, as long as he thinks they are contained within his system of control. The novel's "oppressed people" are more subversive, however. Near the end "chinaboy" is seen leaving with blueprints of Drag's tomb (169), although he has no direct connection to the cattleman's death which occurs shortly thereafter. An even more interesting case is Chief Showcase who plays the "Indian" for Drag and the townspeople and offers both an image of the stereotypical Indian in the Western, in the facade he puts up, and a radical revision of a traditional Indian, through his subversiveness aimed at sabotaging and bringing down Drag's rule. Chief Showcase alternately insults Drag's guest in his "militant poetry" riddled with offenses like "eat out of me backwards paleface" (79), which he reads to general applause. While Drag assumes that he runs his ranch and the town, Chief Showcase prepares for the destruction of both the town and the government. Showcase hides his role as a triple agent behind his "savage" rhetoric, and no one notices that he arranges for the annihilation of the town by Field Marshal Theda Blackwell and his men, beating the white man at his own game, thus turning the tables of both American history and the

[166] This could be a reference to the series of short films *Our Gang* a.k.a. *Little Rascals* which at different times included a black character nicknamed "buckwheat," as well as a white character played by Carl Switzer who bore the nickname "alfalfa."

Western genre, as he had declared earlier: "Foment mischief among his tribes and they will destroy each other" (40).

While ironically subverting the white Americans' authority through his satire and mimicry, Showcase arranges for their mutual annihilation, while keeping them happy with his "Indian" behavior and his hyperbolic "Savage's" comments whose irony his addressees (unlike the reader) fail to grasp: "The white man has the brain of Aristotle, the body of Michaelangelo's David and the shining spirit of the Primemover, how would it look for a lowly savage and wretch like me meddling in his noble affairs?" (109).

YBRBD and the Hoodoo religion/aesthetic are directed at "white" monocultural thinking, which is most clearly represented in *YBRBD* by the system of Christianity which underlies the cowboy community of Yellow Back Radio. Its different brands are seen in the Protestantism of the local preacher and the Catholicism of Pope Innocent, the novel's second main villain, certainly one of the most unusual characters in any Western. Ironically, Reed unwittingly replicates an anti-Christian bias, which Jane Tompkins has seen as underlying the Western's "male" rejection of the "female," civilized ideology of Christianity (31-44).

The monolithic structure Reed sees in Christianity is contrasted with a "black" anti-essentialism. In *YBRBD*, the superiority of Reed's alternative, (Neo)Hoodoo, is most clearly demonstrated by contrasting it with "Christianity the Cop Religion" (*Conjure* 23), which Drag uses as an opium for the masses to keep control over "his" Western town. When Loop appears in the saloon, the town's preacher, Reverend Boyd, tries to ban him or hold him at bay with his crucifix like a vampire, but Loop "lashe[s] the crucifix from his breast without tearing the man's flesh. The crucifix drop[s] to the floor and the little figure attached to it scramble[s] into the nearest moose [sic] hole" (*YBRBD* 102).[167] While the town preacher is easily defeated, Loop's real adversary is the Pope, the symbol of organized Christianity, a religion "which Reed consistently identifies with Western Civilization's desire to universalize itself" (Tietchen 325). When Drag realizes that neither the Reverend Boyd, the symbol of Protestantism, nor his fellow racist, the gunslinger John Wesley Hardin, the "baddest coon skinner of them all" (114), can handle the Loop Garoo Kid he calls Rome for help. While the Pope prides himself with Catholicism's popular appeal ("[Protestantism] was no threat for

[167] The use of the word "moose" here refers not only to the fact that there is indeed a hole made by a moose in the wall of the saloon, but also calls to mind an earlier episode during which the bartender had tried to reduce the linguistic arbitrariness and confusion of the world by imposing grammatical rules, using meese as the plural form of moose: "Goose is to geese as moose is to meese." His aim is to defend the correctness of the language: "I know we're out in the old frontier but everything can't be in a state of anarchy, I mean how will we communicate?" (53). The barkeeper's ill-informed opposition to the vernacular associated in the popular West with frontier characters shows Reed's use of language in his parody of the Western formula.

us. We hand out them wafers, and swing the censers, lot of loud singing, organs, processions. They like it that way" [151]), both Drag and the Pope have to admit that their popular appeal is no match for Hoodoo's – a situation the Reverend Boyd has already come to realize: "What the church lacked in aesthetic it couldn't even make up in pyrotechnics" (52).

It is the Pope's explanations of Vodoun and Christianity's failed attempts to suppress it, however, which most clearly show the opposition of the two religions / world views. As the Pope lectures, Christianity's approach has always been to suppress potentially insurgent forces like Vodoun if necessary by eliminating their practitioners: "… when we were threatened by the Albigenses, the Waldenses and other anarchists way back there when we couldn't absorb them we burned or hanged them" (151). In the face of Vodoun this violent oppression of difference is not only an expression of inferiority, but of downright fear: "It is important that we wipe it out because it can always become a revolutionary force" (154). Yet, as the Pope knows, Christianity will ultimately not be able to suppress Vodoun/Hoodoo, which is one of the reasons he attempts to convince Loop, who is now identified as the first son of God, Satan (164), to return to heaven.[168] Loop, however, sees the times changing to his and Neo-Hoodoo's benefit and refuses: "Seems to me that people are getting sick of daddies. You know – 'thou shalt have no other before me' – Tsars, Monarchs, and their deadly and insidious flunkies" (165).

After the Pope leaves Yellow Back, having failed to convince Loop, he snaps at Drag, the other representative of the establishment, who triumphantly wants to celebrate his execution of the Loop Garoo Kid: "If you think you can do away with him then you Americans are stupider meatheads than the rest of the world gives you credit" (167). Indeed, like Bubba in the final pages of Everett's *God's Country*, Loop / the Devil can at this point be regarded as the personification of the "black" force of Neo-Hoodoo. Having become an abstract, Loop might die as an individual, as he attempts to in what he calls "a parody on his passion" (170), but the principle he stands for lives on. (Neo)Hoodoo cannot be "done away with" as the traditional forces in Reed's Western have to realize, instead it undermines their narratives just as Reed's Neo-Hoodoo writing undermines the genre.

It is in this context that Loop's defense of his work against Bo Shmo, who in his dogmatic zeal accuses him of making no sense, can be read as a reflection of Reed's own appropriation of the Western: "[W]hat if I write circuses? No one says a novel has to be one thing. It can be anything it wants to be, a vaudeville show, the six o'clock

[168] The other reason is that the "Virgin" Mary – like all women – lusts for Loop's sexual prowess. Loop is supposed to "satisfy the wench" (166): "She wants you to come back Loop. Ever since her ascension she's been with the blues" (161).

news, the mumblings of wild men saddled by demons" (36). Just as Loop's writing contrasts with Bo's wooden, Stalinist neo-socialist realism, likewise does Reed's own anti-essentialist, "circus" approach contrast with the traditional Western. The result of Reed's Neo-Hoodoo postmodernism is the creation of a system which, despite coming out of a black religious / folk tradition is much more universal and egalitarian than not only the Western genre, but also much of Western civilization. Its mode of resistance is open to all peoples and races, from the black whip-slinger Loop to Chief Showcase and "chinaboy."

Yet a straight-forward celebration of Neo-Hoodoo, as personified by the Loop Garoo Kid would be too easy. There is an additional twist to *YBRBD*'s ending: after the Pope's heavenly mission turns out "a failure" (167), since he cannot convince the Loop Garoo Kid / Satan to return to heaven on God's terms, he is pursued by Loop, the symbol of the new subversive religion of Neo-Hoodoo, in the novel's last sentences and ultimately the most puzzling scene of the whole book: "The Pope chomping on a havana rushed to the ship's railing. Well I'll be damned, and hallelujah, here comes the Loop, the Pontiff smiled. Thomas Jefferson was out of a job but that was O.K. too" (177). Suddenly the antagonists, who had before shared a bond of common experience and maybe mutual respect, but certainly had no love for each other – shortly before the end of their conversation Loop attacked the Pope: "You and your crowd are the devils" (165) –, are reunited and seem of one heart and one soul. Reed himself has explained this as follows:

> [It] is both a quasi-anarchic and Tom Mix ending, the symbols of religion, the gods, return to art. […] Some people interpreted it as Loop Garoo going back to Rome. But all the events that Pope Innocent VII was talking about were taking place in art. And what happens is that people are on their own and Loop Garoo and the Pope return to art. (quoted in R. M. Davis "Scatting" 413)[169]

Davis interprets the ending as a "ship headed heavenward" (Ibid. 413), based on the Pope's earlier remark that he will be in trouble when he returns to heaven. Nevertheless it remains unclear why Loop would suddenly want to go to heaven after repeatedly

[169] It should be noted that either Davis misquotes or Reed is confused about his history and therefore gives "his" pope the wrong number. Pope Innocent VII was only Pope for two years and was relatively unremarkable in the greater history of the church. The Innocent in the novel more likely is a mélange of the various Innocents, who time and again played a role in the church's fight against heresy and the establishment of the Inquisition. Two likely models are Innocent III, who as Tietchen writes was not only responsible for the Fourth Crusade but is also "remembered for being particularly intolerant of heresy and is responsible for the "minor" Crusade against the Albigenses which laid the groundwork for the Inquisition" (330), and even more so Innocent VIII who was also of remarkable intolerance against "heretics" and who not only was responsible for the Crusade against the Waldensians, but also for issuing a bull to Jacobus Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer, which led them to write the notorious *Malleus Maleficarum*. Both the *Malleus Maleficarum* as well as the crusade against the Albigenses and Waldensians are mentioned in the novel.

refusing Innocent's earlier invitations. Madge Ambler suggests that "Loop goes with [the Pope] in the end – to destroy from within as Chief Showcase did to Theda and Drag" (130), an approach only open to him, according to Ambler, after he has lost the mad dog's tooth which "had to be removed from Loop's neck so he might think rationally" (130). This would indeed be a fitting actualization of Vodoun / Hoodoo practices, which in Hawaii "made a virtue of necessity by developing an aesthetic capable of appropriating the *forms* of the Catholic tradition while transforming their meaning" (Lock 69, emphasis in original), given the Pope's deep insight into Vodoun practices, the tooth's origin as a gift from Zozo Labrique, a positive figure in the novel, and the fact that both Loop and Innocent have, as mentioned, turned entirely into abstract principles in their earlier conversation, a return to art as suggested by Reed seems to make the most sense – even if it is not entirely satisfying for the reader.

This, however, might be the ultimate point of this "Tom Mix ending." In this reading Reed refuses his readers a clear and unambiguous, easily digestible ending with a clear moral *or* a clear hero: Loop leaves with his former antagonist, the symbol of oppressive Western culture, while Chief Showcase, the "other" (and maybe even more successfully subversive) hero of the novel, after having through his cunning brought down both Drag and the government forces, falls for the cheap promises of Cibola. Only the amazons withstand this post-industrial, post-human "paradise" retreating into the forest and – in the spirit of Hoodoo – will "have a celebration tonight. There would be much wine drunk, dancing and messages sent out to other liberated tribes" (175). This seems the ultimate message. Neo-Hoodoo mistrusts holy men as much as it mistrusts holy books, and while the leaders and / or visionaries Loop, Zozo Labrique, Jake the Barker, and Chief Showcase, are either discredited or disappear sooner or later, the spirit of Hoodoo is kept alive going from one place to the other – or in the language of Vodoun – riding one horse and then the next. Neo-Hoodoo thus gains a universality, which transcends the individual as it constantly reinvents itself, always incorporating new aspect, and thus gives birth to itself in a new form, open to all regardless of background, race, gender or any other essentialist category.

In its refusal to present the reader with a clear hero or a clear solution, the novel presents its final antithesis to the Western in which the end traditionally brings a plot resolution and a restoration of order to the West: the abstract concept of Hoodoo with its mistrust of easy solutions has replaced the hero riding off into the sunset, the epitome of such easy solutions, and the one figure who for so long has marginalized Asians, replaced and killed Indians, and excluded African Americans from the popular image of the 19th century.

4.5. Post Revisionism and Post-Soul Aesthetic: Larry McMurtry and David Durham

In his encyclopedia article "African Americans and the Popular West" Blake Allmendiger names Larry McMurtry as one of the few white writers who "sympathetically treat and to some extent privilege black characters," mentioning McMurtry's African American characters in his novels *Horseman, Pass By*, the *Lonesome Dove* series, and *Anything for Billy* ("African Americans" 918).[170] Ernestine Linck has commented on McMurty's racial awareness in a similar way, speculating that the Caucasian Mox Mox in *Streets of Laredo*, a "savage" by action not skin color, who burns people, especially children, alive "could be McMurtry's negation of racism. Evil knows no racial barriers, nor does good" (630).[171] This statement is similarly true for McMurtry's black characters, the positive character Deets, discussed in more detail below, is balanced by the giant African Mesty-Woolah in *Anything for Billy*, a callous killer who works for Billy's antagonist Will Isinglass.

While the race of characters such as the housekeeper Halmea in *Horseman, Pass By* or Joshua Deets in *Lonesome Dove* is worth noting, their race is not part of a radically revisionist attempt to write against the image of a white West, as it is in the novels of Reed or Everett. McMurtry's first novel, his 1961 Post-Western *Horseman, Pass By* is set in mid-twentieth century Texas. It is the novel which, among his work, most clearly addresses racial issues. Halmea suffers from violence at the hands of Hud but chooses to let his rape of her go because she does not trust the white authorities. While racism is clearly an issue in this case, Halmea's primary function in the novel is as a friend to Lonnie, as well as the object of his awakening sexual desire. She is not defined through Hud's rape, but rather stands as a fully developed character who shapes the Bannon household, and whose presence Lonnie misses after she leaves following her rape, without managing to express his feelings. It is particularly in McMurtry's later works that the presence of African American characters is taken for granted as part of a more diversified West. Unlike Mario van Peebles, McMurtry by the mid-1980s seemed to

[170] The other novel by a white author Allmendinger mentions is William Eastlake's *The Bronc People*.

[171] In a recent article Deborah Madsen has (mis)read Mox Mox, whom Lorena twice describes as "a white man" (McMurtry *Streets* 220, 223), and who is later described as red haired (256), as a mixedblood, rather than a Caucasian character. Based in part on this misreading, Madsen argues that "the racial politics of McMurtry's neo-Westerns are conservative, available to serve an anti-integrationist racial agenda." In particular, she attributes "an exceptional capacity for violence to [McMurtry's] mixed-blood characters" ("Discourse" 188), Mox Mox and Blue Duc. This troubles Madsen in as far as the "consistent representation of mixed-race or 'half-breed' characters as psychopaths and the treatment of an exceptionalist ideology [...] permits the narratives to pursue a distinction between ethnically 'pure' and 'impure' characters" (Ibid. 188-89). While an interesting argument in principle, Madsen's position is, of course, seriously harmed by her failure to accurately check Mox Mox's description.

consider the presence of black characters in a Western set in the 19th century not something worth dwelling on or justifying at length. His fiction set in the late 19th century West features African American characters, such as Joshua Deets in the *Lonesome Dove* series, who are portrayed in a human and positive manner without dwelling on their race at any length. Deets is "one of the boys" in *Lonesome Dove* and in fact closer to the emotionally detached Woodrow Call than any of the other characters except Gus. When Deets dies in a scene that can only be called tragic, Call carves an epitaph for him in what is certainly one of his most emotional moments, carving "the words deeply into the rough board so that the wind and sand couldn't quickly rub them out." His epitaph, which once again does not mention Deets's race, pays tribute to his loyalty and uprightness: "JOSH DEETS SERVED WITH ME 30 YEARS. FOUGHT IN 21 ENGAGEMENTS WITH THE COMMANCHE AND KIOWA. CHERFUL IN ALL WEATHERS, NEVER SHERKED A TASK. SPLENDID BEHAVIOUR" (808). While Deets is, if not a main character, at least one of importance and he is portrayed in a positive light, it could be argued that McMurtry conforms to current expectations of the role late 19th century blacks could have played in an outfit such as Gus and Call's, and consequently gives Deets a subordinate rather than a dominant and central position. As a result the character McMurtry draws seems to be geared at historical plausible rather than open revisionism: Deets, an ex-slave, first hires on as a cook for the Texas Rangers in *Comanche Moon*, but soon rises to the rank of a ranger and a scout. His race influences the character's history, but ultimately Deets is defined by his actions. This marks McMurtry as racially aware, in a way that Clint Eastwood is in his *Unforgiven* which features an African American character, Ned Logan, played by Morgan Freeman, who is central to the plot, but whose race similarly is not a matter of debate.

While McMurtry's black characters are sympathetically portrayed, a number of his other racial characters have drawn criticism. Particularly his mixed-blood character in *Lonesome Dove*, Blue Duck, the son of a Comanche and a Mexican, has been seen as somewhat troubling. The Blue Duck story line, which leads away from the main cattle drive, reiterates earlier captivity novel stereotypes. Blue Duck is portrayed as a violent character devoid of any empathy. In many ways he fulfills the role of the stereotypical "Indian" in the captivity narrative. While he rescues Lorena from being burned by Mox Mox, as McMurtry later reveals (*Streets* 221), his motives are not humanitarian. Instead he is simply interested in keeping her alive as bait for Gus. He does not care about his men's rape and abuse of Lorena as long as she stays alive and is able to travel. Similarly, McMurtry's "other Indian," the scout Famous Shoes in *Comanche Moon* and *Streets of Laredo* certainly is no radical racially revised character either, nor are McMurtry's Hispanic characters who have also been seen as "problematic" (cf. Busby 51).

Despite including non-white characters, McMurtry seems not particularly interested in racial revisions. He at least partly perpetuates stereotypes about Hispanic, Indian, and mixed-blood characters which have been part of the Western genre's language for decades, even while he slightly revises black characters. It is thus ultimately hard to decide whether the black characters in McMurtry's fiction are expressions of a post-revisionist stance in which their ethnicity is no longer foregrounded, because McMurtry no longer sees the political struggle over race in the Western as necessary, or if he is merely disinterested. In either case, African American characters are not treated markedly different from any other character, their status as blacks is not much discussed. Instead their humanity and competence are the focus. In this respect some of McMurtry's novels, especially of the *Lonesome Dove* series, could be seen as part of what critics have called neo-revisionism (cf. Neale "Westerns") or post-revisionism, i.e. the creation of myth "in the full knowledge of revisionist history" (Babiak paraphrased in Lusted, *Western* 271), a category Babiak develops to describe Eastwood's *Unforgiven*. The treatment of other ethnic characters in McMurtry's work and his reliance on questionable plot forms such as the captivity narrative and their reception in critical circles cast doubt on the success of his post-revisionism or critic's readiness for them, however.

African American author David Anthony Durham, the youngest writer considered in this chapter, provides a less contradictory example of a post-revisionist novel. Like many other African Americans of his generation, Durham's work can be seen as coming out of a "post-soul aesthetic" mindset, a term that according to Michael K. Johnson refers to "the distinctive features of literature, art, and music produced by many contemporary black artists" ("Looking" 29).[172] Unlike older authors, contemporary African American writers of the post-soul aesthetic tend to "explore the possibilities of desegregation and may focus their work on 'cultural mulattoes,' individuals who have been 'educated by a multi-racial mix of cultures.'" As such they tend to focus on "fractures and fissures" and "depict the fluid and multiple black identities" (Ibid. 30). While Durham's characters for reasons of historical veracity correspond less to the class of "cultural mulattoes" than those Everett creates in his novels set in the contemporary West, the author himself has expressed sentiments that express a post-soul mindset. Durham has stated that he chooses "black characters because our stories are so amazing

[172] Incidentally Johnson's article is about Percival Everett, the author discussed above in terms of a more "classic" approach to racism in the Western. While this fact at first seems to upset a discussion intended to distinguish Durham's work from Everett's, it is significant that Johnson does not discuss *God's Country* in his article. Instead he focuses on Everett's other works set in a contemporary West, works that are more ambivalent than *God's Country* in terms of their race relations and characters, often going as far as minimizing or even excluding a direct discussion of skin color, as Johnson shows. In his article Johnson argues that race and racism are addressed through other means such as the uncanny and the mutilation or wounding of bodies in Everett's novels and paintings.

... and because our history is largely untapped .... But exchanges across racial and ethnic groups have been profound, and it only makes sense to me that my writing reflects that" (Hoffert, and Burns 63). As such Durham's take on the Western, as noted a largely "white" genre, is much less oppositional than Reed's formal explosion of the genre and the race lines between his characters are less distinguishing of a character's ethics than those in Everett's *God's Country*, in which only Bubba and Big Elk's Indians are halfway developed, positive characters, whereas all whites are intentionally overdrawn burlesques.

Durham's young adult novel, *Gabriel's Story*, is as much a story of initiation as a Western. It retells a classic Western narrative from an African American perspective. While race is less of an issue in the novel than in Reed's or Everett's novels, Durham's narrative is nevertheless highly aware of racial issues. The novel tells the story of a black teenager, Gabriel, who moves to Kansas with his brother and mother following a step-father, whom he despises for the main reason that he is not his real father. Gabriel's step father has attempted to start a farm fighting both nature and the racism of a number of his white neighbors. Given the first opportunity, Gabriel runs off from the hard farm life and joins his new-found friend James in hiring on with the charismatic white cowboy, Marshall Alexander Hogg. Among Hogg's outfit are a mutilated, cruel partly African American cowboy, Caleb, who unknown to the outfit's leader has the same father as Hogg, and Dunlop, a competent Scottish cowpoke who has only recently joined Hogg and proves to be the only decent human being in the lot. To James', Gabriel's, and Dunlop's horror and moral outrage, Hogg and his men turn out to be horse thieves and soon murder the two former owners of the horses they had earlier stolen to get their hands on the gold one of the owners, a former prostitute, keeps hidden in her house.

Marshall also accidentally kills a racist would-be Wilhelm Tell whom he catches abusing Gabriel. With corpses now littering the way of the gang, all the boys can think of is to stay with the outlaws when they decide to flee to California. Before long, Marshall and his men rape a Mexican-American farmer's daughters, abduct one of them and leave Caleb behind to torture the rest of the family to death. When Dunlop tries to interfere with the women's violation he is bound, gagged and dragged along, before he eventually manages to flee one night, joining the captive's brother, who had been away when his family was killed by Caleb, in his pursuit of the murderers of his family. After it becomes clear that they will not be able to outrun the posse pursuing them, the outlaws let the girl go and try to escape into a river canyon. In the ensuing chaos Gabriel manages to escape the outlaws accidentally taking Marshall's horse, while the traumatized James finds his own way of escape, drowning peacefully to swim "into the heavens" (221). Among the outlaws, only the brothers Caleb and Marshall escape the

posse to pursue Gabriel, who has accidentally also taken the loot from the band's earlier crime in Marshall's horse's saddlebags. Thinking they are after Marshall by his horse's tracks Dunlop and the girl's brother also follow Gabriel. All men catch up almost simultaneously after Gabriel has rejoined his family. Dunlop and the girl's brother forgive Gabriel, but while they are away Caleb and Marshall capture the family, planning to reclaim their loot and kill their hostages. In the end, however, during a monologue worthy of a James Bond villain, Marshall brags that he has had intercourse with Caleb's mother, who was a slave at their father's house. As a reaction, the black cowboy shoots his half-brother before being shot himself.

What is remarkable about Durham's Western novel is not so much its formal inventiveness or its intricate debate of racial relations, but rather the ease with which racial injustices are reported as facts without claiming center stage. Whereas most of the novels discussed above expose the racism of society and the Western genre mostly through humor, sometimes through outrageous satire and parody that does not shy away from recasting familiar frontier types as caricatures, Durham's novel aims to paint an image of what life could have been like in the West for an African American adolescent, thereby providing his juvenile audience with an important part of the history of African Americans. Through his view on American history as a member of a group previously marginalized in the traditional Western, Durham lacks an interest in retelling the history of the Western United States as a heroic tale of white adventure and nation building and can instead highlight previously excluded aspects and groups partaking in the "Westering experience." Durham also avoids the "black" and "white" painting along racial lines earlier Westerns have often engaged in, by presenting us not only with the positive African American figures of Gabriel and James, but also the negative figure of Caleb, a character as callous as his white half-brother, Marshall, as well as white characters who side with Gabriel, such as the Scotsman Dunlop. Nevertheless, racism as a major presence in the society is of course an issue in the novel, the boys are almost killed on account of their race when they first attempt to beg a racist farmer for some food, then steal it after his refusal to them. There is also an awareness of the plight of other ethnicities in Durham's work. As Blake Allmendinger writes,

> Durham explores chapters in American history that previous writers have sometimes ignored: the African American homesteading movement of the mid-1870s, the government's persecution and abandonment of Native Americans, and the failure to honor Mexican landowners' rights after the Mexican-American war. (*Imagining* 76)

Whereas many of these aspects, from the focus on the previously ignored African American experience in the old West to the larger role the mistreatment and genocide of Native Americans, also prominently feature in other racially conscious Westerns,

Gabriel's Story differs from more familiar mainstream narratives with ethnic characters in its unfamiliar African American perspective, despite the fact that – unlike most of the other works examined in this chapter – it is fairly traditional in terms of style, plot, character development and so forth. Its differing perspective is also its claim to (post-)revisionism, as Blake Allmendinger sums up: "Durham has written a revisionist Western that presents familiar frontier activities – such as homesteading, cattle roundups, and encounters with Native Americans – from the unfamiliar perspective of an African American youth" (*Imagining* 77).

Other aspects of *Gabriel's Story* also reflect a post-revisionist stance, the novel for instance to a lesser degree mirrors *Unforgiven*'s refusal to partake in the traditional Western's dichotomization of people into "good" and "bad." As mentioned, African American as well as white characters are portrayed as positive or negative, but, despite the novel's own suggestion that some people, e.g. Caleb and Marshall are more evil and callous than others, Garbriel ultimately refuses to classify humans accordingly. When his younger brother Ben asks him after his return whether he saw good or bad people killed, Gabriel answers: "They were just people. Don't know what good or bad had to do with it," and defends his relativity against his uncle Hiram's Biblical classification into good and bad people: "Maybe in Bible times it was like that. [...] Nowadays the devil's an iron horse" (264). In such sentiments *Gabriel's Story* evokes *Unforgiven*'s earlier ambivalence about killing, as expressed by the film's main character, Bill Money to his acolyte, the Schofield Kid, who also attempts to justify killing: "Hell of a thing killing a man. Take away all he's got and all he's ever gonna have." In Gabriel's response Durham's novel also attempts to introduce the idea of "a universe in which notions of morality are ambivalent, situational and subjective," a stance Babiak has identified in the post-revisionist Western (57), even if it does not go nearly as far as *Unforgiven* in blurring "the dividing line between the behavior of the protagonist and the behavior of the antagonist" (59).

As such, *Gabriel's Story* is certainly not the most angry, challenging or radical dismantling of racism in the West and the Western. Instead, it provides a rather classic narrative of the winning of the West from an ethnic perspective, and through this tells a tale with which both general readers and (African American) adolescents in particular can identify. By taking its black characters' race for granted while giving them a central position, Durham is part of an effort of setting the historical record straight in cultural texts, I have also identified to a degree in some of Larry McMurtry's Westerns. In choosing a more traditional narrative style than the other novelists and in targeting another, younger and more general audience, while adopting a post-revisionist stance, aware of previous Western's over-simplifications, Durham's novel in particular contributes to the reclamation of the West for African Americans, despite its lack of

formal or political radicalism. In this, Durham comes perhaps closest to Langston Hughes' demand not to forget the African American cowboys, by filling a gap in the Western canon by providing a fairly traditional Western that is nevertheless race-conscious and provides a unique African American perspective.

4.6. Black Indians and Black "White Men"

As I have shown at the outset of this chapter there were numerous ethnicities in the historical West, yet the West became a center of white national identity construction around the turn of the Twentieth Century, the formative years of the Western. Consequently non-whites have never played a large part in the Western and have traditionally been either stereotyped (Mexicans), or marginalized and excluded (Asians and African Americans). African Americans provide a perfect example of a group which played a major part historically in the West, yet only began to seriously enter Western texts after the 1960s, at the same time the beginning of the revisionist Western and the Civil Rights movement.

There are different approaches to incorporating African American characters into revisionist Westerns, not all of them successful. As the example of John Seelye's *The Kid* shows, the inclusion of African American characters into a parodic and revisionist Western novel alone does not necessarily provide an instance of racial revisionism. Instead Seelye depicts his African American character as a marginalized and passive figure whose portrayal does not differ markedly from that of earlier African American characters. Furthermore, Seelye continues to portray the American West as a "white" space in which the black man Ham stands out. The second white author examined in some detail, Jerome Charyn, in contrast includes a more minor character in his novel *Darlin' Bill*, yet unlike Seelye he manages to expose the double standards racism and slavery are built on through the narration of his white narrator Sally Blackburn.

African American authors Percival Everett and Ishmael Reed are more radical in their depictions of race. While Everett exposes the logic of racism in ways similar to Charyn, he is more radical in his deconstruction of his narrator, the white racist Curt Marder. Particularly the final pages of *God's Country* make the larger scope of the novel's aim clear, as the novel turns into an allegory of black emancipation. The black scout Bubba, who through the course of the novel has gone from acceptance of the racist society he lives in to active resistance finally turns into a personification of black America when the white Marder tries to shoot him out of a "blind historical urge" and fails, for Bubba now symbolizes black America as a whole. Ishmael Reed's *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* is even more radical in its approach. It the dismantles the Western, opposing it with its own African American concept of Neo-Hoodoo, a philosophy and

aesthetic which is both reflected in the novel's form and provides a philosophy and strategy of resistance for its main character, the Loop Garoo Kid. Neo-Hoodoo, as presented by Reed, absorbs elements from other (dominant) cultures and transforms them into a black anti-essentialist system for resistance. It is within the spirit of Neo-Hoodoo that Reed's book avoids easy answers and its ambivalent ending in particular sets the novel against the Western's traditional closed and clear-cut ending in which the "good guys" win.

The final texts considered in this chapter, a number of Larry McMurtry's novels, particularly his *Lonesome Dove* series, as well as Anthony Durham's *Gabriel's Story*, present yet another approach to the question of genre. In contrast to the earlier more directly oppositional novels discussed, McMurtry and Durham treat their characters' races not as their central defining markers. Rather they employ a post-revisionist stance which takes the presence of different races in the West for granted, but is aware of earlier revisionist history in that it does not treat its African American characters simply as black white men, but does include their unique situation in a 19th century historical West while providing a fairly traditional, mythic narrative.

What seems curious when one looks at the depiction of race in the novels discussed in this chapter is that there are only individual African Americans in almost all of them. *Blazing Saddles* and *The Kid* are certainly the most extreme in capitalizing on their hero's exoticism, but even in a novel like Everett's *Gods Country* Bubba is the only black man. Only few texts, such as the film *Skin Game* or Durham's *Gabriel's Story* present a larger black presence in the West.

While I have so far looked only at the depiction of black characters in revisionist Westerns, I want to briefly explore the interception of African Americans with other races and ethnicities as a final point. Including "Black Indians" is a way in which a number of works try to avoid a simple pitting of "bad" whites versus "good" blacks or Indians and introducing the problematic history of race relations in the historical West into their works.

There is a strong suggestion in many "black" revisionist Westerns that all nonwhite characters are natural allies, connected through their suffering at the hands of the whites, who have oppressed all of them similarly, most clearly expressed by Father Time in Mario van Peebles' *Posse* when he addresses his white companion Little J Teeters:

> The red man ain't got no problem with the black man. As for you, white boy, that's a whole different story. I mean, first you enslave the black man, exploit the yellow man, and then you kill off the red man so you can snatch up his land for railroads.

In fact, many black Westerns draw an image of alliance between their black and their Native American characters, which not only reflects feelings of a mutual opposition to white hegemonic models that have taken over the Western, but also, as William Katz shows in some detail in his book *Black Indians*, to a degree reflect an historical connection through a common foe (29). Perhaps the most widespread instances of such alliances between Native and African Americans occurred before and during the Second Seminole War which took place from 1835 to 1842 and saw black slaves, runaways and Seminoles fight on the same side in several encounters. As Katz shows the connection was so strong that white law and policy makers frequently felt that they could not "dig too deep a gulf" between the races (33), prohibiting, for instance, the living together or an inter-marriage between blacks and Native Americans (37).

As mentioned above, Ishmael Reed's *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* presents an alliance between the Indian Chief Showcase and the black protagonist, the Loop Garoo Kid, who both oppose the white cattle owner Drag, as well as the oppressive government represented by Theda Blackwell and his men. Shortly after the two characters meet for the first time, Showcase lectures on the issue of black Indians, giving his own interpretation of historical events:

> Indians and black people have been roaming the plains of America together for hundreds of years. Why one of the chiefs of my tribe, the Crow, was James P. Beckwith, and Dick Gregory represented our Washington tribes in their treaty fights. Knappy hair rises like grass from the tracks through the Mandans and the Arikaras made by Sgt. York. And the Seminole fought invasion after invasion against the Fiend to protect black fugitive slaves. (42)

In this short passage many key figures of Black Indian history are mentioned: James Beckwith (a.k.a. James Beckwourth), who lived with the Crow for years (cf. Katz, *Black Indians* 120-25), is mentioned as is African American comedian Dick Gregory, who supported the civil resistance of Native Americans in the early 1960s when they were trying to force the American government to honor treaties signed in the mid-19th century (cf. Rosier, *Native American Issues* 34). The strong historical connection between blacks and the Seminole people, which Katz devotes a large part of his book to (*Black Indians* 49-88), is acknowledged, as is the sexual relation between black and Native people, the basis of black Indians, with the Sgt. York reference, in which Reed seems to conflate Sgt. Alvin C. York, the most decorated American soldier in WWI and subject of Howard Hawks' 1941 movie *Sgt. York*, with York, the African American

member of Lewis and Clark's expedition, who, especially through his skin color, made a large impression on many Native people.[173]

Percival Everett's *God's Country* draws an equally strong, if less historical connection between his black character, Bubba, and Big Elk's Indians. Bubba is obviously acquainted and on friendly terms with the Indian tribe when he first meets them. Later, the witnessing of their senseless slaughter by Custer's men, plays a major part in Bubba's turn from impassive suffering at the hands of white society to active and violent resistance.

Despite the importance of such positive links between blacks and Indians, the story of the alliance of two oppressed races is only part of the story. Another aspect which Katz briefly examines in his study is the history of the African American contribution to the U.S. government's Indian Wars. "There is," as Katz writes, "a painful irony that these intrepid black soldiers [the Buffalo Soldiers] took part in the final defeat of Native Americans, the first victims of racism in the Americas. But take part they did, and proudly, in the last Indian wars" (*Black Indians* 174).[174] This part of the African American presence in the West is shown, in the form of a classic Western action scene of unprovoked Indian aggression, in John Ford's *Sergeant Rutledge*. A more amusing debunking of the seemingly "natural" alliance between African and Native Americans is provided in Thomas Berger's *Little Big Man* when Jack Crabb tells a black servant who dreams of running away to the Cheyenne that the Cheyenne will see him as a white man, "a black-colored one" (128). Similar sentiments are expressed by Eastlake's Indians who describe the African American orphan Alistair Benjamin as "a white boy that's black" (*The Bronc People* 41).

In *Darlin' Bill* Jerome Charyn adds yet another part to the complex puzzle of racial relations in the West. As his protagonist Sally and her useless husband Ovenshine make their way West, they set up school on the Choctaw Nation's land to educate the Indians' black slaves. Here the Natives become the slave holders, introducing another little known historical fact to complicate the black and white picture of the popular Western and the stereotypical, freedom-loving Indian:[175]

> The richer Indians allowed us to educate their body servants and slaves, colored boys that bounty hunters had kidnapped for them and would soon have to go free. The Choctaws were holding on to their slaves as long as they could. And we were hired to prepare the colored boys for Choctaw citizenship.

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[173] Coincidentally, York was given the rank of an honorary sergeant in the U.S. Army by President Clinton in 2001, 33 years after Reed's novel was written (and 170 years after his death). Cf. "President Clinton: Celebrating the Legacy of Lewis and Clark and Preserving America's Natural Treasures."

[174] Other studies go into more detail on this point, cf. Leckie and Leckie, Glasrud and Searles.

[175] A recent article in the German weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* reported on the ongoing struggle of the offspring of former Black slaves to be recognized as members of the Cherokee nation (Schweitzer).

> It was the darnedest thing. Teaching black Indians their tribal privileges. Henry couldn't speak a word of Choctaw. Neither could I. But that husband of mine was devoted to these slaves. He must have felt close to that odd territory they were in, the land of black Indians, where slaves become Choctaw and "freedmen." (71)

Teaching the slaves, Ovenshine, for the only time in his life becomes passionate about a thing that is not a woman's skirt and teaches them the principle of racial equality:

> ... what the hell is in a man's color? Damn pigmentation. An accident of birth. That pigmentation doesn't paint your skeleton. It's on your hide. And when you're citizens of the Nation, you remember that. You're equal to any son of a bitch. (71-72)

This sentiment of equality, which according to Sally's understanding "was pure John Locke" (72), does not sit well with the Choctaw. In an ironic variation of a Southern mob, the sheriff and his Indian police approach the schoolhouse where Sally and Ovenshine live at night, and shoot through a window, threatening the Ovenshines: "*White teacher, if you poison our slaves with your white man's tricks, we will feed your nose and your eyes to the dogs*" (72, italics in original).

While other novels such as Charles Portis' *True Grit* similarly mentions black slaves in the Indian nations (94), it is historian Richard Slotkin's novel *The Return of Henry Starr* which most seriously examines the issue of Black Indians and the keeping of slaves among the Cherokee. Not only is Henry Starr's best friend and comrade-in-crime, Cherokee Bill, a partly black man, who denies his heritage and strongly identifies as a Hair Twister, even while the more racist forces among the Cherokee rebuff him, in Slotkin's work the irony of the Native's position as slave keepers becomes apparent. It is in a conflict between Tom Starr, Henry's grandfather, and his rich adversary John Ross that slavery among the Cherokee is explored. In contrast to Charyn's humorous tone, Slotkin's take has a bitter edge, introducing economic interest as a motif which replaces racial idealism and brotherhood, as the oral storyteller of the novel's past, Tsigesu, tells of the Cherokee's involvement in the Civil War to protect a number of rich Natives' interests in retaining their black slaves.

These rich people are represented by the character John Ross, who first sides with the Confederates to protect his rights of slave holding, then manages to switch sides to appear on the Union's side as the tides of war change:

> So once again John Ross had circumvented and humiliated Tom Starr for all his great courage and strength, so that the man who had no slaves had to be fool enough to shed his blood for the Graycoats, and lost his land in punishment; and the man who held black people as one holds a horse or a dog, he was the friend of the Bluecoats, his judges sat in judgment on Tom Starr – who never held slaves, whose word and hand were both against it, who always held himself a man for freedom. (Slotkin, *Return* 36)

John Ross's move to let others fight for his privileges and against the African American slaves' rights, adds another dimension to the injustice, as exemplified by Tom Starr in whose mind Ross through his actions becomes and Indian who is "a white man too" (Ibid.). Not only is Starr against the holding of slave – although the novel avoids picturing him in an overly positive light by making it clear Tom is no lover of blacks, and in fact rejects anyone who is not a full blood Cherokee, including his mixed-blood grandson Henry – he is punished for fighting for something he does not believe in through the trickery of Ross who uses the head-strong Tom Starr.

As texts such as Slotkin's, Charyn's, and Berger's suggest, race relations are more complex than a simple unity of all ethnic characters opposing the white racists. Similarly, as Durham, McMurtry and others make clear there are villains as well as victims on all sides. The real interest and the real complexities lie in the details. This means that skin color cannot be equated with a moral or even necessarily a historical position.

CHAPTER 5
TURNING "INDIANS" INTO NATIVE AMERICANS

> Yes, My Prayer thought, watching out above his boom, as long as I can make great magic, as long as I can keep a good beat, I will have the world, this little world, firmly held by the ziz. I don't know why one kind of magic must always give way to another kind of magic, why the missionary and I can't live together, why the red man and the white man can't live in the same world without speaking to each other. As soon as we spoke, the day we spoke, that was the beginning of the end. That was the day the white man began to love the Indian to death. A white man can never commit a crime and forget it. When we stole this land, when the Navaho stole this land from the Gallina people, the Navaho forgot it. Except for some rather pleasant memories of the war, the Navaho forgot it. When the white man stole this land from the Navaho Nation he has got to compound the crime in order to forget it. He's got to love us to death. Love is their way of not giving back something they have stolen. Take that white man over there, Blue-eyed Billy Peersall. He is the only white man ever known who hasn't tried to love us. He doesn't even like us – he tolerates us. I wonder if the white man will ever learn that that is all any defeated people ever want – to be tolerated. To be allowed to be different. Love is their way of intolerance. Love is their gentle way of grabbing you firmly by the ziz and twisting until an Indian hollers Uncle Sam. The whites never do anything wrong that wasn't made up for by this love. Their love is like a gentle ziz-twisting thing. Their love.
>
> William Eastlake, *The Bronc People*.

> You would have to care about the country. Nobody had been here long enough and the Indians had been very thoroughly kicked out. It would take a shovel to find they'd ever been here.
>
> Thomas McGuane, *Nobody's Angel*.

5.1. "Indians" in American Literature

Surveying the status of Native Americans in popular Western series, Bernhard Drew states: "If anyone is more poorly treated than women [...], it is Native Americans. Until recently, Indians appeared mainly as villains, exceptions being Max Brand's Thunder Moon tales, written in the 1920s for *Western Story Magazine*" (12). In fact, as Jon Tuska and Vicki Piekarski relate, in the formative years of the popular Western formula it was an editorial policy with one major publisher of pulp Westerns, the Curtis Publishing Company, to forbid fully developed portrayals of Native American characters. After a public outrage following the publication of Zane Grey's *The Vanishing American*, in which the Indian hero married a white woman in the end, proclaiming that he wished to forfeit his Indian heritage by merging through his union with the more successful Caucasian race, "all Curtis publications adopted an editorial policy prohibiting authors of Western stories and serials from characterizing Native Americans in their fiction.

Indians might be present, but, if they were, they were renegades on the war path or minor characters" (270).[176]

The depiction of the "Indian" as a savage is much older, however. In his seminal study *The White Man's Indian* Robert Berkhofer followed the changing image of Indians and the rises and falls in popularity of the portrayal of Native characters in cultural texts from the time of first contact to the 1970s. As Berkhofer reminds us at the outset:

> Native Americans were and are real, but the *Indian* is a White invention and still remains largely a White image, if not stereotype. According to a modern view of the matter, the idea of the *Indian* or Indians *in general* is a White image or stereotype because it does not square with present-day conceptions of how those peoples called Indians lived and saw themselves. The first residents of the Americas were by modern estimates divided into at least two thousand cultures and more societies, practiced a multiplicity of customs and lifestyles, held an enormous variety of values and beliefs, spoke numerous languages mutually unintelligible to the many speakers, and did not conceive of themselves as a single people – if they knew about each other at all. (3; emphasis in original)

Wolfgang Hochbruck has made a similar point:

> If there is, or rather if there appears to be today just one authentic Native American voice, and that voice speaking in English, it comes as the result of a political and linguistic colonial process which forged metatribal commonality out of tribal differences. Contrary to common opinion, these many different nations and tribal groups do not share in only one common cultural concept or metaphysical belief system either. Europeans are probably a more homogenous lot. ("Native American Literature" 265-66)

The Euro-American/Canadian denominator "Indian" subsumes and thus in the white imagination unifies these diverse groups and the images and stereotypes associated with "the Indian." There is in fact only one experience that Native groups share, as Hochbruck points out. Theirs is "a common colonial experience, and intertribal ordeal which took pretty much the same form even for very different tribal peoples" (Ibid. 268). This common colonial past, rather than a shared belief system or Native "sensuality," is, as Hochbruck argues (along with certain expectations and demands of "Indian" authenticity by the reading public and critics alike) what defines Native American literature and its major topics well into the 20th century.[177]

The unvarnished stereotyping of Native Americans is especially blatant in the classic Western, in which indigenous peoples, at least until the mid-20th Century, were with very few exceptions confined to the margins of the text, often in the role of one-

[176] As mentioned previously, I follow Berkhofer and countless others in using the word Indian when referring to the characters and stereotypes found in Westerns, while using Native Americans and First Nations when referring to actual people or more fully developed characters.

[177] Hochbruck identifies these major topics as alcohol abuse, land claims and the struggle over stolen land, as well as the question of identity.

dimensional antagonists. In the Western in particular, Indians have frequently fulfilled a very limited number of possible roles: either as noble savages or comic sidekicks aiding the white hero, or as opponents, the stereotypical "savage Indians," functioning as antagonists, plot motors, romantic and simultaneously dangerous parts of the scenery.

Even if this treatment of the Indian is particularly pronounced in the Western, it is by no means singular to the genre. Berkhofer has linked it to the beginnings of a national American literature in the early 19th century movement of American Romanticism, in which "[t]he only time the Indian figured prominently in the higher forms of American art and literature occurred between the War of 1812 and the Civil War as a result of two trends: cultural nationalism and romanticism" (86). Cooper's Leatherstocking novels, in particularly *The Last of the Mohicans*, played a significant part in laying out generic patterns for the Western. As Berkhofer shows, however, in promoting a Romantic image of the Indian Cooper is less revolunary innovator, than a child of his time. Cooper's treatment of race and the Indian specifically, which Richard Slotkin discusses in his introduction to *The Last of the Mohicans*, is shared by many of his contemporary writers and artists:

> We know that the "Last of the Mohicans" is an elegiac phrase. We may even say that Cooper never loves his Indians so much as when he is watching them disappear, and that for him as for General Sheridan – although with different emphasis – the only good Indians were dead Indians. (Slotkin. "Introduction" xxv)

While Cooper with his iconic title gave the vanishing American one of his most influential and lasting embodiments, Berkhofer has followed the elegiac trend of depicting the last member of a dying tribe in American literature back to the poems of Philip Freneau. These helped establish the "dying Indian, especially as portrayed by the last living member of a tribe" as "a staple of American literature." As Berkhofer argues, "[t]he nostalgia and pity aroused by the dying race produced the best romantic sentiments and gave that sense of fleeting time beloved of romantic sensibilities. [...] [W]hether Indians were portrayed as bad or as good, they were in romantic eyes a poetical people whose activity took place in a sublime landscape and whose fate aroused sentiment" (88). They thus provided the ideal topic for Romantic literature and art. Berkhofer sums up the predominant images of Indians and their interaction with white society in the Romantic period:

> In the end, the battle between savagery and civilization, with glory for one race and tragedy for the other as its inevitable outcome, formed the theme and metaphor, if not explicit plot, of the literature and art depicting the Indian during this period. Indians, both noble and savage, had their destined place in the order of history according to the intellectuals of the time. Noble Indians could exist before the coming of white society or they could help the White settler and then die forecasting the wonders and virtues of the civilization that was to

> supersede the simplicity and naturalness of aboriginal life. Savage Indians could scalp helpless Whites or die under torture singing their defiant death songs according to the old ways of native life. Both kinds of Indians would be eliminated through disease, alcohol, bullets, or the passage of time to make way for the presumed superior White way of life. (91)

James Fenimore Cooper was the most important author in popularizing another central image of the Indian, that of the noble savage, putting it alongside the earlier image of the brutal savage. Owing to the fact that "[l]ike so many authors of his time," Cooper knew "little or nothing of Native Americans directly,"[178] his "good Indians, although not necessarily Christianized, act like Christian gentlemen and natural aristocrats, live apart from their tribes and/or are often the last surviving members of their tribe, and play their roles in locales historically situated between savagery and civilization" (93).[179] The images of savage and noble Indians Cooper immortalizes are, however, older. In chapter 3 of his *I Have Spoken*, Hochbruck discusses the stereotyping of Native Americans in literature as early as the 18th century. The literature of the time often featured sometimes verbatim repetition from earlier accounts of direct contact with Native Americans by settlers, traders and missionaries. Hochbruck points out that a lack of verified sources leads to a codification of stereotypes in stories about the Indian:

> Professionelle Literaten verwendeten Material, das sie als Fakten ansahen, ohne zu bedenken, daß die "Fakten," so wie sie von frühen Händlern und Siedlern präsentiert wurden, bereits ideologisch vorgeformt waren. Damit trugen sie nicht unerheblich zur Fixierung von stereotypen Darstellungen des edlen wie auch des tierischen Wilden bei. (64)

One of the most striking aspects with Cooper's treatment of his Indians, and a feature that remained deeply imbedded in the Western for a long time, is his fear of racial mixing and miscegenation, a topic that will be discussed with regards to Jonathan Lethem's *Girl in Landscape*. Not only in Hawkeye's repeated statement that he is "a man without a cross" do we see this attitude, but also in the figure of the racially "tainted" octoroon Cora, who arouses both Uncas' and Magua's interest. In the end, however, as Tuska and Piekarski write, "neither can possess her because Cooper himself had a horror of miscegenation. Given this fact, it can end only one way for Cora and Uncas: they are united in death" (241). This link of "sexuality to race and class" according to Richard Slotkin, "through a deliberate act of mythogenesis [...] becomes the first comprehensive rendering of [Cooper's] perception of American history"

[178] See Hochbruck *I Have Spoken* 113-34 on Cooper's use of sources for his Indians and his critics' tendency to dismiss Cooper's Indians too quickly because of his lack of direct contact with actual Native American people. Cf. also Ibid. 118 on the simplification of Cooper's tribal and linguistic relations: "Es scheint angemessen zu behaupten, daß einer der Gründe für Coopers eigenwillige Festsetzung linguistischer und tribaler Grenzen die zwangsläufige Ökonomie eines fiktionalen Textes gewesen ist und nicht etwa die ihm wiederholt vorgeworfene Nachläßigkeit oder Ignoranz."

[179] The latter setting is of course also the classic setting of the Western.

("Introduction" xiv). It also becomes a view that is embraced in many Westerns, with a simplified version of Cooper's ending in *The Last of the Mohicans*, where the pure white heroes Heyward and Alice are united in matrimony, sets the model for the climax in many classic Westerns in which the white hero and heroine are joined. As Slotkin writes: "The future belongs to Heyward and Alice. All color is dead. And although Cooper mourns that loss, he grapples with the need – equally strong as yearnings – to disapprove of it" (Ibid. xxvi). This disapproval is an irreconcilable difference between the "races" that is at heart a matter of different "blood," which must lead to cultural conflict (Ibid. xvii).[180] Here, once more, we see the future role of Indian-white relations in the Western laid out before us, yet Cooper's vision, soon to be simplified and cut down to formulaic necessities by countless dime novelists, is more complex and ultimately contradictory, as Slotkin shows:

> Cooper confirms paternalistic and male-dominant values, confirms racial prejudices, in his killing of Cora and Uncas; but he also allows us to glimpse in them possibilities that transcend the conventional limitations assigned to their sex and race, and he gives them more emotional appeal than his nominal hero and heroine. (Ibid., xxvii)

Despite the emotional appeal Slotkin identifies in Uncas and Cora, and a strong relation that could be pointed out between Hawkeye and Chingachgook (cf. Fiedler's *Love and Death* and *Return*), there is no doubt that the majority of Cooper's minor Indian characters are wooden and unrealistic, as many of his critics, most scathingly Mark Twain who coins the term "Cooper Indian" ("Literary Offenses"), have noted.

Writing against Cooper's lack of realism and his noble savage image, Twain, in one of his more racist moments, described the Indians he met in the West as "puny and dirty, ignoble, cowardly, "a cesspool of falsehood," treacherous, sadistic, ungrateful, and boastful" (Blair 82; cf. also Ibid. footnote 1). In order to satirize the "Cooper Indian," who enraged him both in his nobleness and his stupidity, Twain wrote not only the amusing "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," in which he claims: "[i]n matter of intellect, the difference between a Cooper Indian and the Indian that stands in front of the cigar shop is not spacious" (186), but also the beginning of an unfinished novel, "Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer among the Indians," in which Tom Sawyer's romantic views of Indians taken directly from "Cooper's novels" (Blair "Huck Finn," 109) result in serious trouble for Huck and Tom. In *his* handling of the Indian, Twain of course

[180] Critics such as D.H. Lawrence have carried this view into the 20th century. In Lawrence's otherwise insightful reading of Cooper's novel as a mythic dream, the reader finds such gems as: "Malice! That is the basic feeling in the Indian heart, towards the white" (44), and such shrines to racial purity and inbred antagonism as this: "The Red Man and the White Man are not blood-brothers: even when they are most friendly. When they are most friendly, it is as a rule the one betraying his race-spirit to the other" (56).

merely exchanges one stereotype for another. Twain's literary Realism thus does not result in a more realistic image of Native Americans (cf. also Berkhofer 105-06).

5.2. Indians in the Western

As mentioned, the Western carries over many of the conventions formulated in Cooper's writing, frequently further simplifying them. In the formula Western, too, the Indians can take on the two roles predefined in Cooper's fiction. Berkhofer sums up the function Indians were to take in the vast majority of dime and pulp Westerns:

> Since the role of the villain could be filled by White as well as Red savages, the Indian could be presented under either of his two guises. In the negative image the Indian was the usual bloodthirsty savage, often crazed, seeking vengeance or just malicious fun at the expense of innocent Whites, especially women. On the other hand, the good Indian was the typical Noble Savage acting as a friend to Whites fighting the bad White or Red outlaws. Regardless of which guise the Western presented the Indian in, he was master of the wilderness and possessor of physical prowess and/or crafty wisdom. In short, the Western perpetuated the traditional White images of the Indian. (98)

Curiously, despite their marginality and their stereotyped roles, Indians are, if not quite a defining criterion of the Western, at least a strong motivating absence in many Westerns. As Jane Tompkins remarks: "One of the things that lets you know when you're in a Western is the presence of Indians" (*West* 7). Yet, in the Western movies Tompkins watched,

> the Indians I expected did not appear. The ones I saw functioned as props, bits of local color, textural effects. As people they did not exist. Quite often they filled the role of villains, predictably, driving the engine of the plot, threatening the wagon train, the stagecoach, the cavalry detachment – a particularly dangerous form of local wildlife. But there were no Indian characters, no individuals with a personal history and a point of view. (Ibid. 8)

Particularly in later Westerns, like the ones Tompkins lists, Indians are mostly an absent referent. In Tompkins' words they are "there but not there – in the same way women are" (Ibid. 9). They play no major role in movies or novels, yet their presence is always implied, as when the white hero looks at "Indian country," a setting linguistically linked to and defined by its original inhabitants in its wildness and danger. Edward Buscombe has drawn the connection between Indians and setting in Western movies, but a similar argument could be made for Western novels: "Indians [...], in spite of the more liberal attitudes of the last few years, are still primarily important not as people in their own right but as part of the setting" (15). The land, and the frontier as meeting point between savagery and civilization, always remain defined by the Indian's mystical mark on it, even if in many Westerns, Indians do not appear.

The reason for this treatment of the Indian as part of a vanishing or absent race, part of the land, or culture-less savage, according to Berkhofer, is a question of cultural hegemony: "If the Indian was to be taken seriously, his motives and his culture would have to be presented as alternative values and lifestyles to White civilization, thereby introducing ambiguity into the genre" (98). To do this implies, of course, a revisionist spirit and at the very least invites a questioning of the nationalist and nationalizing myth of Manifest Destiny perpetuated in the Western. While the "blessings of civilization" (*Stagecoach*) are often seen ambivalently in the Western, the inevitability of Western civilization's progress is seldom questioned. A critique of civilization is presented in elegiac terms, as a loss of (national) innocence and (male) freedom. The destruction of Native cultures is read as a symbol of this loss, a necessary evil.

Only in the last decades have critics fully awakened to this realization. It is only now that some examine the ongoing colonizing effect of the Western and its stereotypical role allocation. In light of its cultural work, Christine Bold and Victoria Lamont mark the role of Native Americans in Westerns as one of the crucial areas of future research in their introduction to the 2009 special edition of the *Canadian Review of American Studies* on the popular Western, and question critics' earlier tendency of reading Native characters in archetypal terms:

> Native Americans in westerns cannot be dismissed as archetypes in a grand myth of good versus evil, or savagery versus civilization. As Chadwick Allen's "thick description" of the Tonto figure demonstrates, the western continued to legitimize the exploitation and disenfranchisement of Native Americans well into the twentieth century. To overlook this aspect of the western's cultural work is to perpetuate its colonizing effects. (117)

Revisionism targets the negative sentiments towards the Indian at the core of many popular Westerns, sentiments which Theodore Roosevelt has put into words as a statement of general truth: "The most vicious cowboy had more moral principle than the average Indian" (quoted in Hitt 84).[181] Given the role of Indians in many Western narratives, often only implied in their presence as a motivating or defining absent referent, and the ambiguity of white sentiments towards the Indian, the roles of the Indian as antagonist is questioned much earlier than the 1960s. It is, however, in the sixties that this critique gains strength in the revisionist Western, partly as a result of the Red Power movement and the more general questioning of the image of Native Americans in American culture, which happened at the same time. Here too, the

[181] Ironically Hitt, despite his best intentions, falls victim to the pitfalls of racism, when a few pages later he lauds Paul Wellman's *Bronco Apache*: "This Apache [the protagonist, Massai] would never wander off to the white man's school or fall in love with a white woman. He is Apache through and through, an unrepentant savage in the best sense of the word" (91).

Western as the genre most prominently forming the general public's opinion of Native Americans, as well as of white American history, was a target of particular critique.

The 1960s prominence in questioning and reforming Native Americans' roles in American society notwithstanding, there are a number of earlier efforts written in a voice sympathetic to the Indian and critical of the white's treatment of Native Americans that bear mentioning. Helen Hunt Jackson's attempt to write an *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for Indians with her *Ramona* (1884) of course stands out in this tradition. Frederic Remington's *John Ermine of the Yellowstone*, published the same year as Owen Wister's *The Virginian*, features a protagonist who was raised by Indians. Remington's hero, while no Indian himself, comes into conflict with white society because of his background and class. More important for the Western is the pro-Indian sentiment in a number of important films in the 1950s, most prominently Delmer Daves' seminal *Broken Arrow*, the first pro-Indian Western after the Second World War.

C. L. "Doc" Sonnichsen claims a similar trend of portraying Indians in an increasingly positive light in literature, naming a few texts which, in his reading, "take the side of the Indian." According to Sonnichsen, "[i]n the 1930s several good novels took the side of the Indian (for example Will Levington Comfort's *Apache*, 1931), and in 1947 Elliot Arnold in *Blood Brother* [the novel on which *Broken Arrow* is based] went all the way, making the white man the bad guy and the Indian the good guy. His views are still popular in the 1980s" (*Hopalong* 23). Elsewhere Sonnichsen points to an important distinction in the use of "good" and "bad" Indians in fiction (Ibid. 81), criticizing authors for holding on to their negative prejudices (Ibid. 82), and draws an important distinction between the types of Westerns and their portrayal of Native characters:

> Although hard-cover novels tend to take the side of the Indian, and have done so for at least twenty-five years [i.e. since at least 1950], the others – paperback westerns, the commercial products which ornament the revolving racks in the supermarkets across the land, have resisted today's [1975] reversals of old attitudes. (Ibid. 70)

Sonnichsen discusses the depiction of Indians in Westerns by focusing on what he calls "the ambivalent Apache" (Ibid. 64-82).

As Sonnichsen shows using the example of Apaches an ambivalent attitude lies at the very heart of the depiction of Indians in Western novels. The reader, he writes

> has been suffering from a massive guilt complex about what we have done to the Indian. The Native American owned this country, we tell ourselves; we stole it from him. He was wild and free; we caged him. He was a magnificent pagan in tune with nature; we baptized him and ruined him in the process. [...] The consequence of this sort of thinking and writing is contradiction. There is no middle ground. If the Apache is a gentleman of distinguished culture, the white man is a savage, and vice versa. (Ibid. 65)

As a result, Sonnichsen claims, the pro-Indian sentiment of the mid- to late 20th century is no new discovery. As he shows "[p]eople have taken the side of the Indian and accused the white man since very early times" (Ibid. 66); non-fiction examples Sonnichsen discusses range back to the mid-19th century. What seems new is a lip service to the Natives' just cause: "Even when the Apache is portrayed as a red-handed terror, his 'imaginative cruelties' are perpetrated by 'the People in their frustration and fight for survival'" (Ibid. 69). "Admiration for the Indian [...] is the 'in' thing now, and the white men are 'the dregs of their respective societies ... uncouth, ignorant, bigoted, and looking for something for nothing'" (Ibid. 70). Where Apaches and other Natives are still depicted in negative terms, as in the popular paperback Western, they are endowed with "everything we find intolerable in ourselves" (Ibid. 72). Apaches supposedly smell bad, eat in disgusting ways, lack human feelings for their enemies, as expressed in their resourcefulness at torturing, and speak a language that is unpleasant to the ears; after all, "[t]he Enemy would not be the Enemy if he spoke good English," as Sonnichsen puts it (Ibid. 73).

As a result of this legacy and the problematic cultural politics of appropriating the voice of Native American people,[182] Indians are relatively few and far between in American revisionist Western novels. In Westerns, which are revisionist in other aspects, Indians often play fairly traditional parts at the periphery of the novel – even if the reader's reaction to their presence is assumed to be different, as in the vile slaughter of Indian "savages" in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian,* which assumes moral indignation on the reader's part despite or rather because of the narrative's brutal voice. Even more frequently, Native characters are left out all together or only mentioned in passing.

[182] While the issue of the appropriation of Native American and First Nation stories and voices by non-Native authors is problematic in a contemporary North American context, in which questions of politics of identity have in many cases been all but erased by Euro-American culture, hegemony, and land claims plays in, the matter is even more complex: as Hochbruck shows in *I Have Spoken*. Native authors enter a Euro-American literary market, write in English, rather than their "own" language, which some of the authors might not even know, and build on or rewrite images and stereotypes often formed by white authors. Furthermore, accounts of Native stories and traditions of former times, which have since been lost, were recorded by white authors and have to be reclaimed through such texts. As Hochbruck argues, there is, ultimately, no dividing line as clear-cut as many would wish between Native stories, available only to indigenous authors, and non-Native writing, which necessarily misappropriates and misrepresents Native voices. This cross-fertilization and linking between native and non-native sources has not been adequately reflected in the Canadian "appropriation of voices" debate outlined below.

5.3. The Western and the Frontier in Native American Literature

American novels that deal with Native Americans in any meaningful way seldom do so in the Western genre. This is even truer for the work of Native American authors; most reject the form of the Western as of necessity as prejudiced, written and rewritten so many times in an anti-Indian fashion that they do not want any part in it – not even to attempt to set the score straight. While some Native and non-Native authors whose works I discuss in this chapter have attempted to carve out sites of cultural resistance (cf. Chester 105) engaging the dominant "Frontier Anti-Indianism" (Cook-Lynn 18), most Native American and First Nations authors use their awareness of the Western's cultural impact to attack the horse opera from outside its generic boundaries. Rather than providing new blood to the old genre, even in attempts to correct some of the Western's faults, authors such as Canadian Thomas King of Cherokee and Greek descent, Coeur D'Alene / Spokane author Sherman Alexie, Laguna, Mexican and Anglo-American author Leslie Marmon Silko, and others create their own distinct traditions.

Those Native American and Canadian First Nations authors who approach the Western do so for specifically political reasons. Canadian-Delaware playwright Daniel David Moses probably speaks for many indigenous authors when detailing his reasons for targeting the Western formula: When paraphrasing his answer to a journalist's question about why he would choose to write in the "dead" genre of the Western, he states that his motives

> had something to do with the idea that even a dead genre leaves telltale marks on reality. Or why else does history not tell the truth as I knew it growing up Indian? The myth of the frontier is a story of exploration and conquest. The way my folks remember it, however, it's a story of strange visitors who overstay their welcome and take over the house. "Indian" that I am in this country, [...] I had and still do have a strategic, if not perpetual interest, thanks to what passes for North American history, American mythology, and even the imagery of children's games, in knowing something more about the reality of cowboy life. ("Syphilitic Western" 156)

In examining the Western, Moses, like other Native authors, was weary about being drawn into the genre. However, he notes: "The tragic West is a story I, as an Indian, fell have [sic] heard too many times before. Telling it again, even with [a] slant just didn't quite feel like a healthy thing to do" (Ibid. 163). It is in this mindset that Steve Neale has observed how the two independent Native American films of the 1990s, *Smoke Signals* (based on Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*) and *Naturally Native* (both 1998), "have relocated to modern-day settings in order to tackle contemporary Native American issues – and in order to avoid the conventions of the Western" ("Westerns and Gangster Films" 34). Similarly, most Native American

and First Nations writers as well as those non-Native authors who are seriously engaged in revisions of Native characters in a generic Western setting have moved far from the genre's center temporally, stylistically or otherwise. It bears noting that even those authors, white and Native, who successfully engage the image of the Indian in a text that can still be identified more or less loosely as a Western, such as Moses own "Western," *The Indian Medicine Shows*, are further from the genre's formulaic center, as defined in Chapter 2, than most of the other texts discussed in this study. Others, such as Thomas King in *Green Grass, Running Water* attack the genre from the outside. While King's text is not a Western *per se*, and will thus only be briefly mentioned, he makes his target very clear by including countless references to Western movies, the most central being when four elders plan to hijack a John Wayne movie. King's target is ultimately larger. With his four Native storytellers, he lampoons not only the Western, in the character names Hawkeye and the Lone Ranger, but Western culture's depiction of Natives in general, as the names of his two other characters, Ishmael and Robinson Crusoe, make clear. King furthermore targets the contemporary treatment of Natives in several of his story lines, which range from the treatment of Natives on the border, during traditional dances in which an obnoxious white man insists on taking pictures, or the planned building of a dam which Eli, one of the main characters sabotages. The inclusion of coyote and Native ways of storytelling finally marks it as part of a different, uniquely Native literary tradition.[183]

Cherokee and Anglo-American author Robert Franklin Gish provides another interesting example of Native writers' occasional brush with the Western as an anti-Indian narrative, but their uneasiness to rewrite Native American roles within the genre for fear of allowing it to claim center stage. Gish for the longest time wrote "around" the Western. In his first collection of short stories, *First Horses*, he only mentions the Western once in the eponymous story with the distanced rejection typical for Native American literature when he describes the socialization of Native American children in an Indian School:

> There they could eat popcorn, watch Hollywood cowboys that looked a lot like Tooter ride horses, kill Indians, and shoot up the glorious, gory frontier in Saturday-afternoon, black-and-white, grade B entertainment. There, on the screen during the feature and during the *March of Time* newsreel they could learn and relearn their place in history. (31)

Here the Western serves as one of the many instruments of continued oppression of Natives in white America. It teaches history as well as hegemonial relations in a manner whose misrepresentation and falsification is highlighted by linking it to the image of

[183] Carlton Smith discusses *Green Grass, Running Water*, from which he also derives the title of his study, in *Coyote Kills John Wayne* 58-78.

history conveyed in the more "official," but equally constructed *March of Time* newsreels.

In his second collection *Bad Boys and Black Sheep* Gish again reflects on the Western's impact on Americans' self-perceptions without directly adopting the form. In "Nueva Entrada" the Western serves as a narrative that informs and distorts the perspectives of both his part-Zuni high school teacher, LaVonne Bishop, and her African American colleague, Jerrod Templeton. While LaVonne constantly interprets Jerrod through the figure of Cabeza de Vaca's companion, Estevanico or Esteban the Moor, and relates tales of Esteban's "magic" irresistibility to Pueblo women clearly aware of their obvious reflection on herself, Jerrod sees the West as a land of cowboys versus Indians, wondering "why all the Indians he'd seen out West dressed like cowboys, wore boots and hats, and drove Ford pickups" (92). He hopes that the West might serve as the land of limitless opportunities that is portrayed in commercials and popular culture so that he can wipe the slate of his troubled past, and imagines the mixed-blooded LaVonne as a Pocahontas figure, "a river-riding, funky Indian princess and Lady Godiva crossbreed, riding bareback along the ditches" (Ibid. 83).

When Gish writes what could be classified as a variation of the popular Western in his third short story collection *Dreams of Quivira*, a Western if not in form – a monologue / prayer addressed at a statue of "Señora" – at least in content, it is not a rewriting of Native American, but of Mexican-American roles. In "Elegy for Billy" Gish chooses the historical Frisco Shootout, or "Baca-Cowboy War" between Elfego Baca and an uncertain number of cowboys, at the same time "one of the most sensationalized gunfights in the American West," according to Maria Montoya (71), and an event that is little-known outside the Mexican-American community. Gish provides a very conscious revision of ethnic images, highlighting the racist undercurrent in the Old West that is not traditionally addressed in the Western, but the ethnicity he chooses is not his "own." Instead he gives a voice to the Mexican-American Elfego Baca, who is marginalized on account of his ethnicity not only in the society depicted in the storyworld,[184] but also in broader cultural narratives about the Old West.[185] Baca is, after all, not one of the more famous gunfighters populating the Western myth, although the historical basis of his shootout against a superior number of cowboys seems to lend itself as the material of a gunfighter epic at least as well as other highly mythicized, semi-historical encounters, and was, at least for a time, used by Baca

[184] I borrow the term storyworld from David Herman who defines storyworlds as "mental models of who did what to and with whom, when where, why, and in what fashion in the world to which recipients relocate – or make a deictic shift – as they work to comprehend a narrative" (9).

[185] A similar position is occupied by the Canadian mixed race members of the McLean gang whose story is rescued from an ethnocentric mythmaking in George Bowering's *Shoot!*, as discussed in more detail below.

himself to promote his career within the Mexican-American community (cf. Montoya).[186] By highlighting the racism Baca faces, Gish provides his hero with a justifiable reason for his actions. The short story draws reader sympathy from the traditional heroes, shown in the short story to be racist white cowboys, to Baca and his fellow Mexicans. As opposed to the traditional opposition of civilization versus savagery along the lines of a frontier, in Gish's story the savagery lies in a racist society in which Mexicans and other minorities can be violated or killed without fear of consequences.

In celebrating one of the lesser-known historical characters of the West, Gish's short story shifts the perspective of the traditional Western. Gish carves out a site of cultural resistance for a Mexican-American hero, introducing an ethnic "Other" as the central character of what could by its plot be a formula Western, were it not defamiliarized through Gish's use of voice and narration. Significantly, however, Gish does not use his own background, Cherokee and Anglo-American, to do so.

Given the reluctance of Native Americans and First Nation authors, like King, Silko, and Gish to fully enter the white imaginary space of the Western noted above most of the texts discussed in the following, with the notable exception of James Welch's *Fools Crow* and Daniel Moses' *The Indian Medicine Show*, are once again written by (male) Caucasian writers who target and rewrite the traditional role and depiction of Indians in the Western. In their treatments they aim to transform the Western for an audience that is becoming more conscious of an increasingly diverse present *and* past.

5.4. "Going Indian" in Blake and Berger

The two most well-known "pro-Indian" Western novels are perhaps Thomas Berger's Little Big Man, a favorite with literary critics of the Western, and Michael Blake's Dances with Wolves, which became a national bestseller in the wake of Kevin Costner's successful movie adaptation for which Blake had also written the script. Given their prominence, I will discuss these two novels. I do not consider them to be among the most successful revisionist novels, however. Both Blake and Berger write fairly traditional Westerns. Westerns with a stronger Indian presence to be sure, and with a more sympathetic tone towards their Natives, in which they occasionally allow them to become almost fully fleshed characters, yet ultimately neither author manages to

[186] That Elfego Baca continues to be remembered in at least parts of the Mexican-American / Chicano/a community is suggested by the fact that Elfego features as Sonny Baca's grandfather in Rudolfo Anaya's Sonny Baca detective novels, such as *Zia Summer*. Like Gish, Anaya builds in Baca's supposed friendship with Billy the Kid, a connection Baca claimed to have had, which historians can, however, not ultimately confirm or refute.

radically revise the politics of the traditional Western's depiction of Native people. After discussing Little Big Man and Dances with Wolves and pointing out some of their shortcomings as radical revisions of Native roles in the Western, I want to turn to three very different novels, which more effectively target the traditional depiction of Natives in the Western: Jonathan Lethem's Girl in Landscape, Frank Bergon's Shoshone Mike, and James Welch's Fools Crow.

5.4.1. Romantic Stereotypes in Michael Blake's *Dances with Wolves*

Little Big Man and *Dances with Wolves* share some structural elements, but are very different in the way they engage the role of the savage Indian in the Western. Both novels have elements of the captivity narrative and center around a white protagonist who relates his life with the Cheyenne and Comanche, respectively, to an implied white audience. The most obvious difference between the two novels is that Berger chooses to portray his protagonists' misadventures in a picaresque, parodic and comic voice, whereas Blake chooses a serious voice to cast his wondrous glance at the Comanche. The novels are also different in how successfully they give a voice and faces to their Indians. Berger in part succeeds in creating memorable and believable characters, the comic tone and willful exaggerations of his narrator and a critical postmodern distance notwithstanding. Blake, in contrast, particularly in his 1991 afterword to the novel, has something decidedly recalling Grey Owl, the Englishman who reinvented himself as an Objibwe. In his condemnation of all things white and his creation of a literary alter ego he can use to "go Indian" Blake follows an age-old tradition of romantics seeking authenticity among Native Americans.[187] As a result of his good intentions, Blake produces yet another version of the ethno-kitsch story of the white man finding his true self among the Indians. As Shari Huhndorf has observed, the Native characters "remain more or less incidental to the story. Their primary importance resides in their relation to Dunbar, who is the film's hero and center of consciousness" (Huhndorf 3). While Huhndorf discusses Costner's film adaptation of Blake's novel what she says also holds true for the novel. What is more, despite the author's obvious fascination with Native life, the narrative invests so heavily in its protagonist and his heroism that it continually makes its Indian characters look incompetent in much the same way that the white outsider played by Tom Cruise made feudal Japan into a farce in *The Last Samurai*. In

[187] Laura Browder explores the politics of reinventing oneself as an Indian in her examination of several historical cases of fake Indians. Wolfgang Hochbruck in his *I Have Spoken* discusses the rites of introduction usually associated with the adoption of individuals changing fronts and adopted captives into the Native tribes (48-49). As Hochbruck explains, the giving of a new name can be a part of the acceptance into the tribe, a tradition Blake uses when his narrative switches from calling Lieutenant Dunbar by his European name to referring to him as Dances with Wolves halfway through the novel.

fact, Native critics, such as Louis Owens, have called *Dances with Wolves* "insidious" (quoted in Bayers 43), and several have argued that the film uses Native culture to make a point about its white characters, Dunbar / Dances with Wolves and Stands with a Fist, using them to symbolically relieve white America of its guilt over the historical treatment of Natives, while pretending to have an interest and give voice to Native culture.

Dances with Wolves is the story of Lieutenant Dunbar, who during the Civil War is transferred to the West. Following the command of an insane superior he is sent to an outlying fort which, as he moves in with supplies, is being abandoned by the starved and demoralized troops. Dunbar tries to keep himself occupied as the only person at the fort, repairing it, hunting, and befriending a wolf. He also befriends a local group of Comanche whom he eventually joins and marries a white woman who had been adopted by the Indians as a child. Dunbar is so valiant and beloved among the Indians that he quickly rises in their ranks, eventually leading a group during an attack by the Pawnee. When the army comes to reclaim the fort, Dunbar, now fully Indianized and called Dances with Wolves, who has returned to pick up some things before moving off with his band, is captured and is to be tried as a traitor, but his new Indian brothers come to the rescue. When Dances with Wolves wants to leave them in order to not endanger the band through his presence they ask him to stay, showing that he is now a fully integrated part of tribal society. As any popular Western should, the novel ends on an elegiac note when looking at the Plains Indians' future: "The good times of that summer were the last they would have. Their time was running out and would soon be gone forever" (285).

Through this elegiac ending, a turn that is much more pronounced in the movie, the Indians are "safely relegated to the tragic mythic past," according to Peter Bayers (43). The future belongs to the white couple Dances with Wolves and Stands with a Fist. As Bayers observes, "the mythic noble Indians in the movie – the Lakota [who replace the Comanche of the novel; J.F.] – are ultimately tragic characters who in classic noble vein 'vanish' from the west, thereby implicitly and *inevitably* opening the west to Euro-American civilization" (Ibid.; emphasis in original).

Dances with Wolves uses the common black and white distinction between good and bad Indians. Blake's "good guys" are the Comanche, whom Dunbar joins; his "bad guys" are white society on the one hand and the evil Pawnee on the other. White society is, throughout the book, described as morally corrupt, a monstrosity that devours the country, whereas the Indian way of life is at one with nature, making it more meaningful, and striking an eco-critical note popular with reading audiences at the time

of Blake's writing.[188] All the white men, except Dunbar, who will soon reinvent himself as a red man, are either disgusting, insane, filthy, decrepit, or a combination thereof. While Dunbar revels in the beauties of the West's natural environment, the forgotten outpost he later takes command of serves as an unsubtle symbol for everything that is wrong with white culture when we first encounter it. The so-called fort is little more than a collection of hovels and dugouts, either already collapsed or on the verge of disintegration, inhabited by a bunch of distraught soldiers, led by Captain Cargill, who have so little motivation or morale left that they neither listen to their officer, nor keep a clean camp. Everything is filthy and the nearby river is used as a dump by the soldiers: "A coating of miscellaneous trash lined the banks, and even without benefit of an updraft, the rank odor of human waste wafted into the captain's nostrils. Human waste mixed with whatever else was rotting down there" (7). When Dunbar arrives, one of his first symbolic acts is to dispose of the trash left by the other soldiers, which he finds "a complete disgrace" (24). His act of cleaning out the stream regenerates nature. In another instance of symbolism hammered into the text, the stream becomes "clear, and though he wasn't certain, the lieutenant could swear it was running faster [...] Freed of its filthy parasites, it looked like a real stream again, and the lieutenant felt a little swelling of pride in what he had done" (25). Like nature, symbolized by the cleansed stream, Dunbar too regenerates in his new life, ultimately realizing that he "might have stumbled on to a better life" (141).

As such passages suggest the lieutenant can only find his true self where he is not burdened by civilization. After living in the fort for a while he sees his reflection in the water and realizes that "he looked good. His eyes looked as keen as he'd ever seen them, and as though he were acknowledging his affection for someone, he smiled boyishly at the reflection" (46). Dunbar, as we realize without difficulty, is at one with nature and consequently himself. But his transformation is not complete until he bonds with his new people, the Comanche. Kicking Bird, the first Comanche Dunbar encounters, is "magnificent-looking" (52). In fact, all of Blake's Comanche, in Dunbar's estimation, are attractive, intelligent, and compassionate. In the discrepancy between their description and their weakness in the plot one cannot help but be reminded of Mark Twain's criticism of Cooper, for Blake's noble Comanche's share the most basic flaws of Cooper's Indians: they "never notice anything. Cooper thinks they are marvellous

[188] There are a number of mildly eco-critical episodes throughout the novel to drive home its point about white and native culture. The waste left over by the fort's former occupants is the first sign in the novel of white culture's inevitable taint on all things it reaches. In a later episode Dunbar finds a holy forest desecrated by white hunters, in another he finds the remains of skinned buffalo, once again left behind by white hunters, which deeply disturb both the Indians and Dunbar, who sees this killing as "murder" (150), and juxtaposes it with the good killing of buffalo by the Comanche. The point of the episode is, supposedly, the waste of edible meat.

creatures for noticing, but he was almost always in error about his Indians. There was seldom a sane one among them" ("Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offences" 185). Blake's Indians similarly are supposed to be marvelous creatures, but like Cooper's, they have at times a marked tendency towards idiocy. Having surprised the bathing Dunbar naked during their first encounter, the only explanation Kicking Bird can come up with is that he must be a god, despite the fact that he has not only heard of whites before, but in fact has a white woman, Stands with a Fist, living in his tribe. Much later, when the Comanche are attacked by the Pawnee they also need Dunbar to take command during their defense to turn the impending slaughter of their people into a great victory.[189] This makes the reader wonder whether the Comanche are not able to fight on their own; and one must assume they or not, at least not with the white man's efficiency. This point is also made by a member of the Lakota nation with reference to Costner's film: "And then to treat my nation like we don't know how to fight. We, the Lakota, [...] are [...] the first nation to ever militarily defeat the United States of America on the field of battle and Lawrence of the Plains has to teach us how to fight?" (*Reel Injun*).

One of the most striking points about Blake's novel is his racial conservativism. Despite his good intentions, expressed in occasional switches in perspective, the attempt to write from a Native perspective and his at least partly successful attempts to portray a number of the members of the Comanche as individuals, Blake seems to hold a firm belief in the power of blood. Stands with a Fist is still a white woman inside and perceived as such by all (cf. p. 73), although she is fully socialized as a Comanche to the extent where she has forgotten the English language and married a Comanche, who conveniently is dead by the novel's beginning and, in the spirit of the Western's fear of miscegenation, has not left her with any children.[190] The attraction between Dunbar and Stands with a Fist reads like the latest installment in the long literature of racial purity. Even though Stands with a Fist and Dunbar / Dances with Wolves both embrace the Comanche culturally, they remain dominated and defined by their blood, "their mutual whiteness" (200), both in the narrator's mind and in the Comanche's, who agree that

[189] This scene bears a strong resemblance to a similar scene in the 1970 cult film *A Man Called Horse*, which was based on Dorothy M. Johnson's 1968 short story of the same title. In *A Man Called Horse* the English outsider, who is captured and initially treated as a horse, comes to be respected in his Sioux band. During the film's first real battle he takes command over the disorganized Native warriors turning a certain defeat into a victory. The white character's superior grasp of tactics does not even necessitate him to provide guns to his band – ordering the Sioux archers in two rows and having each fire once is enough to break the attack of their enemies.

[190] This fear, which in true patriarchal fashion only applies to white women having sexual contact with Native men and non *vice versa*, also deeply troubles Berger's Jack Crabb, who at one point muses:

> all I could think of was how Olga [Crabb's former wife who ends up marrying an Indian] might at this very moment be carrying the seed of that savage in her. She was forever soiled. I could leave my lodge at any time, go back to civilization, take a bath, and be white again. Not her. The *Cheyenne* was inside her. Indians sure made me sick. (233; emphasis in original)

"the potential union made sense. After all, they were both white" (235). In statements like this the novel reveals its racial essentialism. Dunbar can become Dance with Wolves and Indianize himself, yet, when it comes to marriage, he and the much more thoroughly acculturated Stands with a Fist are still whites. Although they are part of the tribe in all other regards, they remain separated through their racial heritage.

It is within this context that one of the major criticisms of *Dances with Wolves* becomes relevant. If Dunbar remains a white man, separate from the Comanche in their mind, as well as the reader's, as the above passages suggest, the criticism *Dances with Wolves* has drawn from Native scholars gains currency. As a number of critics have pointed out – mostly with regard to the film version of Blake's novel – Dunbar's reinvention of himself as a Native in a narrative clearly directed at white audiences is ultimately not about Native culture, and certainly not the radical break in the Western's depiction of Natives for which it was celebrated by Hollywood, but rather falls comfortably within a long tradition of white characters who "go native." Shari Huhndorf sums Dunbar's role up as follows:

> Like throngs of would-be Natives since the end of the nineteenth century, Dunbar sees in noble Indian life a means of escaping a degenerate and corrupt white world. Escape is not his ultimate goal, however. By adopting the Indian ways, the socially alienated character uncovers his own "true" identity and redeems European-American society. [...] While those who go native frequently claim benevolence towards Native peoples, they reaffirm white dominance by making some (usually distorted) vision of Native life subservient to the needs of the colonizing culture. (5)

Dunbar's function, according to Huhndorf is to symbolically cleanse white culture of its colonial and genocidal past and invent a less problematic past for white American society, in which historical guilt is "assuaged":

> Redemption plays a key role in *Dances with Wolves*. The film implies that these two characters [Dances with Wolves and Stands with a Fist], cleansed of the corruption of European-American life by adopting Indian ways, hold the promise of a new and better white world. It is, in fact, the regeneration of white society that proves the ultimate goal of Dunbar's journey into the primitive. But the narrative serves another purpose. It starkly evokes the conquest of Native America, the precondition of the birth of the white nation, only to assuage the guilt stemming from that painful history. By going native, Dunbar sheds the culpability associated with his official army duties as an "Indian fighter." Significantly, because his perspective provides the film's narrative center and thus the white audiences' point of identification, it also symbolically purges white America of its responsibility for the terrible plights of Native Americans, past and present. (4)

It is essential to this role of redeemer for Euro-America that Dunbar remains white while also "Indianizing" himself. His primary function in his act of "going Native" is to act as a proxy for a white audience in cleansing Euro-American history and culture, and for this, Dunbar has to remain white.

On top of its ethnocentrism, the novel furthermore fails in its racial revisionism through its reliance on the old distinction between good and bad "savages," which is essential to the novel for dramatic purposes. While Conrad Ostwalt reads this as Blake's attempt "to avoid simply romanticizing Native American life" (215), I believe it makes more sense to set Blake's distinction between good Comanche and bad Pawnee in historical perspective; after all Comanche life *is* highly romantic and good in Blake's portrayal. Instead Blake treads the age old paths of Cooper's distinction between good Mohicans and bad Hurons in *The Last of the Mohicans,* Karl May's good Apaches and evil Kiowa in *Winnetou I*, and countless other authors who employ noble savages or loyal tribes as "good Indians" in their stories, setting them off against "bad Indians." In the fourth chapter the Pawnee are already introduced as the bad guys: they cruelly and unnecessarily kill the hapless and harmless (although, as one of Blake's white men, somewhat disgusting) driver Timmons who has brought Dunbar to the fort. They are established by the omniscient narrator as "the most terrible of all the tribes" (19). Later the Pawnee are revealed to be responsible for the murder of Stands with a Fist's family, and finally they attack the Comanche village Dunbar is associated with while most of the warriors are gone. The Pawnee's attack is portrayed as cowardly – they bring eighty warriors to attack the Comanche camp from which the best warriors have left to attack the Pawnee themselves. The Pawnee are fierce we are told: "they never come for horses. They come for blood" (237). In contrast, the Comanche's slaughter of the Pawnee with the superior weapon power of the army's rifles provided by Dunbar, is portrayed as more meaningful and justified than any fighting Dunbar has previously been involved in. His initial disgust at seeing the bodies of his dead enemies turns into euphoria when he "look[s] at the victory in a new way":

> This killing had not been done in the name of some dark political objective. This was not a battle for territory or riches or to make men free. This battle had no ego.
> It had been waged to protect homes that stood only a few feet away. And to protect the wives and children and loved ones huddled inside. It had been fought to preserve the food stores that would see them through the winter, food stores everyone had worked hard to gather.
> For every member of the band this was a great personal victory. (245)

This stance allows as the only justified fights those for home and family. While it condemns battles for territory or economy, such as the war against the Natives Dunbar had been involved in as a member of the military, its ideology is ultimately conservative in that it accepts only the values of home and family as causes for which a fight might be viable. This automatic equation of all fights, including those for personal or political freedom, with battles of ego – meaningless self-assertions as opposed to the meaningful protection of the traditional values of home and family – is not the only conceit this section suffers: The fact that the Pawnee of course had homes and families, too, and

that a successful Comanche attack on the Pawnee consequently would have seemed similar from the Pawnee's perspective, a justified defense of home and family, does not enter the mind of Dunbar who functions as a reflector figure in this passage. Rather, the novel avoids such troubling questions of perspective by an age-old staple of the Western: the Pawnee fulfill the traditional role of bad men as archetypal enemies: "When a bad guy dies, deservedly, he is not a dead person. No mother mourns for him. He has no mother. He is a personification of dangerous wickedness. He hurts us and hates us. We fear and hate him. He is GRENDEL, the enemy of God and man" (Sonnichsen, *Hopalong* 71).

In contrast the Comanche, justified in their defense, at one with nature, threatened and abused by white society, are depicted as wholly good. Here, as in the earlier juxtaposition of vile white men and noble Indians, Blake's novel reminds the reader once again of Homi Bhabha's questioning of simplistic postcolonial approaches, which reject theory and gloss over complexities, keeping old dualistic structures alive in much the same way Blake changes the roles, but not the rules of the game in his novel. Bhabha asks:

> Must we always polarize in order to polemicize? [...] Can the aim of freedom of knowledge be the simple inversion of the relation of oppressor and oppressed, centre and periphery, negative image and positive image? Is our only way out of such dualism the espousal of an implacable oppositionality or the invention of an original counter-myth of radical purity? (*Location of Culture* 19)

5.4.2. Perspective, Irony and Thomas Berger's *Little Big Man*

In contrast to Blake's one-dimensional opposition of a corrupt white culture with a flawless Comanche culture, Thomas Berger takes a much more distanced and critical stance to both Native and white cultures in his *Little Big Man*. Berger's is perhaps the only novel discussed in this study that has received more than adequate critical attention as a Western targeting generic clichés and stereotypes.[191] The novel is told by Jack Crabb. During his life, which he relates in the episodic structure of a picaresque novel, Crabb leaves out few of the stations of classic frontier life, becoming an Indian, overland driver, miner, drunk, Army scout and so forth, he personifies the American frontiersman so well that the dim-witted fictional "editor" Ralph Fielding Snell calls him "either the most neglected hero in the history of this country or a liar of insane

[191] An incomplete list of the secondary sources discussing *Little Big Man* at some length include: Sullivan 115-21, Bakker 176-82, Deming, Wallace "Implied" and "Meaning," Cleary "Finding the Center" and "Saddlesore" 183-223, Oliva, Wylder, Gurian *Western American Writing* 81-93, Grace "Western Myth," Ickstadt, Landon "The Measure" and *Understanding*, Sinowitz, Betts, Zimmerman, Poston, Parker "Circles" and "Religion," Dean, Shaw, Royot, Turner, Bruhns, Fetrow, and many others.

proportions" (440). Crabb frequently switches sides between white society and his band of Cheyenne, almost always in an attempt to escape death or injury. In his highly vernacular style he sneers at the peculiarities of both societies. The novel ends with Crabb being a participant in Custer's last stand, and the only white man to survive the battle of Greasy Hill, the novel's final battle, when he is rescued by a Cheyenne who owes him his life.

Throughout the novel, Crabb's is by no means a politically correct voice. Moreover, as even Snell half-realizes, Crabb is an incredibly opinionated and unreliable narrator. He holds strong but not entirely thought out, often contradictory positions, which reveal that his main loyalty is to himself. Berger frequently uses the narration as a source of humor and postmodern irony, frustrating any attempt at a straight reading of the novel. Crabb frequently shares his contentions about both white and Indian culture with the reader, and he does not mince his words. He frequently calls the Indians he encounters savages, particularly when he is mad at them or wishes to distance himself from their ways, calling them "crude, nasty smelly, lousy, and ignorant" (151). While such statements abound, directed perhaps at white society's infatuation with and unquestioning romanticization of Native life, Crabb also defends or explains Native culture for the outsider, even if these defenses and explanations are often delivered in a presumptuous tone. Sending out such contradictory messages confuses and frustrates any reader trying to locate Crabb's or the novel's ideological position, aligning the novel – despite its rather traditional form – with the politics of postmodernism. Apart from the contradictions in his own words, Crabb's condemnations and explanations are juxtaposed with the depiction of various Cheyenne, most notably the quizzical chief Old Lodge Skins, one of the novel's most likeable characters. In spite of Crabb's feeling of racial superiority and his refusal to admit it, Crabb is occasionally outsmarted by the Native characters in his tale. When Crabb works for the Union Pacific, for instance, he observes a Pawnee who studies "the locomotive smokestack for hours." After Crabb rides over to talk to the man he is cut off in his explanation of the function of the locomotive when the Indian instead asks him for some tobacco and after having received it "galloped off from where he had been standing three-four hours. Maybe that's what he had in mind from the beginning" (195). Such episodes undermine but do not ultimately overpower Crabb's frequent complaints about the primitiveness of the Indians; the novel always remains ambiguous on the issue, switching sides and frustrating the reader. There is, for instance, at least initially, a warmness and sense of community in Old Lodge Skin's Cheyenne band that has no equivalent in the individualistic white society. When Crabb comments on his own brief bout as a drunk, he remarks:

> The Cheyenne would have been depressed to see a fellow tribesman gone to rot; they would have believed it reflected discredit to all Human Beings. On the contrary, an American just loves to see another who ain't worth a damn. (194)

In such observations and Cheyenne tales, which defamiliarize white culture through Native eyes – such as the "Cheyenne" legend of first contact related by Old Lodge Skins where his forebears, in a Freudian conceit, take the whites, clad in thick furs for animals, their guns for giant penises (58) – the narrative pokes fun at white culture. It does not align itself with Native cultures in the way Blake does, however. The ultimate outsider, Crabb ironically frequently feels closer to, and in fact a member of, the society he is not currently living among. While Leslie Fiedler has tried to make Crabb out as "a man neither white nor Indian because he is both, and therefore capable of a kind of cosmic vision denied him by his European heritage" (*Return* 162-63), this says more of Fiedler's wishful thinking than it does of the narrative itself, and even Fiedler himself ultimately realizes this, for Crabb, and maybe Berger, seem to share Blake's essentialist understanding of race, according to which Crabb can be either Cheyenne or white, but never both at the same time. Crabb begins his narrative with the words: "I am a white man and never forgot it" (1). He may not care much for some aspects of white society, but while he has moments of doubt in his identity in which he complains of his "usual" trouble to decide "whether I was finally white or Indian" (237), at least from the middle of the novel onwards, he sees Cheyenne society as doomed, and increasingly identifies himself as a white man, even while nostalgically mourning the passing of the Cheyenne way of life. Furthermore, Crabb is simply too comfortable to put up with the harder nomadic life of the Cheyenne after he has returned to white society for the first time. Crabb is in many respects the postmodern version of the historical "white Indian" John Tanner. In fact Crabb is the exact reversal of Tanner. While Tanner, who was kidnapped as a child by a band of Shawnee and grew up an Ojibwa, "tried desperately to adjust to white society, [but] found it impossible" (Metcalf) after reuniting with his family, Crabb tries to adapt to Cheyenne society but, after his first return to white society, finds it impossible because he is too comfortable to do without the amenities of civilization for long. Where Tanner was a tragic figure whose "later years were lonely and bitter" because of his "confusion of heritages" (Ibid.), Crabb is a trickster who always comes out on top.

Despite his potential for racial hybridity Crabb never really questions the binarism of whites vs. Indians. While the Cheyenne have a somewhat more flexible approach to Crabb's race, making him in their recollection a Cheyenne with "light skin, but that does not mean he was a white man" (159), at least in Crabb's retelling, the only perspective available to the reader, they ultimately share his essentialist view of race.

Especially after Crabb's second return to Old Lodge Skin's band he feels that he is outlawed on account of his race – although it is possible that the cowardice behind his changing of sides has more to do with his compromised position. Despite the fact that he has at one time three wives, an obvious status symbol, he still feels an outsider only safe through his surrogate father, Old Lodge Skin's, protection.

There is in places an element of exposing both the whites' racism and genocide, and Crabb's own unjustified racism. As in most aspects the novel remains ultimately ambiguous, a joke more interested in its own wit than a direct political statement or radical revision, and as such it is sure to leave many readers uncomfortable in places. On the one hand, Crabb insists too much on the superiority of white culture, echoing pre-established Western contentions about Indian "savages," despite his jovial tone, while often at the same time and despite himself he exposes the nature of racism and scapegoating, such as his defense of the "uninspiring" Arapaho Indians. Crabb states they

> wasn't doing any harm except to stink and carry lice – which was also true of a good many of the early white citizenry of Colorado, I might add. Still, there was always talk of wiping them out, and the way I remember is that this was less said by the prosperous than by them who had had no luck at finding gold. If you sold all your belongings to go West for fortune and ended up busted, why, it seemed like the fault of the Indians. (154)

Given most Indians' general peacefulness in their interaction with white settlers, at least when they get coffee not alcohol, in Crabb's narrative such passages suggest that the "savage Indians" are often a creation by white society. Like Percival Everett's jaundiced narrator Curt Marder in *God's Country*, Crabb's fellow whites frequently reinterpret and falsify the past to make the actions of Indians fit their pre-established ideas of how an Indian should act. When Jack meets his sister, for instance, she is convinced that the Cheyenne raped her, whereas we are told in Crabb's earlier account that not only did the Indians not lay a hand on Caroline, they did not even abduct her, the idea was entirely hers – the result, as is so often the case in the revisionist Western, of a character forming her opinions after reading too many dime novels with their tales of wild Indians and captive maidens in distress.

In such passages some of the narrative bases for the genocide of Native Americans are revealed, even though Crabb often shares their rhetoric. Official white action is at least implicitly criticized and shown to lack any real motivation, excuse or heroism in the brief references Crabb makes of historical massacres, such as the Sand Creek massacre (177; 213), even if the tone remains humorous and neither side is idolized. It is in passages such as the following that Berger's novel most clearly shows its stance towards the settlement of the West as a bitter farce and a series of misconceptions, a

stance which could of course be seen as equally as apologetic as Blake's take on the Western:

> That same summer [...], a colonel named Henry attacked the Brulé Sioux in their camp on the Blue River, above the North Platte, and killed eighty. It almost goes without saying that these Indians was friendlies, otherwise the Army wouldn't have found them; and put up no resistance, else they wouldn't have been punished to that degree. Some of the figure was made up by women and children, on account of the warriors retreat from the cavalry charge. That sounds yellow but actually was ignorance. I'm talking about both Indians and whites. A coward kills women, but a soldier of that time at full gallop often couldn't tell them from the braves, and the kids got it from the indiscriminate hail of lead. (81)

While Berger's novel is certainly postmodern and goes some way to establish a stronger Native agency, it is ultimately not a clear revision of Native roles in the Western. In its postmodern elusiveness it can be read multiple ways, but is clearly as enamored with its own wit as John Seelye's *The Kid,* discussed in the previous chapter.

5.5. Indians and Native Americans in the American Revisionist Western

In the following, I will focus on three novels that are more obviously intended to revise the generic role and image of Natives in the Western. I will not discuss most of the revisionist Westerns examined elsewhere in this study, since, as mentioned, most either continue to treat Indians as plot devices and / or part of the setting, as a source of humorous pastiche and parody within their white-centered plots, e.g. Richard Condon's *A Talent for Loving* in which the classic attack of the Indians on the wagon train is transformed into an instance in which the Indians in the end essentially function as the cavalry, saving the day for the protagonists. The majority of American revisionist Westerns examined in this study ignore Natives (almost) entirely. The novels that do include brief encounters with Indians, and use them for primarily parodic or humorous ends, I would argue, do not so much revise or attack stereotypes of Indians as use them in their larger targeting of generic patterns by alluding to everyone's awareness of these stereotypes and their inadequacy. The goal of such uses seems an intra-generic attack, mostly to amuse readers by leading their expectations astray, rather than a larger political goal of targeting and seriously engaging past injustices in both history and cultural representations. There are only very few novels among American Westerns, which, like Robert Ward's *Cattle Annie and Little Britches* or Richard Slotkin's *The Return of Henry Starr*, include Native characters among their cast without giving much significance to the fact that they are Native, and could thus be said to be post-revisionist takes on ethnicity, as explored in the last chapter, using the examples of Larry McMurtry and Anthony Durham.

Tellingly, none of the three novels I focus on are direct Western parodies or generically "straight" revisions of the Western; instead all bring in other genres: James Welch *Fools Crow* is a hybrid of Native modes of storytelling and a historical novel, Frank Bergon's *Shoshone Mike*, too, is a historical novel employing a shifting perspective, and Jonathan Lethem's *Girl in Landscape* mixes the genres of science fiction, coming of age story, and frontier narrative. All three authors defamiliarize the Western and "the Indian's" part in it to more effectively criticize established genre patterns and stereotypes. They engage their revision of the Indian by moving their novels away from the more narrow boundaries of the genre, which – it would seem – allows for only limited revision of Indian stereotypes. While Bergon and Lethem in their novels highlight the functions of stereotyping, racism and limiting perspectives and their contributions to violence against marginalized groups, Welch's project is more ambitious. Like Lethem's and Bergon's Native characters, Welch's too are victimized, but the shift of perspective to a Native view of the frontier he employs ultimately results in more agency for his characters and a fuller picture of Native, in this case Blackfeet (Pikuni) culture. While the Native culture in Lethem's novel, represented in fact as an alien culture, is mostly abstract, Bergon introduces some aspects of Native life into his novel. Only Welch, however, fully grants his Native characters agency and explores how life changed for the Blackfeet through their contact with white civilization. Welch's novel looks at the classic Western tale of contact between white and "red" men from the other side of the frontier. It is no coincidence then that his novel is among the least generically "Western" of any of the texts discussed in my study.

5.5.1. Defamiliarizing the Indian on the Extra-Terrestrial Frontier: Jonathan Lethem's *Girl in Landscape*

Jonathan Lethem's *Girl in Landscape*, takes a very different approach to the Western and the Indian's role in it. Lethem's book at first seems to be a mix of a science fiction novel and a coming of age story. At the same time, however, the novel is also Lethem's answer to John Ford's classic Indian-hater Western *The Searchers*, a film Lethem has, by his own admission, long been obsessed with. In his article "Defending *The Searchers* (Scenes in the Life of an Obsession)" Lethem recounts his relation to Ford's film and his many ill-fated attempts to defend the movie against his sneering contemporaries, who – in Lethem's estimates – retreated before the power of the movie, deciding to view it "as a racist antique, a naïve and turgid artifact dredged out of our parents' bankrupt fifties culture" (4).

Girl in Landscape relates the main character's transition from child to woman set against the "Western" backdrop of an extraterrestrial frontier. Lethem follows in the

footsteps of Charles Portis's *True Grit* when retelling a standard Western plot from an adolescent female perspective. In contrast to Portis, however, Lethem pays closer attention to psychology, choosing to follow the models of Carson McCullers and Shirley Jackson (cf. Stein 232) over Portis's emphasis on humor and action. Lethem explains his intentions behind his rewriting of the Western, aligning his own endeavors with the broader postmodern politics of appropriating conventional narratives:

> There's a generic postmodern move, an assault upon a classic work by taking the neglected or minority viewpoint and retelling the tales – think of Jean Rhys rewriting *Jane Eyre* as *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Given my interests at the time, it wasn't much of a leap to watch *The Searchers* and wonder about Natalie Wood's version of events. What might it be like to see John Wayne through her eyes? (Stein 232)

Girl in Landscape's plot is fairly simple. It relates the tale of Pella Marsh, the protagonist, and her family's attempt to settle an alien planet. After the first part set on a devastated earth which sees the death of Pella's mother, Caitlin, the family "led" by her father, Clement Marsh, a weak, failed politician, moves to the planet of the Archbuilders, described as "a distant place, an impossible place" (1). The planet, which has been abandoned by most members of its original alien inhabitants, the Archbuilders, has a decidedly Western landscape. The crumbling arches found throughout the planet's desert serve as a reminder of both the planet's original inhabitants of whom supposedly only the inferior members have remained behind and John Ford's Monument Valley. The family starts homesteading but, like the other pioneers who already inhabit the planet, finds that there is not much to do. The original Archbuilders have left behind plants which taste like their favorite foods. The pioneers need only dig these up to support themselves. Without much else to do the children explore the planet. Pella soon develops a mystical connection to the place caused by an alien virus that the other families suppress by giving their children drugs – a practice Pella's father, in an attempt at recovering his former leaderly grandeur, opposes. The virus takes control of Pella and she literally begins to enter a union with the planet, an obvious reference to the mythical connection between the Westerner and "the land" in the classical Western. In her new condition, Pella is always tired and, when she sleeps, her mind enters small quicksilver giraffe-like animals called household deer, which are omnipresent on the planet. Pella uses her new skill to spy on the adults of the colony, particularly the mysterious first settler and patriarch Efram Nugent, who also proves to be Clement Marsh's strongest antagonist and the one inhabitant of the planet strongly objecting to Clement's refusal to provide his children with the drugs. Lethem describes Efram Nugent, whose name renders homage to Frank S. Nugent, *The Searchers'* screenplay writer, as "an anti-heroic, racist, angry figure," and stated: "I wanted to explore what it

was like to have your sexual coming-of-age watched over by this bullying man" (Gaffney 50). True to the author's intentions, Efram is a domineering figure whom Pella is simultaneously repelled by and attracted to. There is a strong suggestion that Efram, too, is attracted to the pubescent girl and in one central scene Pella visits Efram in his house, laying her legs across his leg before falling asleep.

The strained equilibrium on the planet, which is largely controlled by the overbearing Efram, is destroyed when he accuses the remaining Archbuilders, a hermaphrodite race, of molesting the children. One of the Archbuilders is found dead in the house of the local artist, who might have engaged in sexual encounters with some of the trusting Archbuilders; another is imprisoned on dubious charges. Pella, who is fond of the Archbuilders and believes in their innocence, confronts Efram. With the help of the other children she manages to stop Efram's lynching justice, when Morris, one of the boys of the colony, kills the overbearing frontiersman.

Despite Lethem's claim that he chose not to write a literal Western, because he was not "at all interested in factually historical fiction, anyway, nor with the pitfalls of depicting Native American culture," and his remark: "It's finally quite dull to consider the book on its initial premise, as a reply to *The Searchers*" (Stein 233), *Girl in Landscape* nevertheless strongly reflects on the Western through its close intertextual connection to the John Ford movie. Through its use of the alien race of the Archbuilders in *Girl in a Landscape*, Lethem examines the traditional role and depictions of Indians in the classic Western. Lethem's Archbuilders comment on the way of depicting Indians in Westerns exactly *through* their defamiliarization. The traditional somber, quiet or grunting Indian is, in his version replaced by "language-obsessed alien characters, enamored of what they consider the poetic possibilities of English" (Gaffney 51). The English names they adopt not only reflect their fascination with language, their choices, Lonely Dumptruck, Specious Axiomatic, Hiding Knell, Truth Renowned, Gelatinous Stand, Grinning Contrivance, and others, also reveal Lethem's sense of humor by spoofing traditional Indian names. Most importantly, Lethem's Archbuilders are not dangerous savages; they are peaceful to the point of passivity, particularly when they are victimized by the settlers in the second half of the novel.

Because the Archbuilders are not traditional Indians or even revisionist Native Americans, but recognizable variations of Indians, Lethem can avoid many of the pitfalls and ambiguities of casting actual tribes into the role of (noble) savages, such as the questions of historical guilt and the origin of violence. While the Archbuilders share some of the traits of traditional Indians, e.g. their *a priori* existence on a planet taken over by outside settlers, a close connection to the land, and a sense of belonging to a vanishing race, the connection of Archbuilders with Native Americans, or colonial subjects in general, is established mostly through the way they are perceived and treated

by the white settlers, particularly Efram and a number of others who follow in his racist spirit. The Archbuilders are the first inhabitants of the planet, yet their right to be in the places they choose is questioned as the novel progresses and they increasingly become the targets of the whites' projection. While their inactivity, which casts them in the role of a quietly suffering subaltern, may be questionable from a postcolonial stance, it also highlights mechanisms of racism and Othering.[192] In his interview with Lorin Stein, Lethem discusses the sources for his Archbuilders in some detail, underscoring the sense of the aliens as colonial subjects:

> When I created the Archbuilders [...] I knew they couldn't be threatening or evil, as in the manner of the Comanches in a John Ford film. Instead I wanted them to be harmless, thoughtful, befuddled types, who stand to one side and comment on the action. What I reached for, unconsciously, were the *Indian* Indians in Forster['s *Passage to India*]. And this unconscious choice shaped the plot to a large degree.
> The Archbuilders, like Forster's Indians, spend the first half of the book puzzling over the behavior of the colonists, seemingly safe, to one side of the action. Then, in *Girl*, as in *Passage*, there comes a crisis in the middle of the book: in Forster, a possible rape or an imagined rape in a hidden cave. That Marabar Caves incident became, in *Girl*, Efram fondling or not fondling Pella [more precisely the parallel would be the accusation of a sexual encounter between Hugh Merrow and the Archbuilders, J.F.]. And the natives are the ones who fall under suspicion. One among them is martyred to the hysteria which comes over the settlers. (Stein 233)

John Wayne's character Ethan Edwards from *The Searchers*, whom Lethem has identified as an anti-heroic, unsympathetic racist in no uncertain terms ("Defending" 6), is a strong presence in *Girl in Landscape*. The book starts with two epigraphs, one by Shirley Jackson – as noted, one of Lethem's models for *Girl in a Landscape* – the other a quote attributed to John Wayne which can only be read in ironic terms given the ambiguous nature of Lethem's work: "Screw ambiguity. Perversion and corruption masquerade as ambiguity. I don't trust ambiguity" [vi]. While Wayne's shadow thus hangs over the work, he soon shows up in another guise as Ethan Edwards, transformed into Lethem's own creation, Efram Nugent. As Michael Adams has observed, the connection between the two characters already becomes apparent in Efram's first appearance: "Efram is introduced standing at a distance with one arm crossing his middle and the other at his side, a posture John Wayne assumes during key moments in *The Searchers*" ("*Girl in Landscape*"). Apart from such formal links between the characters, Efram's irrational hate of the Archbuilders is the strongest characteristic he shares with Wayne's Ethan Edwards. While the local storeowner is annoyed by the Archbuilders who "hang around the general store until kicked out, like deracinated Indians at a trading post" (Abbott *Frontiers* 99), wasting away their days in his largely

[192] Cf. Gayatri Spivak's concept of the subaltern, explored in her "From *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason.*"

senseless store but never buying anything for lack of any currency, it is Efram who first questions the legitimacy of the Archbuilders' presence in the settler colony. It is he who first sees them as a problem when he expresses his conviction towards Clement Marsh that the settlers "ought to draw a line around this town we're starting here [...]. Make it a *human* settlement, a place where kids are safe" (114; emphasis in original). And it is he who first suggests and later defends resettling the Archbuilders like replanted trees: "I'm just talking about moving them out of our settlement. They don't care. They've got plenty of other places to wander around. A whole ruined planet for them to gawk at and wonder what the hell happened to their civilization" (115).

While his callousness towards the friendly Archbuilders is unsettling, the whole perversity of Efram's stance only shows itself in context. Just seconds earlier Efram had told Clement that "Pella's a lovely girl" (Ibid.), and throughout the novel it becomes apparent that it is his own desire for Marsh's daughter which he projects on the Archbuilders. As Michael Adams has observed, "Efram is John Wayne as Humbert Humbert, the nymphet-obsessed hero [sic!] of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955). Unlike Ethan Edwards and Humbert, however, Efram is unaware of any defects in his character and is all the more dangerous" ("*Girl in Landscape*").[193] Much like the early Puritans had projected their repressed sexuality on the Native tribes they met in the New World, Efram sees in the Archbuilders the threat he himself poses to the children, through his attraction to the underage Pella. Throughout the novel, as his actions towards Pella become more open, his rhetoric and actions towards the Archbuilders become more hostile. While he is sitting next to Pella on his couch, his leg touching hers, making Pella feel as though "her leg and his were floating upward" (180), and immediately before, in Lethem's words, "fondling or not fondling Pella" (Stein 233; quoted above), he condemns the Archbuilders as "sexual deviants" and threatens "if they touch the children I'll kill them" (180).

When something does happen, however, it is not the child molestation Efram seemed to fear, but an act of miscegenation. The artist Hugh Merrow has supposedly seduced one of the passive and not particularly libidinous Archbuilders, Truth Renowned. When Efram finds out about the sexual contact he interprets the scene through his lens, seeing the Archbuilder's newly acquired carnal knowledge and the fact that he finds Truth Renowned in the school room, where it and another Archbuilder, Hiding Kneel, attend the children's lessons, as evidence for the Archbuilders' imminent child molestation. Not only does Efram act as the "law" in classic Western fashion when he raises a posse, although one consisting of only two members due to the smallness of

[193] Apart from labeling Humbert as a hero, it is also curious that Adams suggests Ethan Edwards might be aware of his character flaws. There are little if any clues to suggest that Edwards can see beyond his racism in either the novel or the movie version.

the colony and the Archbuilders' peacefulness, he furthermore sees it as his duty "to maintain the separation between the two races" (Abbott "Homesteading" 257). As a result he punishes the act of miscegenation between the (feminized) "native beauty" (147) and the settler Hugh Merrow, protecting the illusion of racial purity and thereby Western society. Like any good Western hero he sees the sexual contact as an unnatural act, in fact a crime, as his reference to Merrow's cabin as "the scene of the crime" (142) makes clear.

Yet Efram remains a silent Western Humbert Humbert, if one without the ability for self-reflection that Nabokov's narrator so craftily employs to defend his acts and lusts, and his blustering concern is, once again, for "the children." When Clement Marsh takes objection with Efram's unfounded accusations, his questionable ways of trying to gather evidence, and urges him to "[s]how not just that something happened, but that anyone was hurt by it if it did happen," Efram merely replies with more insinuations, which in the end reflect more on his own sick psyche than any conceivable actions by the Archbuilders: "You don't grasp what's at stake here, Marsh. How do you know your proof won't come when an Archbuilder leads a kid into the hills for some more of what Hugh Merrow's been teaching them?" (150). The only justification he can provide for his accusations is that the Archbuilders do not "make the same distinction between kids and adults that we do," a distinction that Efram may be capable of intellectually, but which does not affect his interaction with Pella. In fact, Efram, while expressing concern about the children's sexual safety, puts on a show directed at least in part towards Pella, the only child allowed to stay at his "tribunal." When he accuses Merrow of lying, he "turned, met Pella's eyes, seemed to look through them" (150). While Pella is afraid that Efram might know about her ability to enter the household deer, there is also, as always in their contact, a gruff alpha-male sexuality about Efram's treatment of Pella, an omnipresent erotic tension Pella, in the confused pubescent sense of her awakening sexuality and beginning awareness of her attractiveness to others, responds to in ways which oscillate between attraction and repulsion.

There is another side to Efram's hate of the Archbuilders. While he despises the current Archbuilders, not only as the targets of his pedophiliac projections but also as lazy degenerates, he adores what he sees as the original Archbuilders. The main room of his house looks like "a reconstruction of an Archbuilder interior" (176), a veritable museum of Archbuilder artifacts painstakingly reconstructed from shards. Much like the authors and heroes of classic Westerns, Efram draws a distinction between the good natives and the bad natives, the ones who have vanished and leave room for nostalgia and fantasy and the ones he sees on the planet today who are a problem to be dealt with "by all means necessary": "'Hiding Kneel and Truth Renowned, those types aren't what I call Archbuilders,' he said. 'They're what the Archbuilders left behind'" (179). Efram

classifies the actual Archbuilders, as opposed to their glorified antecedents he imagines, in subhuman, eugenic terms, which leave room for whichever treatment he sees fit for them; they are merely "[t]he rabble [...], the lazy, stupid ones that didn't want to go" (Ibid.). The demise of the once glorious Archbuilders is related in Efram's mind, which now recalls the more elegiac and pessimistic implications for a future America without a frontier found in Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, to their passed "chance to find frontiers." As a result of their complacency and lack of a frontier spirit they "became a bunch of good-for-nothing navel gazers instead. They made this planet into a hell of a luxury – the weather control, free food. And it made them into hothouse creatures picking through their own memories of greatness" (179-80).[194] Efram's contempt for the Archbuilders and his monstrosity in how he treats them find their most extreme expression in the suggestion that Efram might be eating the Archbuilders, as his "little joke" (181). But the novel remains ambiguous about whether this is merely Pella's dream while she lies on his couch or his voice drifting into her sleep.

When the Archbuilder accused of sexual contact with the artist Hugh Merrow, Truth Renowned, is found dead in his burning house, it is impossible not to connect this strange accident with Efram's disapproval of miscegenation and his projected fear of child molestation. The Western's genocide of Native Americans has entered the novel on a much smaller scale. While Efram becomes ever more forthright in his crusade against the Archbuilders, the rest of the colony under Clement Marsh's weak attempts at leadership fail to stop him. To Pella's frustration the Archbuilders do not seem to fear Efram or the potential war of extermination he might wage against them. As Pella notes, "Hiding Kneel should be here to keep a watch for Efram, to make sure that no fires were set, no Archbuilders murdered tonight. Instead the Archbuilders had come to admire the sunset and pine for backgammon" (240).

"It began two days later," the next chapter opens (243). Pella comes across Doug Grant, Efram's pupil, E.G. Wa, the storekeeper, and Joe Kinkaid mistreating a bleeding Hiding Kneel in front of Wa's store. It is not made clear what the "it" of the first sentence is or why the narrative insinuates that "it" is only beginning, but the scene recalls Efram's earlier talk about resettling the Archbuilders and resembles a deportation of unwanted elements; an arbitrary, hate-inspired deportation of an imagined Other, in this case, Archbuilders. The violence Hiding Kneel is subjected to and its lack of resistance are disturbing. When it speaks Pella is shocked, since "she had

[194] It is ironic that Efram accuses the Archbuilders of laziness, when he, too, enjoys free food. He hires another settler, Ben Barth, to do most of his work for him. Like the classical cowboy, Warshow's "man of leisure" (37), we do not see Efram working. His position in the novel is that of the wealthy cattle rancher opposing the newly arrived "sod busters." His disdain for Clement Marsh, too, is expressed in such terms when he calls Clement a "carpetbagger" (113), choosing an expression describing an outsider, but also one used by many a Southern ex-Confederate character in the Western.

begun to think of it as a kind of animal or plant, the way the men were destroying its body" (245). The charge, once again, is that of child molestation, a charge based, as it turns out, on Morris Grant's false testimony born out of his attempt to hide that he, too, can enter the household deer. And once again Efram takes over after Clement Marsh has failed in another attempt to conjure up resistance, this time in the Archbuilders: "Don't let them do this to you. This is your place –" (247). Joe Kinkaid's angry objection: "This isn't about what's being done to *Archbuilders*" (247-48; emphasis in original), not only clarifies the speciecist / racist distinction of worth between Archbuilders and human settlers, but also points to another aspect, one which Pella realizes in the end, and one which is central to the novel's treatment of Indians in the guise of Archbuilders:

> None of what had happened was really about Archbuilders, Pella decided. None of the humans had ever met an Archbuilder, or even seen one. It was still all about humans, what they saw when they looked at the Archbuilders, what they saw instead of the Archbuilders (279).

It is exactly this emphasis on the "white man's Indian," or in this case the white man's Archbuilder, that is central to *Girl in Landscape*'s comments on the role of projection and prejudice in the treatment of a colonial Other. The murder of the Archbuilders is as little about the Archbuilders as individuals as the genocide of Native Americans was about individuals or even, in many cases, distinct tribes. The "enemy," *Girl in Landscape* claims, is only what we see in him. Through its defamiliarization of "the Indian," Lethem's depiction of the harmless, friendly and trusting Archbuilders and their groundless abuse serves as a clear case in point of how skewed perceptions can lead to violence.

Pella's hopeful note after Efram's death: "Maybe now they would meet them. Maybe now the Archbuilders would buy the bread" (279), seems shallow and overly optimistic, the notion of buying bread as a sign of acceptance in the community will likely remain an illusion, for Efram has left a pupil, Doug Grant. Sharing Efram's racism, Doug "burned with an aggrieved hostility that made him distant, unreachable" (148) during the "trial" against Hugh Merrow and Truth Renowned; elsewhere Doug is described as "dangerous, like a part of Efram scraped raw, all nerve and fury" (197), and the novel's final sentences make his role as Efram's successor clear: Pella "knew Doug Grant was the same. He'll come back, she thought. He'll grow up and come back, the new Efram. The one who doesn't fit in town. The one she killed was still alive in him. That was who she would wait for" (280). While Efram in the end has been brought down by his deviant sexuality – the very sexuality which I have argued lies at the core of all of his violent acts against the Archbuilder – when Pella accuses him of raping her

in order to save Hiding Kneel, he yet survives in Doug. It is this connection through which Lethem's skepticism is revealed. As Michael Adams has argued: "Lethem portrays those who – like Efram – want to see life in clear-cut, black-and-white terms to be dangerous but somehow essential" ("*Girl in Landscape*"). The threat that another Efram might return in the guise of Doug Grant does not bode well for either the community or the Archbuilders.

In fact Lethem's skepticism takes on an even larger dimension when he talks about the role of his book in the Western discourse, particularly as a revision of Ford's *The Searchers*:

> like a child with dollhouse figures I manipulated my versions of the characters and crises that had overpowered me, trying to decant *The Searchers*, unmake it, consume it. I watched the film and thought about it and talked about it too much, and when I eventually became a bore, *The Searchers* shot me in the back and walked away. ("Defending" 12)

In the end the revision does not unmake the original, according to Lethem:

> The Searchers is too gristly to be digested in my novel, too willful to be bounded in my theories. I watch or don't it doesn't matter: The Searchers strides on, maddened, through broken landscapes incapable of containing it – Ford's oeuvre, and Wayne's the "Studio-Era Film," and my own defeated imagination – everywhere shrugging off categories, refusing the petitions of embarrassment and taste, defying explanation or defense as only great art or great abomination ever could. (Ibid.13-14)

By extension then, Lethem's Archbuilders would not unmake Ford's Comanche, according to the author. But perhaps Lethem is too pessimistic. After all, the fact that his fellow students were not willing to accept the film and its depiction of Indians on its own terms as Lethem describes in his "Defending *The Searchers*" speaks for a revised, more positive image of Native Americans in culture in general, a revision which also reflects back on the Western. The novels discussed above are part of this ongoing trend of rewriting the Indian in the Western so that, at least in a few novels, he can become a Native American.

5.5.2. The Banality of Race Hatred: Frank Bergon's *Shoshone Mike*

Like Jonathan Lethem, Basque-American author Mike Bergon in his *Shoshone Mike* explores the racism and injustice lying at the heart of the conflict between whites and Native Americans. Like James Welch, he chooses a historical massacre to explore this issue. While the conflict Bergon relates is smaller in scale than the one Welch focuses on, the underlying problems of prejudice, misunderstanding and the abuse of power by white America are the same. Calling to mind a similar setup in one of Western American

literature's classic novels, Walter van Tilburg Clark's *The Ox-Bow Incident*, Bergon tells of the pursuit of Shoshone Mike and his family by a posse of whites who are driven by dubious motives. Mike and his sons have killed four white men, one in an act of retaliation, the others as the result of a misunderstanding and out of fear of being pursued by the whites. The novel ends with the slaughter of Shoshone Mike and most of his family by their pursuers in what has, according to its author, been called "the last Indian massacre in the United States" ("Contemporary Mexico" 304).

In his novel, Bergon places a great emphasis on an accurate portrayal of Native customs. While Bergon is clearly interested in doing justice to the Native way of life, he seems interested in painting as objective a portrayal as possible of a historical event, the killing of Shoshone Mike and much of his family in 1911 Nevada.[195] To this end the novel employs what David Rio calls a "rotating point of view" ("Challenging" 73), i.e., it uses a different focalizer in different chapters, all of them based on historical actors. As Bergon realized during his research, which was originally going to lead up to a non-fiction account of the massacre he "could never fully reconstruct what had happened [in Nevada] 66 years earlier" ("Search" 53). Furthermore his attempts to be objective and "present only the facts" did not work: "I had the facts but not the truth. I decided that only a novel could provide the emotional truth of this story – the way events might be remembered and told by the participants" (Ibid. 54). As a result *Shoshone Mike* includes the views of numerous characters with widely different opinions on the adequate response to the murders. These views are, however, not treated equally and are clearly hierarchized. While Bergon gives a voice to all sides of the story, the novel clearly takes a position against the supposed inevitability of the massacre. In his non-fictional article on the incident Bergon himself makes no secret of his feelings about the massacre and its conventional interpretation:

> It has been said that the destruction of Shoshone Mike and his way of life was the final spasm of a bygone era, the sad, inevitable fate of the American Indian. I don't believe it. His massacre was tragic precisely because it was not inevitable. True, powerful cultural forces were at work here, but individuals made choices. Other choices might have been made. ("Search" 55)

[195] In his article "Challenging Conventional Recreations of the Past" David Rio discusses some of the major treatments of the massacre Bergon could build on, namely a historical novel, Kenneth D. Scott's *Frozen Grass* (1960), and two other book-length treatments Effie Mona Mack's *The Indian Massacre of 1911* (1968) and Dayton O. Hyde's *The Last Free Man: The True Story Behind the Massacre of Shoshone Mike and His Band of Indians in 1911* (1973), which increasingly take the side of Shoshone Mike, according to Rio. The latter book supposedly inspired Bergon to write his own account of the massacre (cf. Rio "Exploring" 205). Bergon details his own sources and his research, which involved talking to the families of key actors and accessing their files in his Afterword to *Shoshone Mike*, as well as an article on his novel project, "The Search for Shoshone Mike."

The novel reflects this skepticism. By choosing a third person perspective, even if it is focalized through various characters, Bergon can retain a large amount of control over the interpretation of the events his novel suggests. The characters are widely divergent in their thoughtfulness and their effectiveness in communicating the rationale behind their actions and consequently their ability to win over the reader. Some of the acts related, such as the abuse of the Basque sheepherder Jean Erramouspe by his fellow workers, told from his perspective, evoke reactions against such abuse springing out of a prejudice against another's ethnicity in the current cultural climate, one significantly different from that depicted in the novel. In case this alone is not enough to bring across Bergon's agenda, the novel hierarchizes the character's positions through the placement of the voices in the narrative, starting off with and giving much more space to the voices sympathetic to Shoshone Mike's cause and his own plight than to his adversaries.

The first and most important focalizer is Sheriff Lamb who follows the chase of Shoshone Mike mostly from his office as it moves around his jurisdiction, and finally decides to step in to uphold the law and assure that Mike's family is brought to trial rather than lynched, but arrives too late. Lamb's ill-fated appeals against prejudice and for law in the face of mob rule are shared by the local priest, Father Enright, but, as in Clark's classic, the voices for reason and moderation stand against the majority sentiment, which is guided by a frontier spirit of Indian-hating. Major characters representing the side of the posse are Captain Donnelley, a Nevada state police officer who leads the posse, Mort West, a young man who wishes to prove his masculinity in the pursuit, and the son of one of the murdered men, a Basque sheepherder, Jean Erramouspe, who, like the Shoshones, becomes a target of racism when he is barred from joining the posse. The last major voice is that of Shoshone Mike and his family who attempt to continue their life as "wild Indians" off the reservation while being pursued by the posse.

A number of critics have questioned this fractured perspective, faulting it for the book's many one-dimensional characterizations and Bergon for "tell[ing] rather than show[ing]" (Glotfelty 49). While Ann Ronald describes the novel as "the best Western since Clark to explore the darker sides of Nevada justice, to universally indict the frailties of man" (251), Charles Michaud calls the novel "[w]ell intentioned, well researched, and at times well written," but regards it as failing "to develop into a satisfying whole" (106). Cheryll Glotfelty shares this evaluation, stating "the book's strength as history may account for its weakness as art" (48). She goes on:

> The multiple points of view accurately reflect the competing versions of reality surrounding this disputed incident. Nonetheless, refracting the story through the eyes of so many different characters leads to irrelevant diversions, a split focus, and superficial character development. [...] [T]he reader must plod through two hundred pages of background exposition before the action begins, and then it is over in a heartbeat. (48-49)

While it is correct that Bergon's novel is not the most action-packed page turner in the history of Westerns, rather than blaming its lack of suspense on the failings of a first novel, I will argue that Bergon's treatment of the massacre should be read as an intentional narrative strategy. Following the technique pioneered by Clark in *The Ox-Bow Incident*, Bergon slows down the chase in his novel and thus manages to avoid the generic action clichés of the Western. While *Shoshone Mike* is not *en par* with Clark's classic in terms of literary quality, Bergon manages through his treatment to bring across the point that life is not an action-packed narrative, but more complex and often quite pedestrian and mundane. Events only gain epic status when they are remade into myth through their retelling from a spatial or temporal distance, and sometimes not even then. Epic interpretations of reality, as the one insisted on by Mort, the book seems to claim, lead to problems in "real life." The tragedy of the book's massacre derives, after all, in large part from the mythicized and stereotyped readings of reality held by many of its characters.

In his attempt to highlight the tragic dimensions and lack of heroism of what he sees as a grave and unnecessary historical injustice (cf. Bergon quoted in Rio "Challenging" 74), Bergon focuses on everyday activities and the less than heroic realities of a chase through a cold and snow-covered Nevada. Bergon's novel thus works as a comment on the inflated, heroicized tales of the classic Western pursuit. While Westerns often dwell on the physicality of their protagonists (mirrored by the rugged land), as discussed by Tompkins and others (*West* 5-6, 69-87, and *passim*), the suffering, devoid of all amenities of civilization, and the hardships the heroes have to suffer through are always a mark of their larger-than-life heroism. In Bergon's treatment, in contrast, they become annoying and petty, bordering increasingly on the banal as the chase for Shoshone Mike continues. Others, most famously Walter van Tilburg Clark in his *The Ox-Bow Incident*, have successfully questioned the morality of a mob mentality. While Bergon firmly places his novel in this tradition, what makes his novel unique is the way in which he humanizes the targets of his pursuit, and highlights not so much, as Clark has done, the moral dubiousness and dangers of mob action, but the ethnic prejudices underlying the revenge of the posse pursuing Shoshone Mike.

As indicated above, I argue that the withholding of the gripping action scenes so typical of the Western genre for most of the novel is a large part of the ethics of Bergon's treatment of his material. The murder of one of Shoshone Mike's sons triggers the conflict the book. The murder as well as the revenge his other sons take on one of the murderers are related through matter-of-fact account of the killings. The focus is on the loss of life and the results of their retaliation. The shooting leading to the murders of either man is not described. Throughout this scene the narrative voice is distanced, evoking sympathy for the loss, but careful not to invite a degree of identification that

would make the retaliation seem poetically just and morally right, and thus invite a black and white template of "goodies" and "baddies" through which to interpret the rest of the novel. While the murder in retaliation for Shoshone Mike's son is clearly appropriate within the Shoshone's ethical system, it is not glorified as an act of good violence as opposed to the bad violence which ensues. Rather, the focus is on the fact that no violence is good, for it only leads to more violence (there is a certain religiousness underlying this attitude, which in the novel is voiced most clearly by the local Priest Father Enright who takes over the moral voice Davies and, to a lesser degree, Osgood had played in *The Ox-Bow Incident*). The killing scene ends with a note on the racist status quo. Shoshone Mike decides to flee, because he knows that if he tries to explain the situation "[i]t would be his word against a white man's" (82). And indeed this is what happens later: to justify the actions of the posse even those whites who are clearly crooks are heard and believed by a community that has already formed its interpretation of events based on preconceptions before ever learning the facts.

A similar technique of narrative distancing is used again when Mike and his sons kill a group of cowboys who have come to investigate their slaughter of some livestock. The narrative "moves away" as it becomes clear that Shoshone Mike and his sons will kill the cowboys, focusing instead on one of Mike's daughters, rather than dwelling on a generic shootout scene. Here, too, the account of the murders is succinct: "Henie heard through the wind the popping of guns in the canyon before everything was silent once again" (147), and this is all we learn of the "action scene."

It is only in the final massacre that we are shown the ugly face of violence. There is nothing glorious or epic about the massacre of Shoshone Mike's family or their defense. Instead the primary emotions conveyed are of disgust against the senselessness of their slaughter, as well as a banality and ultimately stupidity of the mob "justice. When one of Mike's sons kills a member of the posse, it seems to his friend, Mort, as if "something unfair had happened" (246). The lack of a higher morality driving the white posse is made evident throughout their chase; it is clear that their actions are motivated by a mix of romanticized images of Western grandeur, manliness and racist attitudes. When the coroner tells them to bury the Indians they first become furious and then tie the bodies to their horses dragging them to their graves; an image of Mort tying a rope around the neck of the man who has killed his friend and dragging the body to a mass grave, brings to mind the iconic image of Achilles dragging the lifeless body of Hector behind his chariot to posthumously humiliate his foe and demoralize the Trojans. Mort's motives one can only presume are the same.

It is only in a newspaper excerpt which immediately follows this scene that the massacre is related in heroic terms. The newspaper writer, basing his report in large parts on the information he receives from the posse, interprets the fight between Mike

and his pursuers in terms of the West's frontier past. In this version the slaughter is re-encoded as a valiant deed of civilization defended, and act of regenerative violence. The newspaper praises the "good Indian" tracker "Skinny" Pascal as "a real hero" (257),[196] gives credit to the posse's valor, and stylizes Mike and his family as "real savages, unmixed of blood, who had carried into these days of civilization all the savagery of the days before the white man's coming" (256). It ends by re-encoding the events as "a chapter in the world's story of heroism and devotion" (258). This mechanism and the contradiction between facts and mythmaking are also at the base of the posse's reactions after the murders. When their actions are examined in a court of law, they complain that "they're making us into the murderers" (260), since in their frontier mindset of an easily identifiable higher justice they cannot understand that their actions are questioned. Yet after the trial their reactions are mixed, many do not want to hear about Shoshone Mike after the trial, whereas Mort "kn[ows] that in later years they'd all remember that day as the height of their lives" (266). The effect of this distorted retelling of history within the larger context of the novel is deeply ironic. It works as a scathing criticism of racist, white history / mythmaking in which realities are obscured by prejudice, complex relations are encoded through easy, pre-established mythic narratives, and history is told by the victors.

While Bergon's novel replicates some stereotypes, such as the "Tonto speak" his Indians fall into whenever they speak English (i.e. "Me Shoshone" [p. 243]), Bergon attempts to do the native way of life justice (with all the pitfalls this involves for a non-native writer) by portraying Mike's life away from the reservation with his family, putting an emphasis on their daily realities, the stories they relate, their migration with the changing seasons and the struggle to gain food from the land.[197] Such an appropriation of a Native voice is always problematic and has led to more than one furious public debate.[198] Bergon is aware of the problems behind his decision, but eventually decided that it would be of central importance to imagine the voice of Mike and his family so as not to further marginalize them in his account designed to bring their deaths to public attention:

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[196] Like most other characters in the novel "Skinny" Pascale was a historical person. He was Paiute, Shoshone Mike was Hukandeka Shoshone. While the novel offers no motifs for Pascale's actions he is more Westernized than Shoshone Mike and it seems reasonable to assume that tracking for the State Police for him was just a job, no matter what background the person he tracked had.

197 The connection between Native Americans and the land is of course another cliché, which Bergon happily takes over. For instance when Shoshone Mike is told that the land does not belong to "them" anymore, he responds: "Maybe not [...] but we belong to it. You whites think everything is dead, and you can just do what you want and the land doesn't know" (222). While the Indians give back to the land, the whites only take, making "the land look sad" (143).

[198] This is discussed below with regards to Canadian writers' appropriations of a Native voice. Cf. also Cook-Lynn's critique of white American writers' redefinition of themselves as members of one tribe or another (34-44).

> For me the biggest risk was crossing the racial and cultural boundaries to present Shoshone Mike's point of view. I hesitated doing so, but I realized that a failure to imagine him and his world would only reinforce the cultural barriers and lack of imagination that led to the massacre in the first place. ("Search" 54)

The courage only came to him when he was in Mexico "where I lived daily among Chamula and Zinacanteco Indians" (Ibid.).

The opening of the novel already targets what Bergon identifies as "this lack of imagination" by relating the thoughts of the somewhat overly racially conscious Sheriff Lamb who "knew the job ahead of him was to keep people alive, even if they happened to be Indians" (11). While Lamb is clearly one of the most sympathetic and positive characters in the novel, he is far from a flawless hero. *Shoshone Mike* is, after all, what Etulain has called a "new gray Western" ("Beyond Conflict"), a Western that takes a post-revisionist stance vilifying neither side, but focuses on complex interrelations in an attempt to portray the West in a more realistic light. Consequently, Lamb is a flawed hero, and one who ultimately fails in his mission to prevent the senseless mob violence. Lamb's compromised heroic masculinity can already be seen in the fact that his marriage is not going well. As we learn, his wife's mind frequently wanders to other men. And far from bringing the town or posse to reason, Lamb is not even successful in disabusing his wife of her racist aberrations.[199] Unlike the Leatherstocking archetype, Slotkin's "man who knows Indians," a white man who moves between the wilderness and civilization without difficulty (*Gunfighter Nation* 16), Lamb is much more closely associated with civilization. In fact, he does not know Indians at all. While he tries to work with the local tribes, he has no idea of what is going on when he visits their reservation, since he does not understand the tribe's customs. Yet his willingness to admit his own ignorance becomes another credential to his character which further sets him off from more traditional frontier characters – Lamb is at least aware of his own ignorance and consequently treads carefully. He is, as we can see, no classic Western hero, no alpha male with universal appeal and a big gun – for in Bergon's world such people do not exist.

Throughout the novel, instances of racism in the West are highlighted. An Indian who can neither read nor write walks around with a piece of paper which states "This here Injun is named Jonie Bliss. He wold [sic] be a good Injun if someone kilt him – Ha ha!" (131), and Nellie Lamb frequently voices her jaundiced statements to everyone who will listen. "I'm talking about savages," she tells Father Enright to justify the mob

[199] In what seems like a blatant case of pop psychology on the author's part Nellie Lamb's racism is eventually explained by her internalized attraction to the racial Other. During the novel's final trial she fantasizes becoming intimate with the Indian scout, Skinny Pascal.

action against Mike's family, and Enright's response is very much the novel's: "I know you are [...] that's the whole problem" (183).

While they are the main target of racism, the Shoshone are not its only targets. Jean Erramouspe, the son of the killed Basque sheepherder also faces discrimination. He is provoked by his coworkers and when he finally tries to stand up to them they hit him in the face with a shovel. Racism against Basques, likely going back to the conflict between cowboys and sheepherders, is also responsible for barring Erramouspe from joining the posse. Although he is the only one who has any real motivation or anything akin to moral justification in joining the posse, his participation is prevented by the others on the ground of their racist presumptions: "What makes you think a Basco kid would even know what to do on a horse?" (163), one of the participants asks. This attitude, as Bergon has stated, was a historical reality as he was told by one of the Basque sheepherder's sons during his research: "Nevada cowboys at that time would not have allowed a Basque to ride with them" (Rio "Exploring" 207).

In dwelling on such details Bergon emphasizes "realism and multicultural diversity" (Rio "Challenging" 69), yet his main emphasis remains on the depiction of racism against Indians and their plight. One of the main voices attacking the bigotry of his fellow men is Father Enright who is troubled by the forces unleashed by the reports of Mike's trespassing and its effect on people for much of the novel. After desperately wandering around town, aware of his inability to directly prevent the massacre, Enright finally preaches a sermon attempting to move his flock to consider the Indians not as the savages of myth, but as people like themselves. Like Lamb he fails to convince in his attempt to promote reason, morality and adherence to the law. After the massacre he explains in exasperation, more to the reader than to Lamb, his addressee in the novel: "They [Mike and his family] never had a chance [...]. People wanted them dead. They didn't want justice. They wanted those people dead" (268). Here the reader again is reminded of Clark's *The Ox-Bow Incident*, in which the same problem leads to another unjustified killing. Like *Shoshone Mike*, Clark's novel also has a final scene in which a central character, Davies, explains mob psychology. Once again, however, Bergon is interested in racial stereotypes and the question of savagery more than in the ethical dilemma, which Clark examines far more effectively. Before he leaves, Father Enright confronts white society with the implications of its actions and attitudes: "We said they were savages. We said they were going to destroy our homes, our families, our laws, everything that made us people. Then we went and did exactly that to them. We did to them exactly what we said they were going to do to us. What does that make us?" (269). In case we missed it before, here we have it spelled out again: savagery and civilization are defined by actions not race.

Another target of criticism is the institutionalized violence directed at Native Americans by government agencies, which finds its most immediate expressions in the treaties and reservation system. The authorities do not understand Native ways, nor do they care to. While we get a brief insight into the lack of hierarchy of the desert Indian tribes, which do not have any chiefs, the white officials fail to grasp the situation, proceeding instead according to their standard plan: "When government officials first tried to sign a treaty with Mike's father and other Hukandeka, they could find no chief. They finally signed a treaty with nine men who seemed distinguished among the nomadic bands" (66). When the government officials tell Mike to return to the reservation, because "the man they called Potacello had ordered him to go to the reservation," Mike refuses insisting "Pocatello is not my chief. I have no chief" (67). Apart from the political violence directed at subjugating the tribes, there is also a dimension of epistemological violence in the historical treatment of Natives, which can be linked to the war against the tribes according to Elisabeth Cook-Lynn's description of the mechanisms of the genocide of Natives in U.S. America. Whites imposed their categories and classifications on the land and its people, obliterating older stories and interpretations.[200] This problematic is also briefly addressed in the text when Mike attacks the officials: "You make up names like Po-ca-tel-lo and Sho-sho-ne and then you think they're real. All the time you make up Indian words and tell us they're our words. We're not children. We have our own words that tell us how things have always been" (67).

Elsewhere Mike equates physical death with spiritual death through cultural assimilation. As he states, he does not want his children "to die or become like whites" (223). This is in large parts the underlying basis of the conflict between Mike and white society. In the end Lamb repeats this sentiment and gives voice to Mike's (and his people's) ultimate defeat. When the Indian superintendent (who apparently knows or cares little about Native life) remarks that the surviving children are lucky, since their past may be dead, but they are survivors, Lamb responds: "Their future's dead, too." The superintendent does not understand Lamb, so the sheriff nods in the direction of the children and adds sarcastically: "Well, now they're just like us, aren't they?" (286). The destruction of Native customs can also be seen earlier in the guards' refusal to hand scissors to Henie so she can cut off her hair to mourn her dead family (255-56). It is, however, in the novel's final words, Lamb's speech quoted above, that the earlier image of Shoshone Mike's children, dressed up like dolls and robbed of all agency or resistance, waiting to be taken to a residential school, the traditional image of America's

[200] Coming from a similar understanding, Blanca Chester has discussed the refusal to accept white linguistic and geographic categories as a strategy of resistance in James Welch's *Fools Crow*.

destruction of Native cultures, is brought up again. Critics like Elisabeth Cook-Lynn, have linked the "spiritual" death caused by the loss of traditions and customs to genocide. The novel in its final image seems to take the same position, focusing on the destruction of Native culture by assimilation into white society, a fate Shoshone Mike had earlier equated with death.[201]

5.5.3. The Other Side of the Frontier: James Welch's *Fools Crow*

The final American novel examined in this chapter, Blackfoot and Gros Ventre author James Welch's novel *Fools Crow* is a point-in-case demonstration of how closely the Western genre is linked to a white perspective. The novel is set in the late 19th century U.S.-American West (mostly in Montana territory), following one man's exploits for honor and respect. Set in a perfect backdrop for a Western novel, if the protagonist were a white miner, buffalo hunter or cowboy, as a result of the shift to a Native perspective, the story violates so many of the genre's conventions that it cannot comfortably be called a Western in any narrow sense. Instead, the novel "resists and restructures the making of history and of genre," (93) as Blanca Chester has argued. This "Western populated by Indians" (94):

> recuperates a worldview of American Indians – more specifically Blackfeet – in a way that makes white feel like outsiders to their own (constructed) history. Welch takes the history of high school textbooks and American myth and turns commonly accepted versions of historical events upside down. (93)

The novel's reversal of the white perspective allows Welch to provide his Native Americans with real, rounded characters and to target or reverse many clichés. At one point, for instance, Fools Crow travels cautiously through white territory (227), rewriting the standard scene of the wary white settlers traveling through Indian country, always prepared for an Indian attack. In his travels the lone Fools Crow becomes the reversal of the clichéd fearless Indian; the frightening Indian becomes the frightened Indian (317).[202]

The first part of Welch's novel tells of the rise of White Man's Dog, a young Pikuni (Blackfoot) man, who is, at the novel's onset, fairly luckless and not very well-respected. Through a number of heroic acts, most prominently a raid on the Crow in

[201] There are countless historical images from Indian schools of Native American and First Nation children dressed up in white clothes, which most likely inspired Bergon. One such example from a Canadian source can be found in Daniel Francis's *The Imaginary Indian* (50).

[202] Frank Bergon uses a similar device in his *Shoshone Mike*: Henie, Shoshone Mike's daughter, is afraid of white people, reversing the cliché of the fear of the white, Puritan woman of the savage Indian (143-44). The white women in *Shoshone Mike*, particularly Sheriff Lamb's wife, are, of course, also afraid of the Natives.

which he wins his new name Fools Crow for killing a Crow warrior who mistakenly believes to have killed him, he improves his standing among his people. The focus throughout much of the novel is not so much on conflict and adventure, although this, too, is a part of Native life, but on conveying the life of the Blackfoot Nations in a non-romanticized way. Large parts of the episodically structured novel deal with Native customs or spiritual concerns, painting a picture in part historic, in part mythic. It is only in the second half of the novel that the attention turns to what could form a classic Western plot, the conflict between whites and Native Americans. What is a narrative of conquest, boundless land, courage and regeneration through violence from a white perspective, becomes in Welch's view from the other side of the frontier a depressing story of a fight which the Indians cannot win, even if they attack, kill and defeat the whites in individual battles. The white conquest of land becomes for the native characters a stifling retreat as more and more white men encroach on Indian land, and the white leaders make the Native chiefs sign treaties with promises, which, as all participants know, they will not keep. While the sympathy of the novel is without a doubt for the Pikunis, Welch does not succumb to a black and white morality. There is no doubt that the whites' acts are wrong, but the novel makes clear that they follow a systemic logic, stemming in part from the white officials' loyalty to their government, in part from the whites' lack of understanding of Native culture. The Natives, too, lack an understanding of their enemies, and so both sides retaliate against past injustices. They never manage to punish the perpetrators of the crimes they set out to avenge, but rather unrelated and innocent men and women who happen to have the wrong skin color.

In one place there is even a brief switch to a white perspective. There exists a strong parallel between the white man who thinks: "I want to kill an Indian" (244) in retaliation for the murder of a white farmer and the rape of his wife, and the Blackfoot warrior Fast Horse who, just pages earlier, had expressed the desire to "make [the Napikwans, i.e. whites] cry" (235). Most of the killings are petty and ugly, out-of place retaliations targeting individuals or whole groups, white or Native, who had nothing to do with the original perpetrators of the crime. These directionless acts of violence – against an unsuspecting farmer family on the one side and the defenseless Yellow Kidney, whose hands have been mutilated by the Crow, on the other – only cause grief to individuals and result in a spiral of escalating violence, a take on the Indian wars other revisionist Westerns like Berger's *Little Big Man* share. This approach is much more complex and seems truer to human nature and history than the simple vilification of one side, be they Natives, as in the traditional Western, or whites as in films like *Soldier Blue* or novels like *Dances with Wolves*.

Shortly before the final massacre, there is an episode in which a number of chiefs meet U.S. General Sully, the white commander known in his own ranks as an "Indian

lover," because he wishes to avoid a military conflict with the Blackfoot. But the parley remains meaningless, since not enough Pikunis show up to sign a treaty in the general's estimate and, more importantly, the elders express that they cannot control Owl Child and the other young braves, who want to fight the Americans. The whites in turn see this as treaty-breaking. Here, too, misunderstanding between the two sides leads to killing and eventually disaster, in this case the historical Marias River Massacre.

Throughout the book, as the taking of land continues, even the rebellious young braves surrounding Owl Child, who had sworn to fight the whites, realize more and more clearly the hopelessness of their cause. It is not for a chance to win the war against the whites they keep fighting, but for their decision to go down with pride rather than suffer the shame of giving in to the whites' demands time and again. Fast Horse, one of Fools Crow's childhood friends, leaves his band and his father, having lost faith in the old ways, and being corrupted by his visits "to the whiskey forts" where "he had lain with a girl with yellow hair, with skin as white as snow." His attraction to white women and his simultaneous disgust for the white way of life have led him to kill "three Napikwans and [steal] their yellow dust" (186). Fast Horse joins Owl Child, but ultimately has to realize that he cannot achieve his dream of honor and glory. His failure, interestingly enough, is expressed by falling back on one of the staples of both the Western genre and Western American literature in general, the diminutive human in a vast land, a land that always reflects back on the character's inner life: "He had dreamed of war honors and strong medicine, an exalted place among the Pikunis. But that was not to be. Now he was a solitary figure in the isolation of a vast land" (330). Having been estranged from both his own band, as well as Owl Child and his group, Fast Horse does not "have it in him anymore" to ask for forgiveness for his earlier trespasses against his people.

> The suffering he and Owl Child and the others had caused had hardened him in a way that was irreversible. To ask for forgiveness would be to ask for entry back into the lives of his people, and he was not one of them now; nor was he with Owl Child and his gang. He had left them at Bad Horse Butte [...]. He would not see them again. (330-31)

The only thing left for Fast Horse in his loneliness is to take the gold he has stolen from the whites and go to "the whiskey forts in the north," on the Canadian side of the border, for there are "many men alone up there" (331). In this realization of his cut-off connection from his own people, which leaves him, like so many others, a "man alone," and his escape in the white's "whiskey forts," with their association with liquor and prostitution, Fast Horse seems to have made the first steps in his transformation into one of the classic characters of contemporary Native American literature, e.g., N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* and Welch's own

earlier novels *Winter in the Blood* and *The Death of Jim Loney*. Here Native characters' alcoholism, and, in the case of Silko's novel, fascination with white women, are expressions of the loss of their own culture and their alienation from their history and people. It is this aspect of *Fools Crow* that most clearly shows, as Welch has stated in an interview, "where some of the younger characters in the first two books [*Winter* and *Death*] are coming from" (quoted in McFarland 109).

As Ron McFarland states, Welch's world in *Fools Crow* is not "idyllic" or "innocent" (111), however. Welch does not paint an idealized picture of Plains Indian life. There are hardships in a life without the comforts of modern civilization; there are cultural practices that to the modern reader seem harsh, such as the cutting off of the nose of an adulterous woman, and there are many characters who are not heroic, but deeply human and flawed. The big difference between *Fools Crow* and the other works is that *Fools Crow* shows "a culture where people felt whole with themselves, whole with their past, whole with power" (William Bevis quoted in McFarland 17). Even when life is harsh and people unhappy in *Fools Crow* there is at least a sense of belonging and a knowledge of the order of the world and their place in it.

Some of Fools Crow's last words, after he has witnessed the massacre of his people, draw a particularly strong connection to contemporary Native life, and make the loss and displacement depicted in Welch's earlier novels, particularly clear:

> I do not grieve for my people now. As you say, we will go to a happier place, far from these Napikwans, this disease and starvation. But I grieve for our children and their children, who will not know the life their people once lived. I see them on the yellow skin and they are dressed like the Napikwans, they watch the Napikwans and learn much from them, but they are not happy. They lose their own way. (359)

In replying to this lament, Feather Woman, a holy woman of legend whom Fools Crow visits, receiving four visions of his people's future, carves out a place for Native American literature, such as Welch's own novel, and other cultural products or stories based on the traditional Native way of life:

> "Much will be lost to them," said Feather Woman. "But they will know the way it was. The stories will be handed down, and they will see that their people were proud and lived in accordance with the Below Ones, the Underwater People – and the Above Ones." (359-60)

Handing down the knowledge of the Plains people and creating a sense of a life before the almost complete destruction of this life by the white settlers, the army and the U.S. government, is certainly a central concern of Welch's novel.

In keeping with this larger interest and its Native perspective, the central concern of *Fools Crow* is not the taming (and taking) of a land, but the often desperate holding

on to tradition in a time of rapid change and loss. One of the cornerstones on which the Natives' system of beliefs and traditions is built is the notion of honor. There is throughout the novel a strong suggestion that honor is one of the last remaining links to original Native life: "Honor is all we have, thought Rides-at-the-door, that and the blackhorns. Take away one or the other and we have nothing" (339). In this statement the novel links honor and food, a link other works on Native life in the 19th century West, such as Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* or Sharon Pollock's play *Walsh*, also explore. Not only do these works portray meat, in particular buffalo meat, as central to the culture and self-understanding of Native men who scorn the meat of domesticated animals, even more importantly Pollock's drama portrays Natives reduced to begging for food at the white forts during the winters when the buffaloes are held South of the border behind giant fires lit by the U.S. army in an attempt to subdue Sitting Bull and his band of Sioux after they have fled to Canada.

While the loss of honor is not exclusively linked to the advent of white civilization, the encroaching of white civilization is often responsible for a loss of honor. In *Fools Crow*, Running Fisher, Fast Horse's brother, reflects on his actions that have dishonored his family: "I saw what happened to Fast Horse and I saw myself in him. As a child I watched him strut around the camp and I wanted to be just like him. [...] And now I am. I have dishonored those who trusted me and I am to be banished for it. It is right" (344). Those who dishonor their tribe or themselves become outcasts, and there is no sentimentality about this custom.

Most of the first half of the book is concerned with Fools Crow and his initiation into Pikuni society, which he masters through bravery in battle against other tribes and through his spiritual growth and dedication to follow the quests dictated by his spirit animal, wolverine (called skunk bear in the book). For the majority of the book the conflict revolves not around direct confrontations or a last stand between whites and Natives, as is so often the case in mainstream Westerns, but rather on the debates between the chiefs on how to counter the whites' continued movement into their territories. In this respect the book is much closer to the Canadian novel *The Temptations of Big Bear*, which also foregrounds Native ways of life and the debates among the Native tribes, than to a traditional Western such as Will Henry's *Custer's Last Stand,* or even a parodic take as in *Little Big Man*.

As mentioned, the question of the whites encroaching on Native land only takes center stage after half the novel. In Welch's sober, yet elegiac treatment of the conflict it seems only fitting that this unheroic conflict does not end with the Pikuni rallying towards one epic last stand, but with their defeat by an enemy they cannot defend themselves against: the small pox. When many have succumbed to this battle, though the band as a whole seems to have survived, the men go out to hunt meat. While they

are gone the women, children and old men are slaughtered by a battalion of white soldiers in the historical Marias River Massacre, an act of retaliation for objecting to white rule and for the murder of one man by Owl Child, who has likely himself already died of the small pox. When the hunters return they find their homes burned and most of their families slaughtered.

The scope of this massacre renders irrelevant the earlier arguments between the chiefs or Fast Horse and Fools Crow on how to react to the whites' presence. Fools Crow feels a frustration at his people's impotence against the white's technological superiority, when he has to realize that retaliation for the massacre is not possible:

> Anger welled up in [Fools Crow], an anger that was directed at the futility of attempting to make the seizers pay. He had always thought that the Pikunis could fight the hairy-faces. He had prepared himself for this fight, he was ready to die a good death to defend his country. Now he knew that his father had been right all along – the Pikunis were no match for the seizers [soldiers] and their weapons. That the camps were laid low with the white-scabs disease [small pox] did not even matter. The disease, this massacre – Sun Chief favored the Napikwans [whites]. The Pikunis would never possess the power to make them cry. (383)

The only thing the Pikunis can do, as Fools Crow tells an old woman of his tribe after the massacre, is to remember: "You will have much to teach the young ones about the Napikwans. Many of them will come into this world thinking that the Napikwans are their friends because they will be given a blanket or a tin of the white man's water. But here [in the massacre], you see, this is the Napikwan's real gift" (385).

The sense of loss and injustice the slaughter of Pikuni women, children and old men evokes is captured in the image of a mourning woman; an "old woman, the only survivor of her lodge, who sat and wailed and dug at the frozen ground until her fingers were raw and bloody." She becomes a symbol of the loss of not only Fools Crow's band, but the coming loss of their entire people through their military defeat and coming cultural extermination: "it was the old woman who made the people realize the extent of their loss" (371). By individualizing and personalizing Native American loss, these images resonate more deeply than the stereotypical elegiac longing for a lost time of limitless possibility the traditional Western has enshrined in the symbolically charged departure of the hero from the town he has saved. In Welch's ending the elegy for a lost past of limitless opportunity and for a lost arena of real manhood, which the Western has so frequently expressed, makes way for loss of one's culture, another recurring topic of Native American literature, a loss captured and made more graspable in the image of the weeping old woman – an image that evokes pity on more than a symbolic level.

Yet the disturbing images of the massacre or the bitterness of not forgetting the injustice do not make up the last words of the novel. There is a surprising, even heroic turn at the end of Welch's novel, which speaks of a strong spirit of resistance – even in

the face of seeming hopelessness. It is a call to carry on against all odds, which one cannot help but read as targeting contemporary Native American and First Nations readers. Looking at the wreckage the white soldiers, the "seizers," have left, Fools Crow feels "in his heart, in the rhythm of the drum, a peculiar kind of happiness – a happiness that sleeps with sadness" (390). This feeling is explained by a spiritual belief that takes the form of a realization of the special place his people have in the world: "For even though he was, like Feather Woman, burdened with the knowledge of his people, their lives and the lives of their children, he knew they would survive, for they were the chosen ones" (390). And indeed, life goes on for the Pikuni when the buffaloes return. Despite their losses and both the reader's and Fools Crow's awareness of the future injustices the Pikuni will face, the novel closes with a hopeful image. When the buffalo return, the novel's last sentence informs us "all around, it was as it should be" (391), opening the novel to a notion of what Gerald Vizenor has called "survivance," "the resistant survival of tribal people" (Madsen, *Understanding* 2).

5.6. Indian and Mixed Race Characters in Canadian Literature

What is immediately apparent when surveying the treatment of Native characters in revisions of the Western by Canadian writers is the much stronger inclusion of First Nations and mixed-race or "half-breed" (English and Native), and Métis (French and Native) characters. While it would be an overstatement to claim that the Canadian Western is primarily about its Native inhabitants or even that Canadian writers in general give a prominent role to Native American or First Nation characters and lifestyles, there seems to be less hesitation to include First Nations or mixed race characters by authors North of the 49th parallel, potentially because there is a lesser sense of historical guilt over the treatment of Native people(s) in Canadian culture in general, and a sense that the stereotype of the Indian is not as prevalent in Canadian culture.

As I will argue, Native characters are nevertheless frequently used not out of a genuine interest for their way of life, but as minor characters, and occasionally targets of projection by white Canadian writers to make a point about their own culture. In this the Westerns follow a larger trend in English-Canadian literature that a number of critics have commented on. This trend also closely parallels a similar treatment in many mainstream American texts that paint a more "sympathetic" picture of Indians, but still relegate them to the margins, and center on the white man who goes native, as discussed in the example of Michael Blake's *Dances with Wolves*. The awareness of the plight of the vanishing or vanished Indian does play into the treatment of Native characters in both American and Canadian texts in similar ways.

The Native presence in revisionist Canadian Westerns nevertheless seems remarkable, if primarily because it contrasts with the relative lack of such characters in revisionist American Western novels – at least in those written by non-Native writers.[203] While Native Americans are often left out in revisionist American novels as an expression of what can perhaps be explained as a national and/or generic "embarrassment" – the truly revisionist novels and romanticized accounts discussed above excluded – more than half of the Canadian novels discussed in this study *do* include Native or mixed-blood characters. Like their American counterparts, Canadian writers even occasionally give such characters central roles, as is the case in George Bowering's *Shoot!* discussed in detail below. In most novels, however, native and mixed-blood characters remain marginal. Their position at the fringe of such works seems to mirror their position in the Western discourse in general, even if they are painted in a more positive light: Canadian texts, perhaps because of a sense of difference from the traditional Western, as well as Canada's different national history, do not use Native characters in their traditional role as aggressors.

As in U.S. American literature, those works that are seriously interested in the treatment of Native American culture in a historical light do not choose the form of a Western. Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear*, arguably one of the most well-known treatments of Native life in Western Canadian literature, for example, takes as its model the historical novel and attempts to portray a "realistic" picture of Native life. Whether Wiebe was successful in his attempt is open to debate. Thomas King, paraphrasing Terrence Craig, for instance claims that "Wiebe has, in emphasizing the religious function of Native people, substituted what may prove to be not so much new characters as new stereotypes which will endanger the very realism Wiebe strives for" (King, Introduction 12), while Eli Mandel disagrees, praising Wiebe's cultural sensitivity: "No other writer of white culture has come as close as Wiebe to the culture he writes of. I attribute this to his own background – marginal to the mainstream, the tradition of English-Canadian writing" (Mandel 45). Nevertheless it has been repeatedly argued that Wiebe, the descendent of Mennonite parents, makes as much a statement about himself as about Big Bear, and it seems questionable whether he has indeed "[t]hrough a creative understanding, [...] become a spiritual descendant of Dumont, Big Bear, and Wandering Spirit," as W. J. Keith claims (Keith quoted in Mandel 40). If, as Dave Godfrey once quipped, a Canadian is "someone forced to choose between being an American and being an Indian" (quoted in Monkman *Native* 5), Wiebe "becomes"

[203] As mentioned above, almost all novels that can be narrowly defined as Westerns are written by Caucasian males.

Indian, and in the process writes a novel that reads like his attempt at the great Canadian novel, which of course cannot transnationally borrow the American Western.

Margaret Atwood, although she only considers (non-Western) pre-1972 English Canadian literature, in her *Survival* makes a number of observations that are useful in considering the revisionist Canadian Westerns I discuss. She remarks:

> [T]he Indian emerges in Canadian literature as the ultimate victim of social oppression and deprivation. The Blacks fill this unenviable role in American literature, but Canadians, though they have a few Black ghettoes of their own, are reluctant to write about them. In American literature the Indian, whether Good Guy of Bad Guy, is always somehow outside white civilization, whereas the Black is inside it; [...] In Canadian literature the place of low man on the totem pole *within* the society is reserved for the Indian. (116-17)

While Atwood's understanding of African Americans as victims in (white) American literature would need some more qualification, her juxtaposition of the "Indian" as outside white society in American literature, inside white society in Canadian literature, is an intriguing point. In the case of the Western the Indian's position as outside society, which Atwood identifies as typically American, has become a generic convention, "white" men and "red" are almost by definition separated by their blood – the line between them is the frontier.[204] Whatever the exact nature of this frontier, the Indian, and in the elegiac Western (cf. David Lusted's definition) the hero, is found on the outside.

While in the Canadian appropriations of the Western, the Indian is frequently depicted as a victim, this does not automatically incorporate him into society, as Atwood's statement seems to suggest. In fact, as Margery Fee has argued for the broader field of English Canadian literature, the position of the Indian is often only inside white society insofar as the (dying or already dead) Native is included as an imagined ancestor to white Canadians ("Romantic Nationalism"). In contrast to the traditional Western's story of danger, pursuit and heroic conquest and the Indian's function as either threatening or noble, the position of the Indian in white Canadian Westerns in many cases remains close to what Atwood identifies as the more general Canadian obsession with victims:

> the point about Indians as Victims is not that they are good or superior, but that they are persecuted. The Americans, then, go for moral definitions based on intrinsic qualities the Indians are thought to possess; a rather racist approach. The Canadians, on the other hand, zero in on the relative places of Indians and whites on the aggression-suffering scale. (*Survival* 110)

[204] It might be worth pointing out again that the positions of inside and outside are attributed according to a Euro-American / -Canadian definition of terms such as civilization, society, frontier and so forth.

The role of Natives as a colonized people in Canadian Westerns does in many cases support Atwood's claim about Canadian author's preoccupation with Natives' role as victims: the mixed race characters in such works as Bowering's *Shoot!* or Vanderhaeghe's *The Last Crossing*, or the powerless Native victims in *The Englishman's Boy*, Geoffrey Ursell's *Perdue*, Sharon Pollock's *Walsh* or Daniel David Moses *The Indian Medicine Show*, could serve as examples.[205]

While it might be tempting to see the roles of Natives in these texts as part of Canada's supposed preoccupation with victims, a similar claim about Natives as victims could be made for the American texts by Lethem, Bergon and Welsh discussed above. Furthermore there are a number of Canadian texts, such as Gil Anderson's *The Outlander* or Anne Cameron's *The Journey*, which, as I will show, do not treat their Native characters as victims, and the Indians in George Bowering's *Caprice* are best understood when seen in their transnational connection to William Eastlake's Indians in *The Bronc People*. Furthermore, Leslie Monkman, Daniel Francis and others have studied the image and historical evolution of Natives in Canadian literature and culture in detail. When their observations are compared to those of students of the Indian in American culture, it becomes clear that the treatment of Natives in English-Canadian literature is in fact not that different from the one identified as dominant in U.S. literature by critics such as Robert Berkhofer, Jr. Canadian stereotypes of the Native population parallel those in America, if one compares Daniel Francis' study *The Imaginary Indian* to similar studies on Natives in U.S. American culture. In Canada, too, Natives are increasingly depicted as a vanishing race in 19th century Romanticism; individual members are either noble savages or anachronisms (Francis, *Imaginary Indian*). Eli Mandel, in his insightful article, identifies four myths in white Canadian fiction about Natives. He identifies them as "1) the myth of the primitive, 2) the myth of origins or ancestors, 3) the myth of the frontier or the identification of Native and landscape, and 4) the myth of marginality, that seeks the identification of writer, Native, and place" (36). All of these myths can also be found in white U.S.-American fiction about Natives, even if they might not be as central, and – particularly with regard to the Western – the central myth of the savage Native is missing in Canadian literature, according to Mandel. As Margery Fee suggests in her article, and as Francis' book upholds, many of the tropes identified with a Romanticist view of Natives are found in Canadian literature.

[205] It should be added that while Sitting Bull is without a doubt in an unenviable situation, it is arguably the English Canadian officer Walsh, caught between his morals and his orders which are entirely contradictory, who is the focus of the play and, in Atwood's terms, its main 'victim.'

5.7. The Myth of a Peaceful Canadian Indian Policy

In the case of the Western there is another point that bears discussion. There is an interference from the historical 19th century North America the storyworld depicted in the text is based on, however loosely. A fictional recreation of this place and era necessarily reflects the two countries' different historiographies. It is within this context that Atwood's addition to the passage quoted above – "none of this need have much to do with how Americans and Canadians treated Indians *historically*. (Canadians in fact have a slightly better track record)" (*Survival* 110; italics in original) – becomes relevant. Atwood's sense that Canada has a better historical record of treating its Native people than the U.S. is a common conception, perhaps a myth, of the Canadian self-image. It is relevant because it might explain the greater ease with which Canadian texts include marginalized and victimized Native characters, often as symbols, and it becomes particularly relevant as one of the targets of George Bowering's *Shoot!*, the novel discussed in most detail below.

Starting in the late 19th century there is a common contention, which is based in equal parts on Canada's historical record and a Canadian self-image as peaceful and non-American and results in a different distortion of history: because of the country's lack of Indian Wars comparable in scope to those waged in the United States, Canada has from the 19th century onwards stylized its treatment of its indigenous population as, in the words of Prime Minister Alexander Mackenzie, "above all humane, just and Christian" (quoted in St. Germain xvii).[206] As Jill St. Germain argues in her study, this is "one of the most deep-seated myths of the Canadian self-image" (xvii). Instead, as St. Germain argues,

> [a]n examination of treaty making in a comparative framework suggests […] that this [Mackenzie's assessment; J.F.] is a more apt characterization of American policy, although it would be necessary to add the terms "ethnocentric" and "self-interested" to that list of descriptors as well. A more appropriate and accurate assessment of Canadian efforts in regard to the Indians in the 1870s would be "cheap, indifferent, and reactive." (165)

Jean Friesen agrees: "That the government persevered so long in some of the negotiations is a testimony not to humanitarianism but to the desire for a *cheap* Indian administration" (51; emphasis in original). This desire also colored the treaties themselves: "The European desire for a cheap Indian policy and gradual assimilation meant that the Indians in *all* the treaties heard promises of continued use of resource rights [such as hunting rights for the nomadic Plains Indians; J.F.] in their old lands"

[206] The lack of major Indian Wars is also one of the prerequisites for the Canadian myth of the Mild West described in chapter 3. George Bowering's *Shoot!* discussed below problematizes this stance, even while using some of the elements of the Mild West myth.

(Ibid. 50; emphasis in original). Many of the clauses uttered by white treaty makers were meant primarily to appease the native tribes, but sent out wrong signals, as Friesen points out: such words as Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris' "'to take the Ojibwa by the hand and never let go your hand' [...] were accepted and understood in a moral as well as a literal sense" (51), communicating to the First Nations' leaders that the treaties represented only "the beginning of a continuing relation of mutual obligation." The crown's officials on the other hand saw the treaties as a "once and for all" transference of the land (49) with little interest in an Indian policy that went above and beyond securing land rights for the crown.

The reason for the different Indian policy in Canada and the U.S. was not a conscious choice by officials to treat their native population differently resulting out of a higher regard for native life and culture, but the lack of a number of pressures that defined and escalated the situation in the U.S. In her examination of Canadian policy making and the Canadian self-image, St. Germain points to a number of factors that distinguished the Canadian situation in the West and explained the lack of a pressure on officials to quickly settle their "Indian question." One of the main differences was a lack of emigration to the Canadian West similar to that in the U.S.A.:

> There was no violent conflict between peoples precipitated by uncontrolled emigration to prompt negotiations for security purposes. Because the Indians were not threatened with extinction from the same source, neither was there a humanitarian impulse to solve an 'Indian problem' through a concerted policy of civilization. (160)

As a result, "Canada could afford not only a leisurely pace in expansion but also a dilatory application of its existing Indian policy" (Ibid.). Curiously this dragging of feet resulted in many First Nation's leaders insisting on treaties (Ibid.; cf. also Friesen).[207] While the Canadian treaties contain none of the American clauses aimed at "reforming" the nomadic Plains Indians into farmers, making "red" men into white men, which seem highly paternalistic, ethnocentric, and objectionable from today's perspective, the

[207] As such, as Friesen points out, the treaties were not as much an abuse of ignorant and child-like Indian leaders, a view favored by earlier interpreters, as arrangement made between negotiators from both sides, with the important difference that the two groups had a vastly unequal power basis. It is this power imbalance, among other factors, that clearly identifies the treaties as colonial acts,

> the peaceful means of transferring interest in and control of vast areas of Canada from Indians to whites. There was clearly an imbalance of power, and the implicit and usually explicit threat used by the Queen's officials was that no treaty was necessary and the Indians should sign and receive at least some compensation for the land. (Friesen 43)

It is from this understanding that Native leaders "took this difficult situation and, in most cases, made the best deal they could for their land" (Ibid.).

reason for this lack is a disinterest in "their" Indians by Canadian officials, rather than an insight into Native culture's validity (St. Germain 161-62).

So large, in fact, was Canada's disinterest in its Indian policy, according to St. Germain, that there was a "reluctance by the government to survey or distribute agricultural equipment even when administrators on the spot and the Indians themselves demanded fulfillment of these treaty provisions" (Ibid. 164). This situation, which forms part of the background of Sharon Pollock's *Walsh*, stands in marked contrast to the U.S.'s attempt to reform and re-educate its Natives into yeomen farmers and the violent resistance by the Natives to this treatment. The central point, however, is that the result of the treatment by the white government for the Canadian indigenous population was in the end no more positive than it was for their Southern neighbors: "Canadian Indians also faced a fight for their lives in the 1870s, but their enemy was starvation, not assimilation, and they saw agriculture as a means of salvation. Canadian indifference thus worked in favor of the government in mitigating violence, at least in the short term" (Ibid. 164).

This is a viewpoint which only occasionally enters the discourse in Canadian authors' writings, however. As I will argue, the less obviously violent aspects of Canada's treatment of its native population is most clearly developed in George Bowering's critique of Canadian colonialism in *Shoot!*, but it is perhaps even more clearly formulated in a transnational perspective in Sharon Pollock's *Walsh*. Here Harry, who functions as a narrator in parts of the play, draws a parallel to U.S. history similar to St. Germain's when he criticizes the Canadian officials' refusal to provide Sitting Bull and his tribe with food when they were starving, thus forcing them to return across the border, where a warrant was out for Sitting Bull and he went straight into the arms of the U.S. army:

> Sir John A.'s policy for dealin' with the Sioux was an all round winner ... beats Custer to hell! Not half so messy as ridin' into a tube-like hollows at ungodly hours of the mornin' ... and no need for a marchin' band ... Quiet, simple and effective ... Do not delay in returning to the United States, for that course is the only alternative to death by starvation ... So Sittin' Bull left the Candian West. (124)

Harry's comparison of Canadian policy making with Custer's campaign, which he sharply criticized earlier in the play, make it clear that Canadian policy is no less violent than America's more direct approach, merely more "elegant" and less messy. It is only in those respects that it "beats Custer to hell."

This different historical record of Canada's relation to its First Nations and its common interpretation in the public imagination as more "humane, just and Christian" reflects back on literature, particularly when this literature focuses on the late 19th

century West. As Margery Fee suggests in her examination of Natives in English-Canadian literature, a complex of contradictory psychological impulses is at play in the appropriation of Native characters, that cannot be simply dismissed as straight out racism: "Because of the sympathy for Native people common to much contemporary English-Canadian writing, it seems simplistic to dismiss the almost obsessive literary concern with Native people as mere exploitation" (Fee 15). Instead, Fee suggests, "[a] complicated process, simultaneously a confession and a denial of guilt – an identification and a usurpation – ensues when white writers choose Native people as literary material" (Ibid.). This is not an exclusively Canadian sentiment, of course. Within the context of this chapter Fee's argument equally applies to American writers, such as Michael Blake, whose work also combines feelings of guilt and identification. The pitfall of this stance, as I have argued is the case of *Dances with Wolves*, is that it can easily turn into an apologetic cleansing of white guilt.

Fee identifies nationalism as one of the major driving forces behind many uses of Indians in 20th century English-Canadian literature, linking this appropriation back to Romanticism, which had informed a similar appropriation in American literature: "The Indian is an important mythical figure in a powerful literary movement – Romanticism – and its related political ideology – nationalism" (17). The process of speaking for a subaltern, according to Fee, also "has its origins in Romantic theory, which sees the poet as the mouthpiece of the inarticulate and illiterate people" (20-21). In Romanticism, "[a]n important distinction is made between the heroic, but inarticulate people and the great poet who provides them with voice, consciousness, and, ultimately, in the form of literary immortality, a soul" (21). Fee argues further:

> The simultaneous marginality and ubiquity of the Native people in our literature can be explained to some extent, then, by our desire to naturalize our appropriation of their land. It also explains a general lack of interest in Native culture or history: we want to *be* them, not to understand them. But Romanticism supplies us with a further explanation: the Indian stands for a dispossession larger than his own. (24)

Fee's argument is astonishingly close to the insightful analysis American author William Eastlake put into the mouth of his Native character My Prayer thirty years earlier in *The Bronc People*, a passage I have quoted in greater length as an epigraph to this chapter:

> When we stole this land, when the Navaho stole this land from the Gallina people, the Navaho forgot it. Except for some rather pleasant memories of the war, the Navaho forgot it. When the white man stole this land from the Navaho Nation he has got to compound the crime in order to forget it. He's got to love us to death. Love is their way of not giving back something they have stolen. [...] I wonder if the white man will ever learn that that is all any defeated people ever want – to be tolerated. To be allowed to be different. Love is their way of intolerance. (203)

Leslie Monkman has made similar points in his dissertation.

> Our literature provides few insights into the nature of red life in this country. Instead, the heritage and dilemma of our native peoples have served primarily to define the nature of white experience in this environment, illuminating aspects of the white man's sense of a national or social or personal identity. ("White on Red" 3; quoted in Mandel 35)

As Fee goes on to argue, the Natives in English-Canadian literature "come to represent what is past, lost, almost forgotten" (25). Connected to their image as a vanishing or vanished people, is a "sense of loss, of elegiac nostalgia," which, according to Fee, "comes from the urban individual's loss of community, nature, and a personal sense of the numinous" (25).[208] A similar argument has been made by several American critics to explain the rise and popularity of the Western, e.g. by Bill Brown for the dime Western in his *Reading the West*.

5.8. Indians as Symbols and the "Appropriation of Voice" Debate

What is curious in the treatments of Native characters in a number of Canadian novels is that far into the 20th century many seem largely untroubled in using Indians as symbols. The oppressed Indian becomes a stand in for other oppressed peoples (in this case of course the marginalized Canadian nation – cf. Chapter 3). To quote Margaret Atwood once more: "In fact, white Canadian identification with the Indian-as-victim may at times conceal a syllogism something like the following: 'We are to the Americans as the Indians are to us'" (*Survival* 120).[209] This chain of identification and its underlying psychology is perhaps made most clear in a scene from Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*, in which F, the narrator's French-Canadian friend philosophizes: "The English did to us what we did to the Indians, and the Americans did to the English what the English did to us. I demand revenge for everyone" (quoted in Atwood, *Survival* 122).[210]

While many white writers had deemed it unproblematic to appropriate the voice and stories of Native peoples, and in some cases to liken Canada's marginal position to that of the First Nations, the 1990s saw what Laura Moss and Cynthia Sugars describe

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[208] Fee identifies this theme even in the self-consciously postmodern works of Robert Kroetsch. The beginning of *The Studhorse Man*, for instance, features a Native ancestor who literally vanishes into the ground, symbolically leaving his place to Kroetsch's 'hero' Demeter Proudfoot. It would be hard not to read a sense of irony into this scene.

[209] Atwood mentions examples like Dave Godfrey's story "On the River," and Yves Thériault's *Agaguk* and Ashini claiming that in Thériault's books "the native heroes are used as more or less thinly-veiled disguises for a presentation of French Canadian problems" (*Survival* 120).

[210] Cf. also Atwood's assessment: "Canadian writers seem to have been less interested in Indians and Eskimos *per se* than they have been in Indians and Eskimos as exotic participants in their own favourite game [that is, in Atwood's view, playing Victims and Victors] (*Survival* 123).

as “one of the central critical discussions in public discourse amongst writers and critics” (531), the so-called “appropriation of voice” debate. In her newspaper article which set the debate off, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias tried to defend Native stories against the use by white writers who were supposedly stealing them.

In response, some authors, such as Sandra Birdsell, accused anybody who wanted to limit Native stories to Native writers of censoring (“Whose Voice? 11), while others, including George Bowering, claimed not to understand the commotion and accused those calling for a limiting of native stories to native writers of displaying fascist tendencies (Ibid. 11-12). Delaware playwright Daniel David Moses, on the other hand, pointed out that Native Canadians were hardly in a position to censor anything.

One issue, which over time crystallized as a central point in the debate, as the two sides started to come to terms, was the hegemony of culture, a point Keeshig-Tobias also mentioned:

> With native people struggling for justice with land claims and in education, what makes Canadians think they have equality in the film industry? In publishing? With agencies that make arts grants? In the arts themselves? Instead, the Canadian cultural industry is stealing – unconsciously, perhaps, but with the same devastating results – native stories, as surely as the missionaries stole our religion and the politicians stole our land and the residential schools stole our language.

African Canadian writer George Eliot Clarke made a similar point to refocus the debate: “Being writers of colour, we must not merely protest the blithe appropriation and distortion of our cultures by some white writers. Rather, we must rage at our lack of ownership of the means of cultural propagation” (“Whose Voice” 12).

“While the debate is no longer as heated as it was in the 1990s,” as Moss and Sugars remind us, “the question of how to balance artistic freedom and political responsibility to subject matter is still very prominent” (Moss and Sugars 532); it gains additional prominence in a genre which has traditionally had a record of treating Indian characters in a less than favorable way.

5.9. Indians in the Canadian Revisionist Western

While many American texts seem to answer the dilemma raised by the appropriation of voice debate by not including Native characters at all or treading very carefully, Canadian texts display a varying degree of awareness of the problematic politics of using Indian characters in a Western setting. Geoffrey Ursell’s *Perdue, or How the West Was Lost* for instance in its last part is clearly on the side of appropriating Native voices (Ursell’s work predates the debate, to be fair). George Bowering, on the other hand, in his *Shoot!* has a particularly interesting take on the use of mixed-blood characters by in

part making their story his own, in part bringing forth a larger and sympathetic political point about the treatment of Natives in Canada past and present, as I will argue below. For the remainder of this chapter I will turn to those Canadian Westerns which include Native characters of some note. I will discuss George Bowering's *Shoot!* in most detail at the end of this chapter, because it is the Canadian novel which uses its Native, or in this case mixed race, characters most ambitiously and effectively within the framework of a revisionist Western.

5.9.1 Victimized and Marginalized Natives in the Canadian Western

While it is, as mentioned above, not a uniquely Canadian approach to portray Native characters as victims, and it might in fact speak more of Native Americans' historical plight and current position in the popular imagination in a transnational framework, as the three revisionist American novels discussed in detail above suggest, it is nevertheless noticeable that Canadian authors most frequently choose to include Native or mixed-blood characters in the role of victims. Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Englishman's Boy* and *The Last Crossing* for instance include highly marginalized and victimized characters. As mentioned in chapter 3, *The Englishman's Boy* is centered around a massacre of an Assiniboine band and particularly, the rape and burning of one of the young women of the tribe.

Vanderhaeghe's narrative is perhaps best understood as partaking in the larger stance outlined by Fee above. His novel attempts to do justice to Natives but ultimately relegates them to the margins and only treats them in as far as they serve his narrative about the white actors, Shorty and Harry. This position is perhaps best seen in the frame narrative of the novel's main storylines. While the "Indians" are for the most part present only as ghosts and/or victims (in the case of Shorty's narrative) in the main narratives, the novel is framed by two chapters, which work as a counter-narrative to the tale of victorious, if morally decrepit, white aggression. These chapters tell the story of two Assiniboine braves, Fine Man and Broken Horn, who in the first chapter capture the wolfers' horses and, in a reversal of the typical Western plot of defeat and death, return home victoriously and celebrated in the last chapter. Although the book thus ends with their successful return home to their village, Herb Wyile has argued that their role is so marginal as to raise the issue of "appropriation." Their "principal effect," he argues, is "to emphasize that imperialism is a thing of the past – and of the present" (Wyile, *Speculative Fictions*, 60). Elsewhere he has stated that "Vanderhaeghe does the same thing as Costner [and it should be added Blake, who adapted his own novel; J.F.] by making whites […] the heroes of the novel and by relegating Natives to the margins; as Tompkins observes, 'Indians are repressed in Westerns – there but not there – in the

same way that women are'" (Wyile, "Dances" 25). The marginality of the Natives' position in the novel thus highlights their marginality in the genre as a whole, but the fact that Natives are marginalized in the Western should be news to no one, and while Vanderhaeghe clearly attempts to distance himself from the appropriation of Natives, by choosing a benevolent narratorial stance in his frame narrative, he can in some ways be said to continue the tradition of marginalizing Natives in the Western, despite his attempts to break through this pattern.

In staying true to this point of view, when Natives do appear in the novel's main narrative they seem to serve a point rather than being there for their own sake. In chapter 25 the wolfers finally confront a group of Assiniboine, but they are not the ones they have been hunting. The situation is clearly designed to show the uneven power relations and politics of the situation, the wolfers' modern weapons against the Indians' Northwest muskets, lances and horn bows, their relative wealth against the Indians' poverty. The situation becomes wholly pathetic when the tribe's leader, Little Soldier, is brought before Hardwick on the American's request, "blind drunk" and "[l]ooking like a baby taking his first uncertain steps," attempting to appease the aggressive Hardwick (259). The scene is played out to make a point about the injustice of the wolfer's aggression: Little Soldier tries to appease the wolfers by giving them two of his horses, while Hardwick remains stubborn, threatening if he does not get a horse the Natives do not have and thus cannot give him. The sympathies once clearly lie with the Natives (as victims), but the treatment of the Native characters is by no means satisfactory. They are stereotypes, drunk Indians like Little Soldier, who despite his attempts to resolve the situation and keep his face "grin[s] foolishly" at Hardwick's insults (261), understanding neither the language nor obviously the meaning of Hardwick's angry shouts, or "stone-faced and sober," stoic Indians (258) ready once more to perform their traditional role of being butchered in a hopeless fight.

The Last Crossing, too, shows limited Native agency. Again Natives work mostly as plot motors, as in the case of the Native scholar inspiring Simon to reinvent himself among the Natives, or as victims of Western aggression, as I have argued in chapter 3 is the case with Jerry Potts. While Simon clearly sees himself as benevolent to Native culture, and works in some ways as a counterpoint to Addington's abuse of the mixed-blood scout Jerry Potts, as Herb Wyile has argued, Simon's position, too, is part of a colonial stance. His loyalty to Native culture is based largely on his flight from hetero-normative Victorian culture. Among the Crow he joins he can live with the *bote*, the "man-woman" of the tribe. Yet,

> Simon, like his brothers, puts his own questionable sexual stamp on the New World. While flouting Victorian sexual codes by co-habiting with the *bote*, Simon, however sympathetic and well-intentioned, imposes other codes on the Crow by discouraging the *bote*'s

> promiscuity, a culturally sanctioned part of her function (Williams 102). This angers the Crow warriors, who resent being denied her spiritually and sexually desirable company and suspect that he is stealing her power. [...] In that sense, Simon exports some imperial attitudes as much as he tries to leave others behind. (Wylie "Doing" 64)

Apart from such points of sexual and colonial politics, and the mistreatment of Potts, the most obvious point that can be made regarding the relative marginality of Natives in the novel is their sheer textual absence. Where they appear, they are mostly victimized, as in the case of Potts, the upsetting of the Crow's societal structure or the account of a Native village beset by smallpox.

First Nation's playwright Daniel David Moses takes an interesting approach to the victimization of Natives and the problem of representing Indians in a Western in his "Western," *The Indian Medicine Show*. Particularly in the first part, "The Moon and Dead Indians," Moses goes all the way in treating the "Indian" as a construct of the white imagination. There are no (living) Indians in the play. Moses provides his rationale behind the decision to exclude any real Indian characters, once again referring to the genre's traditional lack of and, it seems, generic code prescribing a real Native presence:

> I knew when I started on the piece that it was a western, which meant that, by the conventions of the genre, there would be no fully realized "Indians" in the foreground of the story. But wasn't that part of the challenge for me, an Indian, to write about Cowboys [sic], perhaps surprisingly or with a bit of irony or even some political pleasure, claiming or reclaiming r just re-telling a frontier story from my own "Other" point of view? [...]
> Yes, I knew from the get-go that the play was a foreground-free-of-Indians western but had also realized that that wouldn't stop me from trying to see my own reflection in the background. [...] Ma Jones [...] does see that reflection. [...] But of course I couldn't let the character ma know it was really just the author, keeping his distance just over the horizon or most likely just offstage like the ghosts the play's title suggests. ("Syphilitic Western" 158)

The "Indians in the background" are Apaches, according to Sonnichsen, the traditional merciless savages of the Western (*Hopalong* 64), not Moses' own nation, the Delaware, and they are in fact omnipresent – constantly talked about – yet mere ghosts the old frontier woman Ma Jones imagines. The real Indians are all "[r]ounded up or shot" (17) we are told early on by her son,[211] Jon, yet Ma continues to imagine Indians crawling

[211] The image of Indians being rounded up is also used in Geoffrey Ursell's novelistic account of "how the West was lost," *Perdue*. Sir, Perdue's father, is told by an old-timer how he chased Indians, the language is decidedly that of a cattle drive with its effect of making the Natives seems as objectified as cattle in a drive:

> We had a bit of trouble right at first, getting them to move in the right direction. But I sent some of my men out to the sides to guide them along, and with others I urged them from behind. We made them go faster and faster. Finally, they broke and ran. (Ursell 37)

around her cabin and blames them for all the misfortunes in her life: in her imagination the Apaches are responsible for the death of Jon's brothers, who died in the Civil War, as well as the death of her husband, who froze to death in the snow while drunk. Moses himself has commented slyly on his play and the position of the Indians in it:

> My metaphorical ears perked up, perversely or ironically, when I hear that what she fears are "sneaky" Indians. It's partly because it's nice to be mentioned, "Indian" that I am, party because it's even better to have power, even if it's only the power to be fictionally frightful. And finally it's partly because this might be an opportunity to figure out what this fictional fear that beats in the chest of every western I've ever seen is really about. ("Syphilitic Western" 154)

This fear in Moses' treatment is not about Indians, real or imagined, but rather about the darkness lying at the bottom of white society itself, a darkness that is taken out on an Other because society, represented in the play by both Ma and the two male characters Jon and Billy cannot deal with it. In Ma's case this fear or darkness is paranoia mixed with misdirected religious devotion, in Billy's case a repressed homosexuality which time and again surfaces in gun-toting tension and sublimated aggressiveness that at any minute seems to turn into violence.

The only real Indian "presence" in the play is a two-spirited boy – a boy who, like the *bote* in Vanderhaeghe's *The Last Crossing*, combines male and female gender, by enacting a female gender role – whom Jon and his cowboy friend Bill Antrim raped and mutilated in the past. This secret, buried in their past, gains a strong symbolic weight, when – shortly after their admittance of their past to each other – Ma proclaims that the Indians, who were earlier held at bay by the manly presence of the cowboy Bill, are back, then shoots herself in the head.[212] There is, however, another symbolic aspect to the murder, which Moses himself remarks on, the victimized boy stands in not for any raped Indian, but being a two-spirit, the very aspect of his existence that triggered Bill

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The Natives are "funnel[ed]" in between two hills where some fall into a trap, an image that evokes the Native "buffalo jumps" cliffs over which the buffalo were driven, or "mill around" the insides of a fence they have been driven into.

Once they are entrapped the government officials wave papers in their faces, supposedly attempting to force them to sign treaties: "minor officials jumping up and waving papers again and again, and throwing medals with the Queen's face on them, and the people throwing them back, trying to use them as weapons" (Ibid. 38). When the Natives refuse to sign the papers they are mowed down by gunshots without giving resistance, just as the buffalo were earlier slaughtered by Sir and his men. It is perhaps the ultimate irony of the scene that the governor stands by painting first the landscape, then the rising heap of dead Natives' bodies.

While Ursell's commentary is a strong one, it reflects U.S. history and its image in the public imagination far more than it does Canadian history or its popular images. As I have pointed out Canadian Indian policy was far from respectful, but it did not have major Indian massacres as the one depicted in *Perdue*.

[212] The figure of the abused Indian boy returns in Moses' second play in the *Indian Medicine Show* cycle, "Angel of the Medicine Show" in the figure of David, "the show's Indian" (75), who has been lynched for talking back to Western culture when he points out that his people are Christians.

and Jon's violation, represents "yet another set of Native American traditions that have been repressed and almost destroyed" ("Syphilitic Western" 162). The play thus gains a larger significance as a symbol of colonial repression, and – to quote Moses once more – becomes an "exploration of the downside of the frontier," a downside which "was revealed as having much to do with the interwoven anguishes of alcohol, violence, sex and racism" (Ibid. 165). That it manages to do all this in such few pages and without including an actual, flesh and blood Native character, is remarkable.

As mentioned above, not all Canadian texts cast Indian characters as victims. Gil Adamson's *The Outlander* for instance does not make much out of the fact that one of its characters, Henry, is a Crow. While the main character, the "widow," initially mistrusts him, her feelings soon change when he helps her in her flight. As his European name already suggests, Henry is not a stereotypical Indian, however, he does not help her as a noble savage, but rather out of the same nebulous reasons all of the people the widow meets support her, and he is well-spoken, having been born and raised in Baltimore. The only fallback of his role as an Indian in a Western is during a somewhat arbitrary attack by other Indians in which the widow is wounded. At the end, Henry seems neither a radical revision, nor a continuation of stereotyping, but rather a minor character among many with unclear motivation who just happens to be Crow.

Anne Cameron's novel *The Journey*, which otherwise has many similarities to Adamson's *The Outlander* with its narrative of a woman, pursued by a man (in Adamson's case two brothers), heading West through Canada and its focus on the travel rather than the confrontation, has a somewhat more troubling handling of the matter of race, even while its Native characters clearly meet with the author's approval. The protagonists, Anne and Ruth encounter friendly Natives along the British Columbian Pacific Coast, where they move into an empty cabin they find conveniently located at the end of their track across Canada. After they have settled in, local Natives hand over to them what might be the only pair of black characters in the Canadian Western, an orphaned boy and girl, completing their female family unit. This act of handing over the Black children is implicitly linked to a validation of their presence in the area. Margery Fee has described such transfers as a recurring theme of establishing an ancestral link to the land in Euro-Canadian literature: "Sometimes a Native voluntarily hands a totem (often an animal) over to a newcomer, thereby validating the white land claim and blessing the relationship between old land and new landowner" (Fee 21). In Cameron's novel, too, the noble Natives, for undisclosed reasons, repeatedly offer the Black children in order to transfer the cabin and land to the new Euro-Canadian arrivals, despite the fact that both children have already been accepted and acculturated into the band to the point where they have started to forget the English language. The colonial gesture lying at the heart of this transfer seems to escape the text (and presumably its

author), however.[213] As in her earlier *Daughters of Copper Woman*, one of the novels which had come under fire in the "appropriation of voice" debate, Cameron depicts Native culture as more peaceful, valiant and generally preferable to patriarchal Euro-Canadian culture, a more equal society and a source of inspiration for the female utopia Anne, Sarah and Ruth establish amongst themselves. It is the healing power of the Native women which allows Sarah to get over being raped by the novel's evil patriarch, Anne's uncle Andrew.

5.9.2. Indians as Postmodern Commentators: George Bowering's *Caprice*

In *Caprice* George Bowering gives such views of Native culture as a source of wisdom and spirituality as expressed in Cameron's writing a refreshingly ironic twist. In his "Alphabiography," he claims tongue-in-cheek: "*Caprice* is about Indians and baseball" (303). While, as Bowering himself acknowledges, *Caprice* is more generally seen as a parody of the Western, or Anti-Western, or historiographic metafiction (Ibid. 307), it is true that some parts of the book are also about Indians and baseball, establishing an unlikely appreciation of that sport Bowering's postmodern Indians share with the author. Early on, the novel features an ironic appraisal of the traditional Western theme of white civilization's superiority to the primitive Indian culture when the two Indians have to acknowledge baseball's superiority over their own similar game:

> "These petitioners you mention, they are the ones who came here to play that interesting game?"
> "Baseball."
> "An interesting game. You do not have to tell everyone I said so, but from what I have seen I find this brace-ball more interesting than sukkullilaka."
> "But sukkullilaka is our traditional sport. It hearkens back to the misty origins of our people. Our greatest players have always been honoured equally with our most intrepid warriors and hunters. […] I rather wondered whether they would let me play their game with them." (*Caprice* 24)

The "traditional'" Indian game of sukkullilaka, in fact an invention by Bowering, with its cult around the best players, first and foremost pokes fun at professional baseball and the star cult surrounding the major players in North America's big leagues, the scene also parodies a number of core beliefs of the Western, however. As mentioned it ironically apes the supposition of civilization's superiority, which the Western, with its

[213] Arnold Davidson has made a similar point, although he briefly comments on the transfer of the children as linked to the house (*Coyote Country* 130), he ignores the significant connection of the willing giving of the land as linked to the transfer of the children: "That place, in the novel, was already the Native's place. It can be possessed only by dispossessing them. The sad paradox of *TheJourney's* end, then, is that, radical as it is in one respect, it is in another still the same old story of enforced dominion that it purports to controvert" (Ibid. 135).

central concept of a frontier that advances and brings "progress," is firmly based upon. The second Indian's response with its haughty diction also pokes fun at the mysticism and sacredness commonly associated with Indian traditions in novels and films.

In fact the diction of Bowering's Indians is central to their portrayal. The two most well-spoken characters and, according to Georgiana Colvile, "the most normative focalizers" in the novel (135), they provide an ironic commentary on the novel's action, and act as a chorus of good sense. Both in terms of their function within the novel and their constantly shifting voice Bowering's Indians bear a strong resemblance to American author William Eastlake's wisecracking Indian pairs in his *The Bronc People*. In his contribution to the article "Whose Voice is it Anyway?" Bowering urges his readers: "Don't throw out William Eastlake's Indians along with Tonto" (12), thus expressing his familiarity with Eastlake's Indians. The similarities to Eastlake's Indians even goes as far as their names: Bowering's characters, "First Indian" and "Second Indian," or in their reincarnation in *Shoot!*, where they fulfill a similar role of amusingly commenting on the follies of human existence, the "first old old Indian" and the "second old old Indian" (94 and elsewhere), evoke William Eastlake's character the "Other Indian."

As Gerald Haslam points out in his introduction, Eastlake's Indians "function as a Greek chorus, asking, explaining, and predicting (cryptically in all three cases)" (vii). Bowering's Indians, too, serve as a version of the Greek chorus, commenting on the novel's plot, and – like Eastlake's two wise Indians in his first chapter, they pointless shootout between Big Sant and the "Gran Negrito" – revealing the non-Native characters' fallacies, irrationality, and lack of culture. They thus turn the tables on the role of characters traditionally depicted as uncultivated "savages" in the Western, upsetting established models of representation and cultural supremacy. They furthermore show the hollowness of a model of savagery, which is not only ethnocentric, but based on assumptions about another people's cultural practices, rather than on individual savage acts.[214] In fact, Bowering's Indians are the only characters in the book aware of their, as well as, other people's roles. As is stressed time and again, their "famous Indian eyes" (*Caprice* 1, 33, et. al.), can see (and naturally comprehend) things that are hidden from "ordinary eastern eyes" (Ibid. 33).[215] In an act of apparent

[214] A similar way of de-racing savagery is apparent in some aspects in the satirical depiction of the white man's ways in Thomas Berger's *Little Big Man*. In classical satirical fashion the arbitrariness and silliness of cultural practices taken for granted in a society is often revealed through the defamiliarized view of white society through the eyes of Berger's Native characters.

[215] The stereotypical "Indian eyes" and foresight in all their absurdity are another obvious target of parody. Thomas Berger, as usual exaggerates the stereotype, stretching it beyond what is plausible even in a Western. Whereas Jack Crabb takes some forms moving a few miles away for buffalos, being barely able to see them, his Cheyenne companion corrects him:

racial subservience or, as I would argue, mimicry and good-natured condescension, however, the Indians hide their insights and act according to the stereotypes ascribed to them. Doing otherwise, as they must realize, would only confuse the somewhat simple inhabitants of Kamloops, who do not share their poststructuralist insight about the constructedness of various roles (gender, ethnic, historical, cultural, etc.). In an act of well-meaning double irony, the Indians treat whites as children by acting according to the whites' preconceptions, which see the Indians as somewhat child-like. Accordingly, "[i]f a white man asked [the first Indian] how old he was he always replied: many moons. They liked that" (Ibid. 246).

If the Indians would appear as they do to the reader, as humorous, insightful and civilized, they would without a doubt confuse the ordinary villagers. The Westerners, as the narrator informs us, possess so little imagination they do not even understand irony, preferring to live (another cliché) a straight hard life, "you are betraying them somehow if you change the rules and tell them they have to live with irony. The country out there was hard but not cruel, and the people were the same way. They knew how to live with hard. But forcing irony on them was cruel" (Ibid.109). As a result Bowering's Indians, in an act whose irony is hidden from the straight Westerners, wear their simplistic, stony faces, their "typically Indian" look, an expression which, as we are told their "people had added to their folkways after the white man had come into the country" (Ibid. 231). Their intellectual superiority does not result in scorn, but rather is covered by a mild consideration for the less-insightful, showing the Indians' real strength, intelligence, humor, and a live and let live attitude. Given the general intellectual situation on the Canadian frontier, as outlined in *Caprice* a more or less sensible conversation is thus only possible between the ethnic characters. The most insightful and funny conversations occur when the two Indians are alone, but the Italian character, Everyday Luigi, whose stereotypical image as a womanizer Bowering also plays with (p. 11-12), at least gets an honest answer when he tries to communicate with the Indians:

> The first Indian was there, but he was not saying anything.
> "Are you a Catholic Indian or a Prostitute [sic] Indian," asked Everyday Luigi.
> "I am an animist, with Catholic overtones."
> Everyday Luigi found this hard to respond to. The doctrine of his church regarding divorce and annulment and sexual sin would mean little to a man whose escape from guilt was a matter of choice between the confessional and the spirits of the forest. He decided to find another way to drop the topic. (*Caprice* 35)

> Little Horse, with his Indian eyes, said no, they was white men, that one had yellow hair, was armed with a shotgun, and rode a bay that was slightly lame in the left forefoot; and the other wore a beard and was mounted on a roan with a saddle sore. Also they was lost, but he could see that the bay had got the scent of water and shortly they would strike the river and know where they was. (*Little Big Man* 56)

The conversation of the Indian "animist, with Catholic overtones" and "the more or less white man," (Ibid. 35) acts to blur the typical binary oppositions of the Western, between white and Indian, civilization and savage, which as mentioned above is frequently reversed anyway. Here civilization is represented by an Italian, who maybe "wasnt [sic] an Italian after all" (Ibid. 12) and an Indian who is far more sophisticated (or civilized) than his "more or less white" counterpart.

5.9.3. Exploring the Colonial Contact Zone in George Bowering's *Shoot!*

Bowering's next novel, *Shoot!*, questions the Canadian myth of a peaceful "Mild West" George Bowering had himself used earlier in *Caprice* to send up the American Western (cf. chapter 3). Much more serious and multi-layered than his earlier parodic Western, *Shoot!* questions the Canadian myth of a peaceful settlement and coexistence with the indigenous peoples, outlined above, excavating instead the colonial aspects of Western Canadian history by turning his eye to the complex of race, gender and, to a lesser degree, class.

Shoot! relates the story of the historical Wild McLean gang, three mixed-blood brothers, Allan, Charlie and Archie, and their Métis friend Frank Hare, who go from being mischievous and obnoxious pests in the Okanagan, Bowering's own childhood home, to murdering a lawman, Constable Johnny Ussher.[216] While the law, in the person of Ussher, originally treats them leniently, they are hunted down by a local posse after they murder Ussher and threaten the peace and establishment in the Okanagan. The narrative makes it clear that the locals fear them primarily for their mixed race which uneasily reminds them of their own past involvement with native women. They also fear the danger of an Indian uprising. The McLeans and Alex Hare are cornered by over a hundred posse members after ineffectively attempting to start a revolt among the Indians on the local reservation led by Allan McLean's father-in-law. Following an extended siege, the "wild McLeans" surrender, are mistreated upon capture and brought to court in New Westminster. They are sentenced to death by hanging in two separate, but according to the narrator biased, trials. When they are hanged, Archie, the youngest of the gang, is a boy of only fourteen years. Both the narrator and the prison warden's wife show particular compassion for him, since, as we are told, he is not "old enough to be anything but tough" (*Shoot* 2), and he is an important device in the novel's quest to raise compassion for the "boys" in the reader.

[216] Sherrill Grace in "Calling Out the McLean Boys" briefly outlines the sketchy historical record of the Wild McLeans brief bout of fame in late 19th century British Columbia (16-17). More detailed accounts are provided by John Keranen and particularly Mel Rothenburger.

Like many of the books discussed, *Shoot!* despite its raw material which could provide the basis for a narrative of pursuit, confrontation and justice done or the elegiac narrative of noble outlaws defeated by civilization, does not follow the conventions of a typical Western narrative. As Mark Diotte observes: "Bowering does not suggest that [the] realities [of the McLeans' existence] justify Ussher's murder; rather, he uses this tragedy to portray the larger population and socio-political framework as complicit in both the Ussher murder and the deaths of the McLean Gang." Furthermore, the novel refuses to provide us with the genre's climactic shootout. Instead, "[t]he adventure of 'the gunfight' and the social justice of 'the posse' are replaced by four young men trapped without water in a small, feces- and urine-strewn cabin surrounded by over one hundred gunmen" (147).

The complexities suggested in the plot are reflected in the novel's form. The narrative engages its material in a fractured way to avoid bringing up preconceived genre conventions. There are countless jumps in time and space, and the book brings together a number of diverging voices in order to unearth and reestablish the complexities of a story that was at first treated too one-dimensionally by the newspapers, then largely forgotten. As D. W. Garrett-Petts observes:

> If we look beyond the particulars of the characters and the drama of the moment [...] we discover a complex, collage-like narrative about the political, legal, racial, economic, and linguistic constraints that backed four young men into a small, obscure corner of Canadian history. ("Writing" 150)

Sherrill Grace expresses a similar sentiment when she describes the novel as "appropriately hybrid [...]; a half-breed text, an archeological romance" ("Calling Out" 22). A large part of the novel's complexity and hybridity has to do with the narrative perspective of the novel. "[T]he narrative circles" (Ibid. 19), as Sherrill Grace calls it, shifting time and reflectors between passages in an attempt to juxtapose the multiple dimensions of the McLeans' and other Natives' situation with 19th century Western Canadian society's largely one-dimensional interpretation of it. Throughout, the narrative returns to certain key moments and ideas. Particularly, the "intense 'presents' of the December shoot-out and of the moments in 1881 just before the hanging" (Ibid. 18-19) stand out. These two scenes are at once desperate, almost banal, and tragic, but never approach the heroic.

It is once again through its form, that the narrative withholds the usual tension of the Western's pursuit and the suspense of the ending: in the first chapter already the narrative shows the McLeans sitting in jail, and it is fairly obvious that they will die without a chance to escape. We are denied this closing scene, however. Instead, the novel presents us with the McLeans standing on the gallows, afraid of death or mentally

drifting off into another world. The narration segues into the depiction of a photograph developing in a tray, so that the narrator's and reader's perspective merge, when it addresses the reader directly: "I see them in the dark. You see them. The squinting eyes of little Archie McLean" (*Shoot!* 297). This is the haunting last image of the novel.[217]

Just as we know of the McLeans fate early on, we are also aware that the narrator will condemn their treatment. We can therefore focus on the reasons for the narrator's uneasiness about their treatment and see the backgrounds of the McLeans' story. The changing and fractured narrative perspective allows us to approach the story from different angles. The first chapter, as an example, opens and closes with the Native legend of three brothers who are turned into mountains, then shifts to one of the narrative's key scenes of the gang in prison, with a focus on the youngest, Archie, the McLeans' experience of growing up between cultures, followed by a controversy between members of one of Canada's First Nations about whether geese make a sound with their wings or their beaks when flying, which is interjected by a brief characterization of the mean-spirited Hudson Bay trader Donald McLean, the McLean brothers' father, the introduction of Constable Ussher and his murder, as well as other minor episodes. As becomes apparent from this brief look at the first chapter, the narrative combines many voices. Among these one takes prominence, however. Sherrill Grace has described this voice as a "chronicler (a colloquial, third-person narrator)" who

> carries an important focalizing [sic] and ethical burden within the larger narrative framework of the story. He does all the conventional things a reader expects from such a presence; he also disappears behind or merges with a still more personal voice that I identify as "George Bowering." ("Calling Out" 19)

As Grace points out, this narrator, "George Bowering," enters into "what Philippe Lejeune calls an autobiographical pact," a pact which makes the reader "believe that the author and the narrator are one and the same and are, therefore, telling the truth about a *real* life" (Ibid. 19). Postmodern authors frequently use this technique to authenticate their texts and make them meaningful in a world in which the personal replaces references to concepts beyond the individual, such as universal truths previous authors had used to authoritate their texts, and Bowering's narrator is no exception to the effectiveness of this technique. Through his personal authenticity, spiced up with biting wit and irony, "George Bowering" manages to effectively condemn the treatment of the McLeans, both in their own day, as the victims of a racist society and court system, and

[217] W. F. Garrett-Petts has insightfully discussed the use of photography as a metaphor in Bowering's *Shoot!*, and expanded this discussion to inculde other Canadian texts in his collaboration with Donald Lawrence, *Photographic Encounters*.

in Canadian historiography, which has written the McLeans out of its books, as I will show later.

There is another aspect to the "George Bowering" narrator, however, which gains special importance in light of the "appropriation of voice" debate outlined above, a debate whose grounds Bowering violently rejected.[218] Through the "George Bowering" narrator, Bowering makes the story he relates in part about himself, as Grace observes:

> By making his personal stake in the story clear – from boyhood he has been haunted by the absence of the McLeans, while sensing their influence all around him – he authorizes himself to tell their story, to show how, as Eakin might phrase it, their/his/our lives become stories *through* relations of self with other in the contact zone of transculturation. In other words, by telling their story, Bowering tells (aspects) of his own. ("Calling Out" 15; emphasis in original)

This makes Bowering part of the larger trend within Euro-Canadian literature to use native characters to make a point about themselves, as discussed by Margery Fee and others. The difference to most of the works Fee discusses in her article, however, is that the novel's goal is not to invent a tradition to justify the taking of land by white Canadians, but quite explicitly criticizes this taking of land. In Bowering's account the vanishing American, is not dying regardless of the white's actions, as the romantic trope suggests, but his death is the result of the very real colonial politics, institutionalized violence, and the convenient coincidence of the small pox, which the whites have no interest in fighting within the Native population, as Bowering highlights. The profiteers of their death and disenfranchisement are in all cases rich white men, men who will likely be the ancestors of many of his readers. In highlighting the aspects of colonial history, the novel is not merely about "George Bowering" and his personal stake in the story of the Okanagan Valley, but extends to British Columbia as a province, and, in fact, Canada as a nation. Through this agenda the narrative bears, as Sherrill Grace has argued, "an almost impossible ethical intention of making *us* (by which I mean the majority of his [sic] readers who will be white, middle-class Euro-Canadians) recognize our own autobiographical position in a contact zone" ("Calling Out" 16).

While *Shoot!* tells a larger story of colonialism both in the 19th century and in historiography about the 19th century through the use of mixed race characters, it does so not in an attempt to "exploit" Native stories, but to explore the darker sides of Canadian history. It is with a critical distance and a thoughtful wariness of

[218] "That 'literary rights' business reminds me of [...] Hitler's idea that Jews could not write music to be performed by 'Arian' orchestras. A lot of fascist notions come from minorities that threaten to become powerful ("Whose Voice" 12). One of the many things Bowering ignores in his polemical 'defense' of free speech, is the radically different hegemonic position of those who regulate / try to protect their culture, a hegemonic struggle in which Bowering through his intervention positions himself with a white hegemonial cultural block that keeps Native voices in marginal positions.

historiographic selectiveness that Bowering unearths this uniquely Canadian story with all its particulars of racism and the unjust treatment of natives through racist practices, as well as economic marginalization. In this the novel shows "that BC is not so much *post*-colonial as a contact zone [according to Marie-Louise Pratt's definition; J.F.] of on-going colonization and, potentially, of transculturation" (Grace, "Calling Out" 14; emphasis in original). In the 19th century contact zone the mixed race McLeans play a particularly significant role, as Grace remarks:

> the actual racial mixing – the miscegenation producing "half-breeds" – that created the McLean brothers makes them biological contact zones and sites of transculturation, that the white authorities of the day felt obliged to repudiate. ("Calling Out" 15)

Despite its critical stance towards Canadian history and historiography, the novel nevertheless is also an instance of writing *Canada* back on the map; a map which, as Bowering has observed in "Parashoot!," is dominated by foreign stories, such as the American Western:

> When I was a boy I was not told anything about the Okanagan Valley, but I learned a lot about the James gang and the Daltons and the Clantons. All those wild and dangerous brothers from Missouri, where my grandfather had been a boy. But what about the McLeans? Did they escape? Did Archie McLean escape? [...] When I was a boy I knew that the James gang and the Daltons were buried deep in history. But I kept my eyes out for McLeans. (166-67)[219]

Shoot! then not only reinstates a Native, or in this case "half-breed" presence, but also a presence of Canadian actors into a region that has traditionally been dominated by foreign archetypes and stories. This is all the more true for Bowering's own awareness of the power of stories and their shaping.

The shifting narration with its changes between the 19th and 20th century allows the narrator, "George Bowering," to express his concern not only about the historical treatment of the McLeans, in what he condemns as a trial more interested in securing colonial interests than in reaching justice, but also in the representation of history, which ignores those actors who do not fit the picture. The novel makes this clear when it points to the absence of the McLeans in British Columbian historiography: "One hundred and twelve years later [i.e., after the trial] two new histories of British Columbia were published to considerable acclaim. Neither mentioned the McLeans. The McLeans are not in history" (51).[220] The narrator wryly comments on what he sees as the reason for

[219] A similar passage is found in the novel itself as the beginning of Chapter 4 when "George Bowering" writes about a boy in his school Kenny McLean and his generation's preoccupation with American legends and disregard for local history: "We didnt play McLeans and Lawmen. We played USA cowboys and Indians" (42).

[220] It is worth noting that in his own "swashbuckling" history of British Columbia, *Bowering's B.C.*, which appeared only two years after *Shoot!*, Bowering prominently includes the McLeans and other

this gap only a few pages later, implicitly criticizing the myth of a "Mild West" which disavows any traces of personal violence in Western Canadian history:

> Canadian history is mainly written by schoolteachers who know a lot about the Government.
> If an individual with a gun shows up, he had better be an American or else.
> In the Kamloops museum there's a display including pistols about Bill Miner the train robber.
> He was an American who snuck into Canadian history with a gun in his hand.[221]
> People do not want to know about the McLeans. They werent Americans. They werent white people and they werent Indians [sic].
> They might as well have been dead all along. (59)

It is in passages like this that the story of the McLeans reaches a larger significance. Not only are Canadian historiography and the "Mild West" mindset, which expects violence only from outsiders, criticized,[222] the narrator also criticizes any mindset so inflexible that it allows people to think only in oppositional pairs, such as us vs. them, Canadian vs. American, and white vs. Indian.

It is this inflexibility and the feeling of superiority derived from the Othering inherent in the setting off of whites vs. Indians that fuels the novel's main point of critique, the racism of Canadian society in the 19th century: the "half-breed" McLeans are the ultimate colonial subject, subaltern and silenced, not only alienated from white but also from Native culture. Their attempt to break out of the powerlessness of a position they were born into as a result of their race is ill-informed, as W. F. Garrett-Petts observes:

> Neither white nor Native, and accepted by neither community, the "Wild McLeans" seem inexorably driven into their roles as outlaws: as Archie puts it, "The onliest thing we were ever left with was gettin' famous" – and they decide early in life that lasting fame can be achieved by following the example of outlaws to the south. What they fail to recognize is that the rhetoric of American-style violence does not play well in Canadian history books. (148)

It is of course a bitter irony that even their attempt of "gettin' famous" and Alex Hare's dream that "They'll remember us [...] A hundred years from now people will be coming to this here shack to see where we got it" (207), are suppressed by similar forces of colonization to the ones which had already dictated their lifetime. Their existence is so thoroughly ignored that there are not even gravestones for them, as Bowering reminds us, in "Parashoot!": "There are no gravestones for the Wild McLeans, so you had to

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characters from *Shoot!*, such as John Andrew Mara (109-11, 173-76, 190-92, and elsewhere). His later history of Canada, *Stone Country* (2003), however, once again leaves out the McLeans.

[221] Fittingly Bill Miner is also the main character in what is arguably Canada's most important film Western, *Grey Fox* (1982).

[222] This links the novel to the discussion of Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Englishman's Boy* as a critique of nation building through simplified, essentialist narratives provided in chapter 3.

wonder whether they were dead, or whether they had ever lived. The field where they were buried no longer exists" (Bowering, "Parashoot!" 167).

Their powerless within white society is further expressed by the fact that none of the McLeans have learned reading or "arithmetic," a metaphor associated with European colonialism. These are the tools that might have enabled them to operate in a space increasingly dominated by white codes and mindsets. "Arithmetic," in particular is identified as "a way to make sure there would be enough space in the valleys [i.e., along the rivers and on the good land; J.F.] for all the white people" (175). It is an instrument of colonial dispossession and land grabbing, and its rules as presented by Bowering are relatively simple: "The main thing you had to learn about arithmetic was how to use it for your own benefit" (244). The McLeans, however, do not know arithmetic, and as a result of their ignorance, they, like their Indian ancestors, cannot resist the disenfranchisement they suffer, the taking of land that makes the white upper classes richer. Their brief attempt to resist can only take the form of ill-informed violence, a form of resistance they have imported from South of the border, hoping that the outlaw code will gain them if not power then at least fame. Individual violence, as Bowering makes clear, however, is not part of the code of the Canadian West, and the McLeans' attempt to become famous is ill-fated, short-lived and directionless, crushed by the systemic violence of a white system of law books and arithmetic. It is both significant for their directionlessness and deeply ironic, that they kill the well-meaning Constable Ussher in a drunken rage, rather than reaching the real target of their hatred, the land owner John A. Mara, who has impregnated and all but abandoned their teenaged sister, letting her work for him as an "act of mercy." It is Mara whom the narrative strongly identifies with the silent violence of racism, class-injustice and patriarchal abuse of women in the 19th century Canadian West, and the injustice of the McLeans' existence is made all the more graspable by the interspersed sections that portray the rise of Mara and other rich Euro-Canadians.

While they share the experience of dispossession and powerlessness with the Native tribes in the Okanagan Valley, what makes the McLeans' position even more bitter is that they are not only powerless, they are also rootless, at home among neither whites nor Natives, since both see only the negative aspects in them. They are "bad news of the future for the Indians, and bad news of the past for whites" (273). In their search for an identity their mother, a Native woman, creates the category "McLeans." When Archie asks her: "Are we white men?" Her answer is: "You are McLeans" (4). This category, potentially drawing on the Scottish clan system of their father but not a self identification he himself uses and never explained in the novel, remains a category of its own, just as the McLeans mix of blood constitutes them as neither white nor First Nations but as a group of their own. "McLeans" thus remains the only category the

brothers fit into, at the same time, however, it is a category that does not fit in with either white or native society, a notion the narrative explores throughout. As is made clear repeatedly, white society sees them as either Indian or not quite Indian, unsure of where exactly to place them, while the Natives likewise see them as not quite Indian. Consequently, they are at times unsure how to see themselves in racial terms. In 19th century society they are clearly a neither nor, rather than the both the narrator seems to see in them when he points to their racial hybridity, favoring the *mestizo* in typical postmodern fashion:[223]

> They were better than their white folks and they were better than their native progenitors. Each side saw them as degeneration, though. Tag ends. The Indians saw them as the children of lost women. The white ranchers saw them as reproof of their younger days. (141)

The crisis of identity this view of "half-breeds," a word which "was used as an unpleasant epithet" (16), is most pronounced in the case of Allan McLean, who as the oldest serves as a leader for his brothers, but longs for a place in a larger community. Allan, who is married to a Native woman, has a notion of reinventing the future for the Natives, but ultimately fails to see his goals through. Allan's contested identity becomes apparent throughout. In his passionate addresses to Chillitnetza and the other Okanagan elders, for instance, he identifies himself and his brothers as Natives by choice:

> I am a man, and a man's heart tells him what he is. I am an Okanagan. What did my father's people give me? Unless I am an Indian, I have no land. My heart is with my mother's people, and with the people of my wife. My brothers have killed white men and they have killed the white blood in their bodies. We have begun the war that will return your land and your soul. (163-64)

Earlier, Charlie had informed Hector, another McLean who is not part of their gang, about Allan's attempts to become Native, and received a similar positioning by Hector:

> "Hector, you got to understand something about our brother. He thinks he's an Indian," said Charlie.
> "Listen, we spend our time with Indians. We sit around campfires with Indians. We talk Indian when we're around the reserve. Last I heard your brother was marrying an Indian. So what are we? Do we spend a lot of time with white society people? Been to any tea parties lately?" (90)

Despite Hector's suggestion, the McLeans and particularly Allan are not Indians, however, nor do they continually see themselves as Indians. While Allan tries to connect to his Indian heritage, when he listens to a voice in the forest to gain a vision

[223] Cf. Gloria Anzaldúa's theory of the borderlands and the "new mestiza" as a postmodern celebration of mixed race in a globalized and rapidly gobalizing world of cross-border identity and hybridization.

of his future, he addresses the voice, stating: "I am not an Indian, [...] I am Allan McLean" (19). In his conversation with the voice, Allan accuses the Natives of having given up too much to the whites, without putting up any resistance: "They gave away the land, they gave away the stories, they gave away the fish and the skins. They gave away the women." Yet he stands against white society and wants to reclaim the land, fish and stories from the whites, a plan which only in part seems to be about his personal visions of grandeur as a leader of men. His children, he proclaims, "will be called McLeans, but they will not be sons of Britain" (20).

Despite his contempt for white society Allan also occasionally makes use of his white heritage. "Today he was being a white man" (102), we are told when Allan sarcastically rebuffs his brother and drinks whiskey. And it does indeed seem as if it is in part Allan, the white man, who plans the uprising on the Indians behalf and wishes to enlist the Indians in his crusade against white society, when he says: "Maybe them Scotchmen made a bad mistake creatin' us kind of people. Maybe we're just what the Indians need to help them ride off the reserves and take their land back" (104). He later expresses a similar sentiment with regard to the smallpox; "Could be, making people like us gave the Indians another chance. Get some white man blood into them, the smallpox bug cant [sic] kill them anymore. They'll have to think of another way of killing us" (111). In such passages, Allan seems to share the narrator's view of the potential for the racial hybridity of his existence, as "better than their white folks and [...] better than their native progenitors" (141), and it seems this existence which emboldens him to see himself as a leader for a future in which the Natives drive back the white people. However, society and even the McLeans, are ultimately unable to free themselves of the metanarrative of race and grasp the hegemonic forces at work in the mediation of its meanings. Just as they lacked the imagination to find a mode of resistance that did not copy outlaw codes from the U.S., so do they fail to find a third space for themselves: when Allan answers Alex Hare's question where his Indians are to get them out of jail with "No more Indians," "No more white men," Alex wonders "What else is there" (251-52). An earlier conversation between Allan and Charlie McLean about the African Americans South of the border further makes the novel's position to simple racial roles clear, even while the McLeans do not manage to see through the discourse of race:

> "Down there [in the State] they got Darkies just about everywhere you look. Matter of fact some parts of the States there's more of them than there is of us."
> "What d'ya mean us?" asked Charlie.
> "I mean there's more of them than there is white people."
> "Oh, us *white* people," said Charlie. (55; emphasis in original)

This passage serves as an ironic reference of Allan's own confusion of race, and his acceptance of an "Other" which results from his lack of questioning of the concept of race. While the irony of Allan's self-identification as a white man is pointed out by Charlie, there follows an even more direct discrediting of the narrative of race when Allan continues to relate the stories he has heard: "...down there in the States you are either a white man or a nigger. If you're half nigger, you're a nigger. If you're a quarter nigger, you're a nigger. I heard about people was niggers in the States and when they come up here they was all of a sudden white men" (55-56). The grotesquery of this situation is summed up by Alex Hare when he innocently asks: "Ain't life strange?" (56).

A similar sentiment about the arbitrariness of ethnic boundaries, as well as the notion of changed ethnic categories in Canadian society, comes up again later in the story of Edwards, a Welsh immigrant with political ambitions: "If you were a Welsh boy living in Britain you were an Indian," we are told. "If you came to the land of gold and unregistered cows you could be a white man in a few years. Justice of the Peace" (83). Finally the grotesquery and arbitrariness of ethnic boundaries, which serve social marks of distinction more than reflect external realities, is taken up again when French and other non-English settlers are distinguished from English settlers as "the white men and the real white men" (86), a notion reflecting a bias for Anglo-Canadian immigrants in the 19th century.

It is not the uncertainty about the McLeans' identity, however, which condemns Allan's attempts to rally the native elders. Their refusal, rather, is based on the view that "[t]he white men have not killed us the way they did below the medicine line," instead they brought food and goods (161). Allan's argument that they also brought the small pox and thus killed the natives is ultimately ignored, as is his argument that the native people did not need the white weapons before the whites scared away the game. The contemporary reader's sympathy in this instance clearly rests with Allan and it is upsetting that the Natives do not right the wrongs done to them. The bottom line, however, is that Allan "was talking to a man who did not have suicidal dreams" (164), and in fact Chief Chillitnetza's reluctance to act in hindsight certainly saved his people's lives.

Despite the Natives' refusal to take part in Allan's crusade, the McLeans' are ultimately let down and mistreated more by white society and when they do not see themselves as McLeans, they drift towards their Native heritage. When they surrender they empty their weapons "Indian style" so as not to be taken while they can still fight, an act which seems peculiar to one of the onlookers, but is "explained" by one of his peers:

> "But shit for breakfast! They aint Indians. All the Indians are in their holes or sidin' with us. Them fellows is not Indians, Ian."
> "Might as well be," said the man with one ear, ["]for all the good it's goin' to do them." (214)

The McLeans are treated as Indians by white society. In response they see their enemies as white, even if not all of them are: "This is how the white men keep their word," shouts Allan when they are mistreated during their capture, despite the fact that "[t]here were Indians in the crowd, and halfbreeds. But most of the men there would call themselves white men" (216). The McLeans' perception, as this passage demonstrates, is divided at the color line, a bias which had already informed their drunken murder of Ussher and one not justified in every case, as the novel makes clear. In the typical fashion of an ethical postmodern stance, Bowering does not paint a black and white image of racial relations with reversed roles, that is he partakes in what Richard Etulain has called the New Gray West, a West that acknowledges complexities and contradictions ("Beyond Conflict"). By including figures such as Ussher, the novel:

> does not represent all the white settlers as violent and bad; they too have their human weaknesses, misgivings, and fears. And he does not whitewash the Gang; he allows us to see them behave with drunken violence and act with raw aggression, just as much as he allows us to see the aggression perpetrated against them. (Grace, "Calling Out" 21)

In the end it is a conversation between the two old old Indians which most clearly defines what a "half-breed" is in 19th century Canadian society: "An Indian with a black beard and no land" (96). As this passage suggests, the "halfbreeds," the "queen's people," were not regarded as Indians, and therefore received no land.[224] They were thus in a sense even more disenfranchised than their Native ancestors, who at least received land on reservations. In contrast, white society in Bowering's arithmetic metaphor treats its mixed race members as zeroes, lost between the two cultures, denied membership in either, and particularly membership in both:

> The white people had a law of arithmetic that said that two things could not be in the same place. They had another law in arithmetic that said one take away one equals zero.
> One white man, and one normal woman could have all the babies they wanted to, but they would all be zeroes, and zero times ten is still zero. The white half was adding, and the Indian half was subtracting. A half take away a half equals zero. (175)

Just as the half Blacks in the U.S. are treated as Blacks, so is Allan, the half Indian, an Indian in white eyes, but not necessarily in Indian eyes.

[224] Cf. also *Shoot!* 163-64, 208-09. This is also important in Rudy Wiebe's novel about the Riel rebellion, *The Scorched-Wood People*.

Even while Allan longs to be a part of Okanagan society, the “Wild McLeans” in the end fit neither society and adapt their behavior accordingly:

> While they were around Indians they spoke white. When they were in town they spoke Indian. They spoke French, but never when there was a priest around. Allan McLean spoke Okanagan when he was absolutely sure he was alone with his wife and son. (157)

They rebel against all societies who refuse them inclusion, and consequently are caught between the fronts when they are besieged in the cabin. The Indians Allan had hoped to rally do not show up, and in fact there are Natives among those besieging the cabin. As Alex Hare notes: “Indians on one side. White bastards on the other side. Look who’s in the middle, as usual” (181).

As if their role as shipwrecked between the cultures was not harsh enough in itself, there lies a deeper irony in the McLeans’ existence, which the novel dwells on: they are the descendants of a vicious white colonizer, Donald McLean, employee of the Hudson’s Bay Company and scourge of the local Native population. Despite his hatred of all things Native Donald McLean takes at least two First Nations wives and starts new families with them while his first family remains in Scotland. As we are told, Donald McLean’s relation to the First Nations, like that of many of his fellow colonizers, is deeply contradictory: “He hated Indians, and treated them with monstrous cruelty, but he lived with at least two Indian women and created a lot of children with them” (15). Donald McLean, the novel sums up, “liked to shoot Indians and create halfbreeds” (16).

The paradox of Donald McLean’s existence is mirrored, although under a reverse setup, by that of his sons: “their father died fighting Indians. They were now fighting white men who kept coming from Scotland [Donald McLeans’ home] and taking the best country along the rivers” (3).

The contradiction of their heritage, a union of two oppositional groups, is not unique to the McLeans, however, as the text suggests in its paralleling of the McLeans’ and Alex Hare’s childhood:

> When [Donald McLean] whacked them he gave his opinion that they were little heathens or in danger of sliding into savagery.
> Their mother, though, never whacked them. Where she came from people never whacked their children. They expected their children to be brave and to grow straight as a pine tree, they challenged them to walk past their fright in the woods at night, but they never whacked them.
> Alex Hare’s father would let young Alex get away with murder on one occasion, and thrash him for looking funny the next time he saw him. Nicholas Hare was a busy and successful man. (80)

Later we are told that six-year-old Alex "could speak English and French and Shuswap. When he spoke Shuswap his father whacked him" (82).

Whacking their children seems like a punishment the fathers direct at the constant reminders of their own transgressions, mirroring the larger uneasiness miscegenation causes society as a whole, as the novel suggests. The "breeds" are

> dangerous because they always gave evidence of where they came from, the sexual union of native women and hairy-faced men from outside the world. They were horse-riding consequences of dark guilty fucking. [...] They were dangerous because they were made from desperation sex, and there was a score to be settled somewhere. There was a darkness that would not stay in the basement of history. (141)

The McLeans' personal dilemma as mixed race Canadians, the results of "dark guilty fucking," and their consequent lack of a larger racial identity is of central concern to the novel for the way that it creates an emotional involvement on the reader's part. It also has larger implications, introducing a central point the novel makes about the interlinking of racial, gender and colonial politics in the 19th century Canadian West. This link is introduced early in the novel and is once again linked to Donald McLean and his abuse of Natives. After the narrative relates the story of the split between the Indians over how geese make a sound when they fly, the narrator speculates about the violent, white Hudson's Bay employee's reaction: "If Donald McLean had heard the story about the geese he would have said, 'Isn't that just like an Indian, to argue about such a thing?' His wives would have kept quiet" (8). This passage links the aspects of race and gender and their underlying networks of unequal power. Donald McLean condemns his Native wives to silence through the violent power he holds over them. Their silence is reproduced on a textual level for the novel never makes his wives' reactions explicit.

This is the first taste of a larger concern over the connected silencing of Natives and women the novel returns to continually. This connection is repeatedly drawn in a concern over the abuse of Natives through the taking of their women, then their land, and, more concretely, in the story of Annie McLean, as well as the McLean's Native mother – two figures who, despite their marginality in both their society and the narration are of the utmost importance. Like in *The Englishman's Boy*, in *Shoot!* also a mistreated and raped woman whose race seems to offer her for the taking to the European immigrants is of central importance. The McLeans' and Alex Hare's hatred of white society is fired by the white landowner J.A. Mara's abuse of the fifteen year old Annie McLean, whom the rich white Mara sees as just another inconsequential opportunity proffered for his enjoyment. The McLeans, we are told,

> had never killed anybody.

> Not like their father.
> But some people say that when John Andrew Mara seduced a fifteen-year old girl [i.e. Annie McLean; J.F.] and got her pregnant he set the stage for a new act in their career.
> To him it meant nothing. He was just another Overlander taking hold of an available girl. It was traditional. There was land to be had and women to be had. Land was going to be valuable. (35-36)

In this passage the connection between land and women and the objectification of the woman implicit in this link, as not only for the taking but in fact less important than the land, are brought to the front. As in other instances, the narrator once again retains an ironic distance, leaving it up to the reader to see the outrageous connection between sentences that are put next to another without the need to elaborate on their connection and troubling implications. The passage also presents Annie McLean as one of the driving forces of the novel's plot, just as the Native girl in *The Englishman's Boy* had been a driving force behind Shorty's actions, but she, too, remains silent and silenced. As Grace remarks:

> There are two extremely important women whose voices we do not hear, whose stories Bowering relates indirectly through the men, whose pain, betrayal, pride, and role in *his*tory we must imagine from the feelings of their men folk and the blank spaces in the story. These women are Sophie Grant [the McLeans' mother] and Annie McLean. […] Bowering both stresses their silencing and provokes my empathy. He leaves me wanting to know more. ("Calling Out" 20-21; emphasis in original)

Grace also stresses the female presence / absence in the text, as well as the implications of society's view of women as objects:

> By making me see Annie exclusively through the lovelorn eyes of Alex Hare and the male perspective of her brothers, Bowering reminds me of how she was constructed in the late 1870s BC society – as fair game, a beautiful plaything to be discarded when used. (Ibid. 21)

What Grace fails to mention is that the discourse of gender is, in this case, inextricably linked to that of race. Being not only female in a strongly patriarchal society, but also a "half-breed" in a white, European-dominated culture, Annie (and her mother Sophie Grant) are doubly marginalized and silenced. Their silence sounds loudly even in Bowering's account, which does give voice to the male McLean Boys and thus re-establishes the male perspective of living outside the racial margins of society. While the McLeans' brief period of rage against the establishment was noticed at least within their own time and is excavated by Bowering, the same is not true of Annie. As in *The Englishman's Boy*, the women despite their centrality to the plot remain almost entirely silent, examples of Gayatri Spivak's notion that "the subaltern as female cannot be heard or read" (2206).

Consequently the only real exception to the silencing of women is a white woman and the member of a more privileged class, the prison warden's wife; she is a "good" Western woman in the original sense of the word, however, silenced in her own way through being bound to the social codes of her 19th century middle class position; she remains within the role laid out for all Western women by the Virginian's Molly: true to her husband, gentle and forgiving, the upholder of the "Eastern" moral code, and thus remains powerless in her protest which is ignored or cast aside by her husband.

In addition to the mostly silenced personal stories of Annie and Sophie Grant, there is another important instance of the connection between the complexes of race and gender. The taking of Native women by the colonizers is presented as a logical first step leading up to the stealing of land. The novel lays out this theory in the first chapter in which a brief history of the colonization of the West is presented through an exchange between members of a Native tribe:

> One of the Indians was saying, "You should remember what happened before when the Chilcotins came over here pretending they wanted to play a sports tournament. These white men – maybe they just pretend that they want animal skins. Maybe the reason they came here was to get our women all along."
> "Oh, now really –" began another.
> "No, I mean it." And now this man's voice became really animated. "And think about this: if they can somehow manage to take our women, or some of them, even, maybe they will get the idea that they can take away our land."
> The others all laughed. (12)

Wile the Natives laugh at the apparent absurdity of the suggestion that the whites could take away both their land and their women, this is exactly what happens. The grotesqueness of history, as related by Bowering, is even more pronounced in an excerpt from "Parashoot!," which achieves its comic effect through both its diction and its reduction of complex connections:

> The white men needed furs and food at first. Then they needed land and women. The white people kept sending their men across the ocean and leaving their women at home. The Shuswap and Okanagan men did not want to go across the ocean and help themselves to the spare white women. But the white men wanted women to do the kinds of jobs that seemed more like work than adventure. While they were at it, the white men also wanted someone other than each other and their horses to stick their penises into. But in the Shuswap and Okanagan communities there was not all that much time spent on war, so there was not a significant surplus of women.
> It was a problem in arithmetic. (162)

Once again, Bowering returns to the metaphor of arithmetic, his symbol for the stripping of rights of Native people, and unsurprisingly the Sushwap and Okanagan's end up on the tail end of arithmetic. The notion that they should by right be able to go across the ocean to "help themselves to the spare white women" is of course so unrealistic given

19th century realities that it necessitates no real comment. It merely reveals the double standards of white society. It is within this context that the McLeans' sense of justice, their outrage about the "taking" of their sister and other Native women clashes with white society's fetishism of commodities, as defended by John Ussher, the unlucky representative of this society, and the one who ultimately loses his life to secure other people's gains:

> "– stealing horses is just about the worst thing you can do in this country. Stealing horses and robbing people on the highway is about as bad as you can get, next to murder."
> Allan McLean fixed Johnny Ussher with his black eyes.
> "What about stealing women?" he asked. "What about taking young girls and filling their heads with white man's lies and filling their stomachs with Hudson's Bay whisky and making a white man's whore out of them?"
> Is he talking about his mother, the constable thought.
> "I am talking about my sister," said Allan McLean. (33)

This passage once again shows the centrality of the absent Annie, but it also introduces the notion of colonial realities in which all abuses are covered by the white man's law. The sexual aspect of colonialism and the colonial aspect of sexuality the novel concerns itself with are perhaps best expressed in a Cheyenne proverb quoted in the novel: "A nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground" (113). Annie McLean, Sophie Grant as well as their male relatives are treated in a way that their heart can only end up on the ground.

The bias of the colonial legal system, whose legislation aims not as much to establish justice as to uphold hegemonic relations, is part of another central concern of the novel, the institutional racism of the 19th century Canadian West, the last part of Bowering's critique of Canada's past I wish to explore. Institutional racism permeates all aspects of a racist society which upholds strong double standards to secure its economic and colonial interests. It is this society, for instance, which charges a white person seventy dollars for a gun while expecting the equivalent of nine hundred dollars in pelts from an Indian (70-71), but Bowering is more interested in the violent side of white society's war against its natives, through passive neglect and active legal convictions.

White society's central notion, at least where its members are far removed from the immediate experience of facing Natives and mixed races, is one of self-important disinterest and narcissism: "They thought all the Indians would disappear, and at least that sticky problem would go away. In places such as Victoria, people thought it was too bad, but perhaps the best thing overall, in the long run" (Bowering, "Parashoot!" 161). This stance reflects the arrogance of Empire, an arrogance which given the reality of a post-Empire world rings with biting irony:

> This was the British Empire, after all. Yankees and halfbreeds may be a threat, but only for a while. Only till just order was animated to prevail. Look at the map of the world. There was something right in the path of history. (223)

One of the primary reasons Bowering gives for the "disappearance" of the Natives throughout *Shoot!* is the smallpox disease, which many whites seem to regard as a welcome "problem solver": "Most people thought that eventually smallpox and other European diseases would turn the Indian people into history. But in the meantime you did not want Indians on the warpath" (Bowering, "Parashoot!" 163). While this notion may not be entirely be accurate historically, particularly in the cynicism and clarity with which Bowering expresses it, it does reflect the indifference of Canadian officials denounced by historians such as Jill St. Germain. It highlights the slow genocide through indifference, disease and disenfranchisement North of the border, which stands in opposition to the active confrontation taking place in the U.S. The novel, however, makes clear that it is no less despicable for its lack of direct aggression. The novel sharply attacks the refusal to protect the Native population from smallpox: "Charlie was born in 1862, the year the Indians were dying of smallpox," we are told. "The gold seekers brought smallpox with them. Victoria vaccinated the white people. The Indian people fell dead in the forest" (40). Bowering once again makes his point through a brutal sequence of seemingly neutral statements of fact in this passage, leaving it up to the reader to realize and evaluate the obviously racist practice of the government and thus strengthening its impact. Elsewhere, the role of the smallpox in colonial politics is made even more obvious:

> "White men say the smallpox was a good thing. Only way they could get the Indian population down in this country. Across the line they shot more than half of them. Up here they had to let the bug do it."
> "Arithmetic," said Allan. (111)

Smallpox is part of a system aimed at transferring land and wealth to whites, as Allan's wry reference to arithmetic, the symbol of this system, makes clear. The suffering of Natives matters little in the cold self-interested reasoning of arithmetic, in which Natives merely stand in the way of releasing the country's full potential.

An arena of colonial power as unjust in its own ways as the bitter cynicism of the white officials' refusal to act on the smallpox epidemic ravaging the Natives is Canada's legal system. Its practices, with their racist implications, are engaged largely through the McLean trial. Early on the double standards of the racist legal system are addressed in a conversation between the McLeans and Ussher. The naïve Ussher asks the McLeans what it means that they are not white men: "Does the church keep you out because you're not a white man, exactly?" To which Allan replies: "Does the god damn jail keep

us in because we are only half-white?" (32). Allan's anger is directed at an unjust society, whose legal system backs up the taking of land (and women) from Natives, and then sentences these Natives or "half-breeds" if they stand up for their rights. Elsewhere, Bowering draws another distinction between the American and the Canadian solution to the Indian question:

> In the old days the Hudson's Bay Company whipped Indians and threatened their families. The Americans shot them. Now the Provincial Judges came around on their circuits and hanged them, and sometimes hanged white men who got liquored up and shot people. (58)

While the Canadian solution seems much more "civil" initially, as this passage makes clear the end result is the same for Natives on both sides of the border. The passage also makes clear through its phrasing that the legal system treats Natives much more harshly than white people. This notion is developed further in the figures of two judges, Judge Begbie, the "hanging judge," and Judge Crease, the judge presiding over the McLean trial. Both see themselves as upholding law and order, but are presented as agents of the British Empire's colonial rule by the novel. When a group of Chilcotin Natives have been tricked by a false offer of amnesty and are then tried, Judge Begbie is bothered by the morality of their trial, but does not question the system he upholds in the faith of serving a higher good:

> It bothered Judge Begbie that they were now sentencing these thin men to whom they had offered an amnesty. It seemed that there might be some moral hesitation, and even something legally imperfect.
> Oh, what the hell! He heard the jury decide for guilty without leaving the box, and sentenced five of them to hang.
> It would save lives, in the long run, and the colony required settlers. It must not be left to the hordes of drunken gunmen from the States. (64)

In this passage, the judge is not vilified *per se*, but his indifference and compliance with the jury's prejudiced verdict, which sentences the Natives to death without even taking the time to consider the possibility of a lack of guilt, follows his society's biases and interests. It is small condolence then that Judge Begbie seems to believe himself to serve the advance of civilization and the national task of protecting the Canadian West from American interest. This notion, flimsy as it may already seem to a contemporary reader, is later qualified and corrected when we are told: "They needed Judge Begbie to ride around the country hanging people. He often said that he was saving British Columbia from the Yankee invasion, but when there were twenty-seven men hanged, twenty-two of them were Indians" (88).

While the novel questions Begbie's self-proclaimed role as a protector of Canada against the Americans by juxtaposing his self-aggrandizing rhetoric with the statistics

of his hanging verdicts, which most commonly are directed against Natives, the aspect of a self-deceiving narrative of Empire is even clearer in the case of the novel's second judge. Judge Crease sees himself and the McLean trial in similar terms. He wants "to put the case of the Kamloops murderers into the context of history" (257) and thus declares the killing of Ussher an attack on "the people" (266), claiming that the McLeans "have caused great terror throughout the country, and by a campaign of robbery and assault and murder [...] have disgraced British Columbia" (268). The judge's verdict sums up the position Bowering presents as dominant among the white 19th century elite:

> So long as their white father lived, the children were held in some sort of subjection, but the moment he was gone, they gravitated toward their mother's friends and fell back into nature's ways. Is it any wonder then, that, remaining unchecked and uncared for they should at last adopt the Arab life which in a scattered territory is fraught with such danger to the state? (259)

Within the larger context of the novel, this statement can only be read as a grotesque misrepresentation. It stands in completely opposition to everything the narrative has presented us with before, the violence of the white fathers which stands in opposition to their mother's more gentle education, the violence of Mara against Annie McLean and his economic violence against everyone in the Nicola Valley, particularly the natives as opposed to their refusal to become violent against the whites. It is made clear that this violence in Canada is associated not with gunplay but with the institutional violence of Empire. This system is dominated by upper class British people, who secure the interest of their peers:

> Charlie stared at the Judge for a long time. He was interested in the Judge's English accent. The white men in the Interior had several kinds of accents. But the ones that owned ranches and the ones that were Government men had that English accent. Some of the others might shoot you or stick a knife in you, but the ones with the English accent were going to hang you. (266)[225]

While the system is dominated by such men as the two judges, it hands its codes and preconceptions down to those of lower standing, who are also employed in this system. The volunteers who come from Victoria to capture the McLeans, for instance, are linked to other more obviously violent colonial acts of the British Empire, a technique which grants the McLean affair a larger social and historical significance:

[225] There is also an element of an unjust class system that is only hinted at in Bowering's novel and which I cannot go into. When the prison warden remarks about Alex Hare: "He can write. Hardly any of my prisoners can read or write," we see for a brief moment the class aspect of a legal system, which, as an instrument of maintaining hegemonic and economic superiority for the upper classes, almost exclusively sentences those who are of lower classes and thus cannot read or write.

> They were men who had killed Maoris in New Zealand and black men in Africa and *Métis* on the prairies. [...] They were tired of looking at telegraph poles. They wanted to sight dark faces with their Government rifles. (182)

Even though they, unlike landowners like Mara or politicians like Edwards, are not the beneficiaries of the colonial system they defend, these men have so fully accepted the psychology of Othering that they hate the darker races regardless of where they find them or who they may be, whether Maoris, Africans, *Métis* or Scottish "half-breeds."

Bowering links the rhetoric justifying the violence of Empire to the act of nation building in a way similar to the one Vanderhaeghe had employed in *The Englishman's Boy*. The enemies unifying the young nation are, however, different ones in each case. Vanderhaeghe criticizes the government's anti-American rhetoric which glosses over the Canadian participation in the massacre of the Assiniboine, as I have shown in Chapter 3. In Bowering's novel, the target of repression is the internal Other, the mixed-blood children of immigrants and Native women. As the novel informs us, the tragedy of an unjust death, in this case Ussher's, is once again used by politicians to form Westerners into Canadians. These words ring as false as those of the Eastern politicians who accuse only American cut-throats of the murder of the Assiniboine in Vanderhaeghe's novel:

> Senator Cornwall said that John T. Ussher had given his life in the defense of Canada. The new nation had to be protected against those forces that would set anarchs and satans loose among the peaceful pioneers of the Christian order. (222-23)

It is of course clear to the reader that Canada never was under attack, and particularly considering what the novel has told us about the alleged peacefulness of these Christian settlers, whose violence, through government, racism and "arithmetic" is no less violent for its official sanctioning. The senator's grandiose words have an especially bitter and hollow ring to them. The act of Empire, cleaned by the official rhetoric of patriotism in Cornwall's words, is shown in its full violence and nastiness in the novel. The victims are, in both novels, Natives or people who are seen as Natives. Whereas Vanderhaeghe's novel reflects the marginalization of the Native voices in its narrative setup, Bowering in contrast chooses to give a voice to at least his male mixed race characters, bringing to the fore more directly than Vanderhaeghe's novels, *The Englishman's Boy* and *The Last Crossing*, with their more classic elements of pursuit and adventure, the violence against the First Nations which underlies 19th century Canadian history, and the foundations of the Canadian nation in the West.

5.10. Re-Connecting Revisionist Westerns

Native and mixed-blood characters are more frequently employed in Canadian than in revisionist American Westerns. This does not necessarily mean that they gain places of prominence, however. In fact, a number of American novels, ranging from Blake's *Dances with Wolves*, over Berger's *Little Big Man*, to Lethem's *Girl in Landscape*, Bergon's *Shoshone Mike*, and Welch's *Fools Crow*, revise the treatment of Natives in American history and / or the Western genre, with different degrees of success. While some of these novel's, namely *Dances with Wolves*, do little more than reiterate old stereotypes while attempting to showcase their own difference from the white mainstream, when they are successful, like Welch's novel, they give their Native characters more prominent roles and seriously explore Native culture or, like Lethem's and Bergon's novels, explore the politics and psychology of Indian hating and Othering. Other novels, such as Richard Slotkin's *The Return of Henry Starr*, or Robert Ward's *Cattle Annie and Little Britches* unearth little known historical half-blood or Native characters, and write their stories while treating them no different from non-Native characters.

Among revisionist Canadian Westerns, on the other hand, only George Bowering's *Shoot!* with its deep involvement of its half-blood main characters, Bowering's ironic treatment of Indian stereotypes in *Caprice*, and Daniel David Moses' original treatment of the Western in his play *The Indian Medicine Show* stand out as particularly prominent revisions of Native stereotypes in the Western. While proportionally more Canadian Westerns feature victimized Native characters, their role in the narrative is often functional rather than self-supporting. Acknowledging their suffering sometimes seems like a lip-service in a narrative with a different focus. In contrast to this, Bowering's *Shoot!* employs its mixed-blood characters, the historical McLeans, in order to unmask the violent colonial undercurrent of Canadian history, in which Natives have been subjugated if not to military violence as in the U.S. then to institutional white violence of various sorts.

CHAPTER 6
GENDER IMAGES: DEFLATING THE HEROIC MALE

6.1. The Western as an Arena of Masculinity

> The appeal of the desert lies partly in its promise of pain, an invitation that is irresistible, [...] because it awakens a desire for spiritual prowess, some unearthly glory earned through long-continued discipline, self-sacrifice, submission to a supernal power. [...] These [passages, which Tompkins quotes] all describe the same man, a man whose hardness is one with the hardness of nature.
>
> Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything*.

> Any pause at all would have been fatal for sure, as I would have given in to fatigue and weakness from hunger. But like any real man of the frontier, sheer stupidity saw me through as I concentrated on the singular task of sticking to my horse's back.
>
> Percival Everett, *God's Country*.

"Few figures have had as powerful and persistent an impact on representations of American masculinity as the cowboy," writes Joanna Eagle in the encyclopedia *American Masculinities*. Although the image of the cowboy has been under attack for a long time, it has not lost its impact as a cultural metaphor for manliness, as Eagle observes:

> By the latter half of the twentieth century, parodies and critiques of the image of the cowboy as a tough, laconic loner became more frequent, particularly as authoritative white masculinity came under pressure from the civil rights and liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Nonetheless, the cowboy image endures, in music, fashion, and, not least of all, in political rhetoric, where politicians from Henry Kissinger to Ronald Reagan to George W. Bush have invoked the cowboy image to legitimize the moral authority of violent action in the name of the American nation.

In the cowboy's "own" genre, the Western, the centrality of the display of masculinity has not exactly been a secret.[226] Two important monographs in the 1990s Jane Tompkins' rather personal *West of Everything* and Lee Clark Mitchell's more scholarly

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[226] Interestingly, philosopher Peter French offers a dissenting voice when he claims:

> [T]he ethics that emerges [in the Western] is *not*, in most respects, the ethics typically identified as masculine in the recent philosophical literature, where a contrast is usually drawn between a masculine ethics of rule and principle focused on contract and justice and feminine ethics of care and kindness focused on relationships between people. The Western scrambles the categories. (151; emphasis in original)

French's point is most relevant for an ethical or philosophical interpretation. A reading based on gender *performance* like the one I will propose is only marginally affected by this observation. The Western's ethics might indeed be murky and ambivalent, but its performance of masculinity remains astonishingly consistent, even in later gritty and more ambivalent Westerns, such as Clint Eastwood's work.

Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film turned a gender lens onto the Western, interpreting the genre, in Mitchell's terms, as marked "more than anything" by a "persistent obsession with masculinity" (*Westerns* 3). Jane Tompkins expressed similar sentiments:

> [W]hat is most interesting about Westerns at this moment in history is their relation to gender, and especially the way they created a model for men who came of age in the twentieth century. The model was not for women but for men: Westerns insist on this point by emphasizing the importance of manhood as an ideal. (*West of Everything* 17)

Later Tompkins paraphrases her central belief of masculinity's centrality to the Western genre, when she states:

> The Western doesn't have anything to do with the West as such. It isn't about the encounter between civilization and the frontier. It is about men's fear of losing their mastery, and hence their identity, both of which the Western tirelessly reinvents. (Ibid. 45)

According to Tompkins the Western's emergence around the turn of the 20th century constituted a site of resistance against female narrative models and an increasing female agency in American society, which it counters with a male genre. In her exploration of gender in the early 20th century Western Victoria Lamont follows Tompkins ("History"). The central virility of *The Virginian's* male hero, as well as other similar heroes in later Westerns, "is precisely in response to a social environment in which the gender of citizenship was vigorously contested" ("History, Gender" 152). The Western fulfills the cultural function of shaping images of masculinity, more specifically hegemonic masculinity, which is always in danger of loosing its position of power. Indeed, as Martin Weidinger points out, there is a necessity to constantly remake masculinity in cultural texts:

> Männlichkeit als sozial konstruierte Geschlechtlichkeit muss immer wieder neu zur Schau gestellt, neu definiert und reaffirmiert werden [...]. Die Figur des Westernhelden muss somit als work-in-progress angesehen werden. Dauerhaft garantierte und abgesicherte Männlichkeit existiert nicht, Stillstand bedeutet Männlichkeitsverlust. (97)

This construction and validation becomes even more important if it serves as a basis for an unequal system, such as patriarchy. As Mitchell also points out, the concepts of masculinity and femininity are constantly under renegotiation, and the Western has for much of the 20th century been one of the prime sites of this negotiation. According to Mitchell,

> keeping women in the kitchen does not itself transform men into Men. The alchemy for "making the man" is more complex, dependent on an intricate mixture of bodily and

> behavioral traits that result in the double logic of the male body visibly making itself, even if it needs to disappear *as* a body to ensure the achievements of masculinity. (*Westerns* 154)

The contradictory double logic underlying masculinity's connection to the male body and its simultaneous need to transcend the biological body's physicality that this quote suggests is examined in more detail below.

In the Western, masculinity is most closely connected to the protagonist, often a cowboy or gunfighter, and it is through his actions, particularly the acts which mark the protagonist as heroic, that masculinity is defined and redefined. This interlinking of heroism and masculinity in the Western mirrors a larger bias in American culture, as Holly Allen states:

> American ideals of heroism have been historically inseparable from ideals of masculinity. While heroism has been tied to such masculine ideals as gallantry, chivalry, nobility, and courage, the basis of American notions of both heroism and manliness has been a tension between virtuous devotion to a higher cause and the quest for personal achievement.

Indeed, the image of the heroic white male provides one of the central pillars of the Western. While the Western hero frequently possesses the ideals of gallantry, chivalry, a natural nobility, and courage, the tension between devotion to a higher cause and personal achievement that Allen sees in him has been interpreted differently by other commentators, notably by Robert Warshow in his brilliant contribution to early Western scholarship. As Warshow writes, the Westerner, whom he identifies as "*par excellence* a man of leisure" (46), does not need to strive for achievements, since he is already "there":

> Employment of some kind – usually unproductive – is always open to the Westerner, but when he accepts it, it is not because he needs to make a living, much less from any idea of "getting ahead." Where could he want to "get ahead" to? By the time we see him, he is already "there": he can ride a horse faultlessly, keep his countenance in the face of death, draw his gun a little faster and shoot it a little straighter than anyone he is likely to meet. These are sharply defined acquirements, giving to the figure of the Westerner an apparent moral clarity which corresponds to the clarity of his physical image against the bare landscape; (47)

Warshow shifts the lens to a discourse which, in a post-Butlerian academic environment, would be identified as one of gender as performance (cf. Butler's *Gender Trouble*). As Warshow argues, what the Westerner "defends, at bottom, is the purity of his own image – in fact his honor. [...] [H]e fights not for advantage and not for the right, but to state what he is" (48). Warshow's observation seems astonishingly contemporary. He goes on to make an even more central point when he links violence, which he sees as central to American culture, to the performance of masculinity:

> [T]he values we seek in the Western [...] are in the image of a single man who wears a gun on his thigh. The gun tells us that he lives in a world of violence, and even that he "believes in violence." But the drama is one of self-restraint: the moment of violence must come in its own time and according to its special laws, or else it is valueless. [...] Really, it is not violence at all which it the "point" of the Western movie, but a certain image of man, a style, which expresses itself most clearly in violence. Watch a child with his [sic] toy guns and you will see: what most interests him is not (as we so much fear) the fantasy of hurting others, but to work out how a man might look when he shoots or is shot. A hero is one who looks like a hero. (56)

Lee Clark Mitchell makes essentially the same point 40 years later, and in fact quotes from the above passage, when he links the Western's use of violence to the making and remaking of masculinity in his chapter "A Man Being Beaten" (*Westerns* 150-87), an argument I will follow:

> Violence in the Western [...] is less a means than an end in itself – less a matter of violating another than of constructing one's physical self as a male. The purpose is less defeat or destruction than [...] display. And if this celebration of violence confirms it as a masculine emotional prerogative (that is, as an activity released and controlled by men), it does so by putting the male body distinctively on show. The shoot-outs, brawls, and scenes of horse-taming, the shots of "riding herd" as well as assorted Indian chases: each compels a man to exhibit broad shoulders and narrow waist, allowing us to gaze at masculinity in action. (Ibid. 169)

According to Mitchell this building up of a "Man" operates within a contradictory dialectic relationship which oscillates between sex and gender, "between an essentialism that requires the display of a male body and a constructivism that grants manhood to men not by virtue of their bodies but of their behavior" (Ibid. 155). To solve this issue the body as an object to be gazed at needs to disappear behind the manly action of the protagonist. While the Western frequently gazes at the male body as the site where masculinity will be performed or celebrated, there is a "deep-seated nervousness over homoeroticism" (Ibid. 159), which necessitates that the male body continually be transformed and disfigured, unmade as an object of erotic gazing, and remade into the body of a *man*. The fact that the protagonist's manliness is expressed in large parts through physical acts of violence which are centered on the male body is linked to an unmaking and remaking of the male body as the body of a Man, as Mitchell argues:

> The frequency with which the body is celebrated, then physically punished, only to convalesce, suggests something of the paradox involved in making true men out of biological men, taking their male bodies and distorting them beyond any apparent power of self-control, so that in the course of recuperating, an achieved masculinity that is at once physical and based on performance can be revealed. In short, the Western is invariably pitched toward an exhibition of manly restraint, thereby requiring the proof of generic excess in the form of repeated violence. (Ibid. 155)

It is through these acts of violence that the male body "can paradoxically become what it already is" (Ibid. 160). Mitchell sums up his argument, disagreeing with the earlier assumption that the violation of the male body is a punishment for the audience's (homo)erotic desire. Instead, he argues,

> [w]herever a man is being beaten in the Western, it is less to punish us for our delight in the male body than to prepare us for the process by which he becomes what he already is. We find ourselves, male and female, identifying with that subject of suffering and in that moment also identifying with the masculinizing process itself as one of American culture's most powerful (and powerfully confused) imaginative constructions. For it is the Western hero – unlike the leading men in any other genre – who is placed before us precisely to be looked at. And in that long, oscillating look, we watch men still at work in the unfinished process of making themselves, even as we are encouraged to believe that manhood doesn't need to be made. (Ibid. 187)

Women also have been seen frequently less as figures resting on their own importance, but rather as factors giving the masculine hero more definition. Jane Tompkins has famously read the entire Western genre as an answer to and a refutation of the domestic tradition, which dominated the American 19th century, and speaks of a "destruction of female authority" (*West* 39) in the Western. Women serve as necessary "motivation," but are not given a voice. Their position, the "argument" of "civilization" is introduced merely to be discredited, as Tompkins argues in her reading of John Ford's *The Searchers*:

> [W]omen are the motive for male activity (it's women who are being avenged, it's a woman the men are trying to rescue) at the same time as what women stand for – love and forgiveness in place of vengeance – is precisely what that activity denies. Time after time, the Western hero commits murder [...] in the name of making his town/ranch/mining claim safe for women and children. But the discourse of love and peace which women articulate is never listened to [...]. Indeed, the viewpoint women represent is introduced in order to be swept aside, crushed, or dramatically invalidated. But far from being peripheral, women's discourse, or some sign of it, is a necessary and enabling condition of most Western novels and films. The genre's revenge plot depends on an antithetical world of love and reconciliation both as a source of meaning – it defines the male code of violent heroism by opposition – and as a source of legitimization. (*West* 41)

This oppositional stance is most clearly articulated in the classic image of the woman trying to keep "her man" from engaging in his manly activity, from which at some level both know he cannot refrain, for, in the words of John Wayne's Ringo Kid, words which are reiterated in countless variations in other Westerns since the Virginian's refusal to head Molly's words and not face Trampas, "there are some things a man just can't walk away from" (*Stagecoach*). Instead, there follows the second classic gender image of the Western, that of the woman waiting in the doorframe of her house eager for her man to return, which he will by the film's or novel's end, or after he has defeated his opponent.

Martin Weidinger draws a similar conclusion from his reading of previous scholarship on female roles in the Western:

> Worin die Bedeutung von Frauenrollen im Western liegt, welche Funktionen weibliche Charaktere erfüllen und welchen Status sie im Verhältnis zum Mann innehaben, wird mitunter sehr verschieden interpretiert. Konsens herrscht jedenfalls dahingehend, dass vor allem Männlichkeit im Zentrum des Genres steht und weder konstruiert noch dargestellt werden kann, ohne auch Weiblichkeit zu inszenieren, und sei es nur als negatives Gegenbild und Spiegelfläche für das männliche Ideal. (96)

In contrast, "[t]he Western hero's true social milieu [...] is the group of masculine comrades, the boys at the ranch, the other horse soldiers, the Indian sidekicks" (Cawelti *Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* 101). As briefly paraphrased in Chapter 4, Leslie Fiedler has famously expressed this view in his *Love and Death in the American Novel*, *The Return of the Vanishing American*, and his article "Canada and the Invention of the Western" as the theme of the white male fleeing the female company in the East to unite (in a non-sexual union) with a dark male, a trope many revisionist writers are keenly aware of, as evident in David Markson's ending of his *Ballad of Dingus Magee* discussed below.

While there are myriad ways of attacking the Western's construction of masculinity, I wish to explore three ways in particular in which revisionist authors have repeatedly attacked the heroic male in the Western. The most obvious, if not the most effective or the most common, way to question a male protagonist's authority is the introduction of a strong woman as a contestant to the part of lead male. The other strategies, which I discuss under the heading "the unheroic male," are related more directly to the character of the male protagonist himself. Since the Western's early days there have always been "historic" characters in the West's mythology who personified the ideal of heroic masculinity. Military leaders, lawmen or outlaws such as General Custer, Wyatt Earp, "Wild Bill" Hickok or Jesse James have inspired the public's imagination and their stories have been reimagined in countless novels and movies to the point where these historical characters have become icons of the Western genre carrying specific expectations with them. As such these mythic/historical actors are not only an inspiration for writers of classic Westerns, but also obvious targets for revisionists. This use of historical characters is often part of a larger debunking of the Western myth as a construct of the sensationalist (Eastern) imagination.

Lastly, I want to examine the representation of the shoot-out, one of the major arenas of heroic male performance in the classic Western, in the revisionist re-writing of the genre. Considering the centrality of violence in the Western's construction of masculinity, as well as the recurrence of the classic shootout scene, whether a duel or some other violent confrontation between the hero and his antagonist(s), the shootout is

a central tool in both the construction and deconstruction of masculinity, as I will show. Finally I will explore the way in which one novel, David Markson's *The Ballad of Dingus Magee*, brings together all of these elements to parody the Western and to deconstruct two of its central male figures, the outlaw and the sheriff.

Throughout this chapter I will discuss Canadian and American texts without distinguishing them by national lines, since there seem to exist more similarities than differences between the texts. The most striking difference is certainly the stronger tendency towards parody in the American Western, which also impacts the figure of the hero. Canadian texts, on the other hand, owing in part to the two women writers discussed here, Gil Adamson and Anne Cameron, seem to have a stronger tendency to include female protagonists into a Western setting. Nevertheless, differences between individual texts are larger than similarities along national lines, and there is no huge difference in gender roles in the two countries that would necessitate keeping American and Canadian texts apart in this analysis.

6.2. The Introduction of Female Characters

> Action, action is the thing. So long as you keep your hero jumping through fiery hoops on every page you're all right. The basic formula: good man turns bad, bad man turns good. Naturally there is considerable variation on this theme.... There has to be a woman, but not much of a one. A good horse is much more important.
>
> Max Brand.

Given the present connection of the Western to masculinity and male writers it comes as a bit of a surprise to realize that this connection was not always as strong. Scholars such as Vicki Piekarski and Victoria Lamont have begun to explore the role of women writers, most prominently perhaps Bertha (B.M.) Bower, in early pulp Westerns, and to uncover a history of popular Western fiction written by women. Contrary to popular expectation this history goes back to the first Beadle & Adams dime novel, *Maleaska, the Indian Wife of the White Hunter*, which was written by a woman, Ann S. Stephens (cf. Bold "Popular West" 864-65). As June Bube shows, other women played a role in the 19th century dime novel market as well. Despite such early female, and occasionally feminist (cf. Lamont "History", Bube), counter-narratives, the Western becomes in the early 20th century an arena for male writers and filmmakers showcasing masculinity, and marginalizing female alternatives (Bold "Popular West" 865). While women remain an audience for popular Westerns, as Judith Alter has shown, they are not the main target of the genre Western but rather of the Western romance.

A case in point for a "return" to more centrality of women to the genre, which happens not only in revisionist texts, but also in the Western's equivalent of the

sexploitation film, the porno Western, a form clearly directed primarily at heterosexual men. As Bernhard Drew has stated:

> Ironically, it was only with the entrance of the sexy [read pornographic; J.F.] cowboys that the cowgirl appeared – Fancy Hatch and Lone Star and Molly Owen among them. Women are ill-treated in the formula Westerns. They exist as sex objects even in their own series, which are strictly adult. (12)

The way in which Robert Warshow summed up the relation and respective power of men and women in the classic Western in 1954 thus still holds largely true for many non-revisionist texts: "[T]he West, lacking the graces of civilization, is the place 'where men are men'; in Western movies, men have the deeper wisdom and the women are the children" (Warshow 46). Furthermore, as David Davis remarks, the role of women in the Western is tied exclusively to the Western's typical male hero:

> Molly Wood in *The Virginian*, like all her successors, is a literary device, a *dea ex machina* with a special purpose. Along with the Western environment, she serves to throw a stronger light on the hero [...]. [T]here is nothing to bring out his qualities of masculine tenderness, there is nothing to show his conscience until Molly Wood arrives. A cowboy's tenderness is usually revealed through his kindness to horses, and in this sense, the Eastern belle's role is that of a glorified horse. (22)

Furthermore, as Davis goes on, "[t]he cowboy ideal is an adorable figure and the heroine is the vehicle of adoration. Female characters enable the author to make observations about cowboys which would be impossible with an all-male cast" (D. Davis 22). Not surprisingly this role does not sit too well with a number of revisionist writers of the Western. In particular Canadian authors have taken offence at this relation between the Western, masculinity and a connection of the male hero to the American nation, as Arnold Davidson remarks: "The literary equation, 'Western' equals 'American' equals 'male,' is not going to appeal to Canadian authors, male or female, and they will with some regularity subvert that definition by parodying or reversing its final governing terms" (*Coyote Country* 99).

6.2.1. Sexualized and Non-Sexualized Women

The critique of women's roles is one aspect of Westerns that is frequently found in secondary criticism, at least as a side note. In literature written in the Western genre, however, these roles are often not as radically deconstructed. While it is a critical commonplace that women have reformed the literary landscape in the West. There are nevertheless not many women writers of revisionist Westerns. Rather women, like Native Americans, have chosen to rewrite "frontier" assumptions outside of the Western

genre. As Gregory Morris writes: "Perhaps the most dramatic shift in contemporary Western fiction has been in the viewpoints taken by its women writers, who are significantly re-envisioning the West and the role played by women" (xv).Yet the effect of this change in perspective in the Western regional literature that Morris talks about has not had a huge impact on the Western genre, whose gender codes remain fairly rigid. Generally the Western remains "not only male-centered in subject matter but also the cliché of popular male reading. Its female counterpart is popular romance" (Carrera 433)."[227] Nevertheless there are a number of revisions of female gender roles by male authors, and some by women, which I will discuss below, starting with Clark's "Ma" Grier in *The Ox-Bow Incident*, who is more manly and masculine (both characteristics that do not fare too well in Clark's treatment) than some of the other members of the hanging posse, e.g. Major Tetley's son Gerald.

A prominent example of a novel which casts a woman into the leading position in a Western is George Bowering's *Caprice*, a full scale reversion of the Western, complete with a French-Canadian heroine.[228] Despite its introduction of strong female agency, however, the novel "remain[s] disturbing to the woman critic," even if the reason for this is not always "easy to pinpoint," as Georgina Colville has remarked (137), a situation which could be argued to be the case for many male writer's attempts to decenter the Western's masculine hero by introducing stronger women.

In her article on *Caprice* Colville links her uneasiness to Laura Mulvey's theory of fetishization, scopophilia, and the "male gaze."[229] Caprice, who is not a very rounded or believable character to begin with, is not often the focalizer, but rather the figure that

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[227] This has begun to change even in the popular Western, the current 6th edition of *Genreflecting* lists twenty six novels under the heading "Singular Women" (Herald 118-20), observing: "Fortunately" the stereotypical and unflattering portrayal of women of no importance "has changed in recent years, with strong, independent women playing prominent roles" (118). Indeed, novels such as Glendon Swarthout's *The Homesman* have attempted to offer "realistic" treatments of women settling the West. Often female narratives of the frontier are not classic Westerns, however, but rather accounts of homesteading informed more by the historical novel or, in popular literature, the traditionally female romance genre than the adventure story which brought about the Western genre.

[228] Other accounts of women at a frontier are Stephen Scobie's long poem *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn* and Audrey Thomas's *Isobel Gunn*. Both tell the story of the historical Isobel Gunn (ca. 1780 – 1861), an Oakney woman who in the early 18th century followed her lover to the New World, and, disguises as a man, worked on Canada's fur trapping frontier, until she has to reveal herself literally minutes before giving birth. I will not discuss either here, since they are not revisions of the American model of the Western, but are much more indebted to Canadian history and the model of the historical novel or the Canadian model of the wilderness novel, which frequently features a woman faced with the wilderness (cf. Davidson, *Coyote Country* 124-25).

[229] Mulvey explains scopophilia as follows:

> There are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation, there is pleasure in being looked at. Originally. in his *Three Essays on Sexuality*, Freud isolated scopophilia as one of the component instincts of sexuality which exist as drives quite independently of the erotogenic zones. At this point he associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze. (2184)

is gazed at, as Colville remarks. Following Mulvey, this turns "the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring to look at rather than dangerous" (quoted in Colville 137). Isabela Carrera reaches a similar yet even more devastating conclusion. She agrees with one reviewer who states that Caprice "seems to have galloped out of Mr. Bowering's sexual fantasies," (Bowering, *Caprice* back cover). Expanding on this observation, Carrera remarks that Caprice's

> physical appearance is certainly suggestive of depictions of women in certain types of male fantasy literature […]. This figure out of yet another subgenre, male popular romance / comic magazine / pornography, is mostly silent, though she has the added attraction of a slight foreign [French Canadian] accent. (435)

Carrera's somewhat harsh conclusion regarding this fetishization of the protagonist and her relative passivity is that

> [t]he tighter plot of the western (hardly altered by the gender inversion) imposes the path on Caprice; or alternatively, the predominance of genre over gender does so. […] Much of the humour and literary play of the book are born from the transformations of the western that are not gender-dependent, and from the comment on the literary creation of "The West." […] In *Caprice* the connection as subjects is only possible between author and reader if the reader is male and Caprice is their common object of fantasy. (438)

Carrera is certainly correct about Caprice's failure as a female alternative to the male cowboy hero. *Caprice* is in the first place an "anti-Western" (Bowering, "Alphabiography" 307), not a feminist revision of the Western. The book aims at the unmasking and reversal of many conventions of the Western, and gender roles are only one of them. Carrera's claim about a connection between author and male reader seems a bit too sweeping, since the fetishization of Caprice, which Colvile describes, is sure to leave more gender conscious male readers uneasy, just as it is ignored by some female readers, e.g. Eva-Marie Kröller. A view which limits Caprice to her depiction as a sex object highlights an important point, but overlooks others: Bowering's novel is quite clearly ironic, a parody of a popular genre at that, and a reading which takes Caprice as a straight, "realistic" character deformed by Bowering's sexist leering is too one-dimensional. It seems more to the point to ponder the fact that Bowering's Caprice is no less or more realistic than the heroic, and talented Virginian or Lassiter in Grey's *Riders of the Purple Sage* and their many clones in subsequent literature, all of them marvelously handsome and talented. In fact, Caprice is portrayed in *exactly* the same way, only this time the gaze is hetero- rather than homoerotic. Her depiction primarily strikes us as remarkable since we are as critics so sensitized to the depiction of women as sex objects and still rather desensitized to the erotic undercurrent of the traditional Western (as explored by Mitchell and others), a quality so well hidden in the Western

that it is often overlooked. If Caprice seems wooden and unrealistic so is every other character in the novel and it seems more promising to read this as Bowering's statement on the popular Western with its cardboard characters rather than his failings as a writer of (female) characters. Nevertheless, what complicates this reading and leads back to Carrera's critique – although she does not make this point explicit – is a critical view that takes the larger patriarchal framework into account in which the novel was written and is consumed. For, if the emphasis on Caprice as a striking and erotic woman and is not that dissimilar to the fetishizing gaze of Wister's narrator when he describes the Virginian, within a patriarchal framework readings that highlight physicality and sexuality are always already highly overdetermined by gender stereotypes and unequal power relations and therefore have radically different implications and call forth different reactions. There is no doubt that the Virginian gains power when the narrator dwels on his physicality, whereas things are much less clear for Caprice, as Carrera's uneasiness about the fetishization of the character reveals.

Bowering's simple switch of gender in his protagonist and the play with stereotypical gender images therefore reveals a dynamic buried in the classic Western that extends far beyond the genre and says much more about gender roles in our society. It seems worth taking these seriously rather than brushung *Caprice* off as only its author's misogynist fantasy as Colvile seems to in parts of her article. Caprice is without a doubt the author's object of fetishization, but it is also notable, as Colvile herself remarks, that Caprice "subverts Mulvey's [and the Western's; J.F.] dichotomy of man as doer / looker and woman as object to be looked at by playing both parts" (135). Caprice is the most active subject, superior to all white male characters. Significantly it is *her* who in the end leaves the scene riding back to the East (not a West "that was becoming nearly as narrow as her trail" [266]) and leaving behind her partner, the male schoolmarm. Thus the Western is at once completely turned on its head and, at the same time, brought to a classic end.

A further testament to women's power in Bowering's novel is that Caprice is rescued by another woman, Gert the prostitute, the one time she gets into serious trouble when she is attacked from behind and unable to fend for herself. Gert with her masculine name is another example of a strong woman who protects herself against the common stereotypes of women, particularly women associated with her occupation in both the Western and culture in general. She rejects being regarded as the one-dimensional archetype of the "bad" woman, objectified, limited and defined by her occupation, but rather insists on having a personality she keeps hidden from her male customers:

> 'Well,' said Addie the afternoon bartender, 'it seems to me like there's two kinds of women. There's the kind you want to be your mother or the mother of your kids, and there's the other kind.'

> 'Listen,' said Gert, 'there's only one kind of man, and you're it, an asshole.'
> 'Nice language, Gert. We sure know what kind of woman you are.'
> 'You'll never find out,' she said. (*Caprice*, 45-46)

This insistence on a position of power through the manipulation of the simple men around her, and in rebellion against her generic role in a Western narrative, links Gert to another prostitute in the Canadian West, Belle in Anne Cameron's *The Journey*, who through her aggressive femininity defeats the bible-toting misogynist sheriff Luke Wilson in what could be regarded as a parody of a duel (cf. 6.3.2).

Despite this connection between the two "Canadian" characters Gert and Belle, it is in many of U.S. author Larry McMurtry's women that Caprice finds her closest equivalents. Most of the leading women in McMurtry's books are strong, sexually liberated women, somewhat at odds with a more classical 19th century gender model, and closer to Robert Ward's nonchalant Cattle Annie and Little Britches in his late-hippie Western or Jeromy Charyn's Sally Blackburn, who also has few of the classic Victorian reserves about living her sexuality. McMurtry's women, like Ward's, also occasionally seem like sex objects for both author and reader.[230] Nellie Courtright in *Telegraph Days*, for instance, announces: "I've never been able to keep my hands off any male with even an ounce of appeal." And: "I was too wellborn to be called a slut, though if I'd had bolder male cousins I might have deserved the word" (109). Indeed McMurtry puts Nellie's heart where her mouth is and needless to say does so in a way that seems decidedly male and leaves the reader wondering how Nellie avoids being pregnant throughout most of her tale. Although not quite as extreme as Nellie, Lady Cecily Snow in *Anything for Billy* goes in a similar direction, as does Loreena in *Lonesome Dove*. To be sure Loorena changes and attains more depth after she has been abducted and raped by Blue Duck's men, and in fact becomes an "earth mother," in *Streets of Laredo* according to Ernestine Linck (630); nevertheless McMurtry has an ongoing fascination with strong, tough talking, sexual women, or maybe, like so many other middle-aged American authors just with sex in general. In his later non-Western novels *Texasville* one of the characters, Duane "has fathered a son to whom sex and fast cars are all, [and] a daughter to whom sex is all," and in *The Evening Star* the main character, Aurora's "sexual appetite makes her ridiculous," according to Linck (628, 629), and the list could be continued. Yet, once again, this is not to suggest that McMurtry uses his women merely as targets of projection for his sexuality.

[230] Charyn manages to avoid a clear male gaze through his first person account from a female perspective given in Sally's world-wise, ironic voice, who accepts sex like she accepts most things, with a well-tempered humorous gaze at man's folly. Her account of Ovenshine's sexual adventures or her own change of partners between "Silverspoon" Shirley and "Wild Bill" Hickok is frequently too absurd to be taken for authorial leering.

Nevertheless, particularly in his later works, they are often so similar (and sex-obsessed) as to be barely believable, seeming rather like the product of male fantasy. Nevertheless, several (woman) critics have praised the treatment of women in his earlier works. Jane Nelson sees an "equality" (618-19) between Clara and Gus in McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove*, and Billie Phillips sees McMurtry's women as "developed, complex characters who exemplify, in various degree, the four kinds of love" *libido*, *eros*, *philia*, and *agape* (67).

Like *Caprice*, McMurtry's works are neither the ultimate Western novels of female liberation, nor are they a pornographic product resulting from their respective authors' scopophilia, an obsession which renders these works ineffectual. Rather *Caprice*, and to a lesser degree McMurtry's works, especially *Telegraph Days*, are parodic revisions of the Western in which a reversal of the Western usual gendered perspective is one of the points of attack. Thus Bowering's, McMurtry's, Ward's, and particularly Charyn's novels are among the more "emancipated" of the works examined.

Many of the other texts show female characters that are slight revisions of the classic "Molly" type; they are usually slightly stronger, yet ultimately the plots remain male-centered, the female characters marginalized. As I have argued in the previous chapter both *Shoot!* and *The Englishman's Boy* center around absent mistreated and / or raped Métis or Native women, respectively, making the novels prime examples of Spivak's claim that "the subaltern as female cannot be heard or read" (2206), and many other novels, although not going as far as *Shoot!* and *The Englishman's Boy* in silencing their women, trod a comfortable path of the Western in mostly ignoring their minor women characters.

Thus most authors either write strong female protagonists as highly sexualized characters, or continue to use female characters as a means to give definition to their male protagonists following the Western's tradition, even if such women have a slightly more central and powerful position. The most notable exceptions to this rule are two novels written by women, Anne Cameron and Gil Adamson, both of which focus on female protagonists. Before I discuss Cameron's novel in detail, I want to briefly mention two other novels which take a path different from Bowering, Ward and McMurtry by not showing their female main characters in a sexual light. In E.L. Doctorow's *Welcome to Hard Times*, the narrator Blue finds himself living together with a former prostitute named, of all names, Molly, who violently rejects and ridicules him at every corner, after he has failed to protect her and the town of Hard Times from the "Bad Man from Bodie" (whose name, not coincidentaly, is Turner) yet holds tremendous power over him, always reminding him of his failings, while waiting for her chance at vengeance when the bad man returns. In Charles Portis' *True Grit* it is

similarly a woman, in this case a young girl, the narrator Mattie Ross, who insists on punishing a murderer, while the males by her side, particularly Rooster Cogburn, are always on the brink of straying off. Nevertheless, it is not Mattie who kills the murderer, and the novel eventually returns to a rather traditional path when Rooster first kills Tom Chaney, then rescues Mattie, as I will argue below. Neither is it Molly who kills Turner, although Doctorow is too much of a skeptic to write a traditional Western ending of regeneration and just punishment. Instead Molly is ironically united in death with her nemesis, whose wounded body she had tortured just moments ago, when Jimmy, her adopted son, kills them both (it is left unclear whether by accident or out of disgust for Molly's actions) in the moment in which "Turner's arm had closed around Molly as if in embrace" (209).

6.2.2. Anne Cameron's *The Journey* as Feminist Revision of the Western

In the following section I want to focus on how two Canadian writers replace the male hero in his trek West across the wilderness by a woman, a set up also found in U.S. American texts such as Molly Gloss's *The Jump-Off Creek*, and reflected in the more central roles of women in recent film's such as *Meek's Cutoff* (2010). These texts thereby challenge what Susan Kollin calls "[t]he gendered politics of mobility shaping the popular Western" (*Captivating* 18), in two connected ways showing both the flawed assumption of that gendered dynamic's assumption that only men can traverse the wild space of an often sexually encoded Western landscape (a landscape to be phallically penetrate, subdued etc.; cf. Mitchel "Introduction") and the real, destructive impact these assumptions have on their female protagonists. In *The Outlander* Gil Adamson portrays her protagonist's flight West from the two brothers of the abusive husband she has killed after the death of her baby. Adamson's approach includes a number of images of a subservient societal position for women in a 19th century, which I briefly want to discuss before focusing on Cameron's *The Journey*. Adamson's protagonist, "the widow," Mary Bolton, who tellingly is referred to throughout the novel not by her name, but by her societal position as the wife of a dead man, remembers her childhood as defined by "physical submission" and helplessness (28-29), and in her later marriage does not fare much better. Unlike Cameron, however, Adamson does not lay blame at the feet of the widow's father, but paints a society in which women are contributors to female marginalization and oppression, an oppression which in most cases results more from misinformation and lack of consideration than active bad will. The widow's grandmother, for instance, "had believed that education was damaging – too much blood to a woman's brain would cause reproductive malfunction. [...] And since no one in her family, including her grandmother, had ever met a woman with a degree, the

lesson went unchallenged" (48-49). Sex as violence, of course, is a central ingredient in Adamson's portrayal of women's position. The widow remembers her husband, "a voracious energy so overtaking him he was blind to her grunts and struggling, her attempts to rearrange him or push him off, his hard heavy body laying down unintended bruises" (85). Yet, here too, Adamson does not paint a black and white picture, and, in contrast to Cameron, sees an alternative of care in a heterosexual union when the union finds a more enjoyable sexual and personal connection to an American woodsman, who calls himself the Ridgerunner. Despite such moments of hope, Adamson is by no means an apologist for a sexist early 20th-century society, and the novel periodically returns to episodes of misogyny in the Canadian West, such as an episode in which the widow is accused of being a witch after a mine shaft collapses, simply because she is the only woman present (311-15). Yet the discussion of gender, sexism and misogyny is not the central concern of Adamson's novel and always takes a back seat after the widow's struggles in the wilderness. Anne Cameron, in contrast, chooses to make gender the focal point of her feminist Western, *The Journey*.

Both Cameron's and Adamson's novel are in part adventure story, in part critique of a patriarchal system which violates women's rights and ultimately drives them to insanity as has happened to Adamson's protagonist, if they do not break through the logic of the system, as do Cameron's characters. As this juxtapositon already suggests, Cameron is much more militant in her writing. She goes further in her critique of patriarchal society and her book seems to derive more clearly from a political agenda.

The Journey is the story of a young girl Anne who flees from her abusive uncle, Andrew, who has worked her mother to death and tries to impose himself on her. After stealing his horse and burning her old house she flees west. On the way she encounters another woman, Sarah, an ex-prostitute who has been tarred and feathered and driven out of town by a misogynist sheriff Luke Wilson. When they stay in a brothel run by one of Sarah's friends, Luke Wilson and Uncle Andrew show up again, and the women flee further west. As part of a wagon trek across the Rockies they pick up a young girl, Ruth, who flees from her own abusive father, and Sarah gets impregnated by another of Cameron's countless useless males. The three women finally end up on the coast, taking over an empty homestead they find. After a while a group of Natives appear and hand them a black boy and girl, completing their family unit. When Uncle Andrew and another man, Simon, appear and rape Sarah, Anne shoots Simon, while Ruth shoots Uncle Andrew. The novel ends after the family unit (minus Lin, the black girl who has been killed by the two men) is restored due to a group of Native women's healing powers, who cleanse Sarah after the rape, and all live happily ever after.

While by no means a major piece of literature, Cameron's novel is interesting in that it is a feminist, indeed a lesbian, revision of the Western and thus stands out among

all the other novels discussed in this book. Cameron alone manages to turn the Western against patriarchy by making her critique of male dominance in a patriarchal society – a society usually strongly implied in the Western – the central concern of her novel. Indeed, Cameron wears her ideology on her sleeve even before the novel begins. Her book is dedicated to "all the little girls who always wanted to be and never could grow up to be cowboys" [v], and Cameron's first epigraph, a parody based on a line from "The Streets of Laredo" makes her approach even clearer:

> I see by your outfit that you are a cowboy
> I see by his outfit that he's a cowboy true,
> I see by their outfits that they are all cowboys,
> If I get an outfit can I be cowboy, too.
> (as sung by those of us tied for
> too long to trees and stereotypes) [vii]

The last line of Cameron's song, omits the grammatical "a" and thus turns the word cowboy into an adjective, a description of a state. As Arnold Davidson notes, this difference "highlights dress as determining essential selfhood which thereby becomes merely a matter of dress (a circular proposition also implicit in the original song)" (*Coyote Country* 120). Yet there is more at work than a performance tied to dress as Cameron's parenthetical addition suggests. The question which ends Cameron's version of "Streets of Laredo" is ironic, since woman as Other cannot become a cowboy in the classic Western – a matter of much linguistic debate in *Caprice* is the male characters' continued attempt to decide how Caprice fits into the West's scheme of things, whether she is a cowgirl, a cowperson, or a bullgirl –, instead women remain "tied [...] to trees and stereotypes," a situation which Cameron sets out to address, as her final introductory remark reveals: "When one is reinventing the world one cannot be concerned with minor details [of historical accuracy], and when one has become convinced, over a number of years, that the privileged patriarchal perspective is sick, one looks for alternatives" [ix]. To provide such an alternative is clearly Cameron's aim, for, as she relates immediately after she could not find a suitable place for herself in the Western's she watched while growing up:

> The boys could identify with the heroes. We had Dale Evans. She was the one with no guns, the one on the slower horse, who rode behind Roy just in time to catch the mud flying from his gallant steed's hooves. Not much of a role model.[231]
> And so, because I had long hair, worn in pigtails, and the stereotype did not allow me a six-gun, a rifle, or a knife, I spent many hours tied to trees, the captive Indian. Perhaps that was the beginning of this story. (Ibid.)

[231] This passage evokes Margaret Atwood's allegorical poem "Backdrop Addresses Cowboy" in which an allegedly female speaker similarly rebels against her role in the "Starspangled" cowboy's theme, "I ought to be watching / from behind a cliff or a cardboard storefront / when the shooting starts, hands clasped / in admiration / but I am elsewhere" (70-71).

What is more remarkable than Cameron's rejection of the male Western model is her metaphorical self-identification with the Western's usual victimized Other, the Indian. Cameron the young girl of the novel's dedication, or Anne in the novel, as female is as Other to patriarchy, as the Indian is to the Western. Naturally, women and Natives end up being allies by the novel's end, magically realizing their mutual marginality and oppression. Indeed, *The Journey* foregrounds "other stories typically suppressed in the dominant discourse of the Western," as Davidson has remarked (*Coyote Country* 120). But it does so in a way that rests uneasily. Just as she does in her likening of herself to an Indian in her authorial declaration of intent, Cameron uses all ethnicities as weapons in her attack against the patriarchal system, and they all ultimately remain symbols of the role of women in the society she depicts (and the one she writes in).

At one point in the narrative the women come across a group of Chinese railroad workers who are mercilessly whipped by their (male) foremen. One of the workers dies as a result of this mistreatment, an event which mirrors the death of Anne's mother who was similarly 'worked to death' by her uncle. While Anne and her group sleep near the railroad camp at night, they become witness to a group of Chinese who flee under cover of the night. In the morning they are met by the railroad men who pursue the fleeing laborers. Their leader refers to the Chinese as "lazy things," claiming that "[t]hey move a lot [...] but they don't do much" (161). It is made clear that this is an instance of misrepresentation as the result of a malevolent and prejudiced gaze, when one of the escapees is briefly taken in by the group. He does more than his share of work: he gathers food for the group, as well as for his own escape to the Pacific Ocean, and even looks for jade after all the work is done. As mentioned it is unsurprising given the general drift of Cameron's novel that the women side with the ethnic minority, and it is equally unsurprising that, in the process, they overcome their initial prejudice. In her last glimpse of the Chinese workers Anne realizes her kinship with the Asian laborers, as part of another oppressed group. She also realizes their individuality, which she had earlier denied (164), transcending her earlier entrapment in her society's prejudice: "Anne knew she felt a kinship with each and every one of them, and she realized she was seeing them all as individuals: They didn't look at all alike after all" (202). The real significance of the episode thus lies in the way in which it reflects back on the main characters, as oppressed women, and women who can see past the skewed vision of their society.

As discussed briefly in the previous chapter, the novel establishes a connection between the women and the First Nations they encounter along the coast which is even more problematic than that made between the group and the railroad workers. While Sarah briefly suggests that they have "sort of taken over" the house in a similar way to Uncle Andrew, Anne insists that it is "[n]ot the same" and that seems the end of the

discussion (232), the transfer of house and land is legitimized by the handing over of the two black children, as discussed in the previous chapter, and Cameron does not seem to see a problem in this. Yet, as is quite obvious, and as Arnold Davidson has pointed out, the position the novel gives to the Natives is quite troubling and very much reiterates the traditional Western's treatment of Indians:

> The last action and words of *The Journey* especially displace the Indian. The two women rest from work with a dip in the ocean and "then, together, they swam lazily toward the shore, toward their home" (307). The text insists that this land is now "their" land, and that same point is also made by the labor from which they are resting. (*Coyote Country* 133)

Ironically, the ending reproduces the racial status quo, although this seems to escape the novel, which equates women and non-whites. Yet, as Davidson insist, "the Indian is still captive, which is to say that the male construct of female has been disputed but not the white construct of Indian." Furthermore, "although the feminist utopia finally established in *The Journey* is situated at the margins of both Indian and white society, its very success will further marginalize only the former" (Ibid.).

Before Anne and her group arrive at their feminist / lesbian utopia, *The Journey* is a direct attack on male gender models and male hegemony, as they are underlie both the Western and contemporary society. Much of the novel's plot, where it is not directed against one of the lazy and disgusting representatives of patriarchy, Uncle Andrew, Luke Wilson, or Ruth's father, "the raggedy-ass man," shows the female protagonists searching for alternative models to define their identity as women in the face of a patriarchal society which has failed them.[232] As Davidson shows, there is a strong parallel between Anne and Sarah in the first two chapters, both of whom flee from male violence, and in a way all women represent the same archetype (*Coyote Country* 126, 132), just as most of the bad men in the novel represent the abusive father in Davidson's Freudian / Lacanian reading. Whether or not one partakes in readings of phalli and castration anxiety, the men certainly all serve as stand-ins for various aspects of the abusive patriarch.

What is interesting about the way in which Cameron portrays Anne's search for identity in a patriarchal system is that Anne's escape initially follows a pattern of the performativity of gender which is deeply engrained in the Western, although its models reach back much further. When Anne flees from Uncle Andrew she does so disguised as a boy, an act of cross-dressing which not only shows her attempt to become male in a male-dominated society, "be cowboy" as it were, but is also deeply rooted in the

[232] It should be noted that there are a few "good" men in Cameron's novel. Most, but not all of them, ethnic and thus on the same side of oppressive white patriarchy the women find themselves on, as discussed above.

Western genre's history. Jon Tuska and Vicki Piekarski establish the significance of costume as representation of power and gender in the genre:

> [Dane] Coolidge established a dress code for females in his fiction, which was widely imitated, especially after it was adopted by motion pictures. His heroines are generally strong only when they were wearing men's clothing and this strength is conceived as being masculine in character. However, as with B.M. Bower's novels, Coolidge's heroines tend to become petty or contrary shortly after they appear and thus are able to remain emotionally aloof from the hero until the inevitable reconciliation at the end. (Tuska and Piekarski 257)

Robert Berkhofer, Jr. makes a similar point when he remarks: "in the Western the hero regardless of nominal occupation was always athletic and masculine, even Calamity Jane" (Berkhofer 98).[233] This of course does not bode well with Cameron's feminist redefinition of the Western. Anne cannot find or redefine herself as a "man," but has to transcend her cross-dressing and cross-gendering to find a viable, female alternative to the role patriarchy ascribes to her and other women. The female path is only completed with the shooting of Uncle Andrew, the novel's antagonist and its longest stand-in for patriarchy, according to Arnold Davidson, and it is completed by Anne who cannot bring herself to shoot her uncle despite all the harm he has caused, but by Ruth, the adopted girl and herself a former victim of an abusive patriarch:

> The girl escaping in the guise of a boy is here re-represented as the girl as girl confronting her oppression. It is in Ruth, then, that Anne finally returns to herself as a young woman and sees another way to oppose the gender and ideological paradigms that forced – but were not altered by – her flight. Simply switch paradigms and an action previously unthinkable becomes almost as easy as breathing (and almost as essential to survival). (*Coyote Country* 132)

Indeed, Kathleen Martindale in her article makes a similar point, when she links Cameron's novel to a feminist discourse against nonviolence. According to Martindale the women in Cameron's novel have to see through and reject a patriarchal construction which automatically equates women with caregivers and limits their options to a seemingly natural dichotomy of self-sacrifice or egoism. Yet, as feminist theoretician

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[233] In *Deadwood*, which in a lot of ways seems like the model for the HBO TV series despite the fact that the author Pete Dexter is not credited, Dexter plays to this stereotype, portraying Calamity Jane as so dirty, ugly and manish – a drunk who can never hold her job as a cart driver because she abuses the oxen when drunk – that one of the other characters, Boone May, feels he has to cleanse himself with a whore after he has had intercourse with Jane (who unsurprisingly takes the dominant part during the intercourse).

Larry McMurtry in *Buffalo Girls* goes all the way in adapting this view by making his Calamity Jane a hermaphrodite. Unfortunately, however, this revelation comes so late in the plot, five pages before the end of the novel, that it is a gimmick rather than a source of serious exploration and questioning of gender roles. When one of the characters tells another about Jane's hermaphroditism, his friend answers: "I don't care what religion she was, [...] I just liked the old girl," the novel's last sentence, and a fitting description of its take on the issue (350).

Judith Farr Tormey points out, "denying the path of self-sacrifice is not logically the same as accepting egoism." However, "patriarchal mystification keeps women from seeing that resisting self-sacrifice, that is, accepting or insisting on what one has a right to have, is an honourable stance and a moral act" (Martindale 106). In the novel, this realization is most clearly played out when Anne and Sarah join a wagon train west and Sarah in particular is immediately cast into a position in which one of the members of the trek, the "raggedy-assed man," expects her to take care of his children. Sarah finds herself in an ethical double bind in which she is either able to do the raggedy-assed man's work for the sake of his children or seems to abandon his helpless children if she refuses to do this work. Anne in contrast violently opposes this patriarchal logic, rebelling "against male exploitation and female complicity in it" (Ibid.). It is only with the final act of opposing violence with violence, however, that the women complete their symbolic journey away from the logic of patriarchy. This logic, as Martindale writes, insists on the nonviolent resistance of women. Yet

> [f]eminist philosopher Jeffner Allen rejects nonviolence as a patriarchal construct: it has been assigned to women *because* it is ineffective and self-destructive. Nonviolence keeps women powerless and forces us to choose martyrdom and suicide. (109)

Ironically, of course, this violent ending brings *The Journey* back closer to the traditional plot of the (male) Western. The novel is a journey of pursuit through the wilderness, which ends with the killing of a main villain who has been established early on and is brought back throughout the book. The difference of the story *The Journey* tells lies in the details, the protagonists' gender and its politics of turning the masculine genre against patriarchy, even if its solution is not entirely a singularly feminine mode. Yet, the novel's ending is at least in part suggestive of this difference. If one overlooks the inherent violation of the Native's land – softened in the narrative through the voluntary transfer of the Black children and the land – the novel ends with a feminist utopia, with an affirmation of home and the (non hetero-normative) love between Sarah and Anne. Even if this utopian space is not entirely safe as long as patriarchal society remains on the outside, as the invasion of Uncle Andrew and Simon into this female space reminds us.

6.2.3. Résumé: Women in the Revisionist Western

While trying to depict women in a less sexist and stereotypical way, many revisionist Westerns still cast them as marginalized figures. Those few novels that incorporate women in more central roles often focus on the depiction of strong women, such as the protagonists of Cameron's *The Journey* or Bowering's *Caprice*. As is the case with the

portrayal of Native Americans, it seems as if the genre can either be entirely refocused and redirected to specifically address the depiction of women (or Native Americans), or it continues to write its old ideology, even if the author is aware of this ideology. This problem of substantially changing women's roles is seen in both Canadian and U.S. Westerns.

The changes in historiography resulting from the New Western Historians' attribution of a greater historical role of women in the West have not led to a more prominent position of women in most texts – at least not ones which can be comfortably placed in the Western genre. There are of course countless texts about women in the West which give a central position to women and tell of a female presence and history in the 19th century West. Molly Gloss's *The Jump-Off Creek* and Wallace Stegner's *Angle of Repose* are fairly recent examples, but numerous earlier examples could be found, including texts by Willa Cather. As Annette Kolodny shows in *The Land Before Her*, a tradition of early women writers exists which stands in contrast to the more culturally dominant male narratives of the frontier. Such texts generally do not take their point of departure in the Western genre or its ideology, however, but, in the case of contemporary novels, take other models such as the historical or realist novel as their literary models. Jane Tompkin's words still largely ring true, even with regard to the revisionist Western: "Western's pay practically no attention to women's experience. Nor could they. When women wrote about the West, the stories they told did not look anything like what we know as the Western" (41-42). As John Cawelti told an interviewer, the generic Western

> never seemed comfortable outside the sphere of traditional masculinity, as if there were something inherently sexist about the genre. The decline of the Western as a genre certainly reflects the spread of an antisexist, antiracist consciousness in America. (Lee)

This lack of an equal representation of women in the Western is certainly due in part to the fact that, while some women are Western critics and have drawn our attention to the lack of strong and / or believable female characters, with the exception of Gil Adamson and Anne Cameron, there are no women writers of revisionist Westerns in the U.S. or in Canada. Where women writers of popular Westerns existed historically, market pressures often forced them to follow male models (cf. Bold, "Popular West" 865) or keep their critiques slight (cf. Piekarski's article or Lamont's "B.M. Bower"). Instead, male authors step in and create female gun- or whip-slingers, who, as has been shown, turn out not entirely satisfactory characters.

6.3. The Unheroic Male

As explored in the introduction of this chapter, Westerns, and particularly their protagonists are strongly tied to the concept of masculinity, a masculinity which is usually expressed as heroic white masculinity. While some authors have countered this situation through the introduction of strong female characters – characters whose role in the traditional Western was merely as an instrument of further enhancing the protagonist's manliness through their admiration – others have chosen to more directly target the masculine hero with his implications of chauvinism on both a gender and a national level. In the recent special issue on the Western of the *Canadian Review of American Studies*, Christine Bold and Victoria Lamont have observed:

> [T]he "mythic space" of the western (in Richard Slotkin's term) remains dominated by men, but it no longer parades their masculinity with triumphant nationalism. Westerns tell uncomfortable truths about manhood in America (and about America as a manly nation). (115)

In exploring the male as a target for a critique of masculinity, there is a crucial difference between an anti-hero and an unheroic character. While the hero as anti-hero is common in the Western, the simple reversal of a hero's ethics from "good" to "evil" or, more frequently, "self-interested" does not automatically make this character unheroic, when heroism is defined more loosely as stemming out of a sense of integrity, as Peter French has suggested (126-32). Furthermore, when the issue is masculinity as performance it does not make a character unmanly. An anti-hero or a hero with aspects of anti-heroism can still be manly, as Sam Peckinpah's oeuvre or almost all of the roles Clint Eastwood ever played demonstrate. In fact, as Jon Tuska and Vicki Piekarski write,

> [i]t was a trend in the Fifties to introduce anti-hero elements into even formulary Westerns, but generically this trend was more apparent in romantic historical reconstructions, as in *The Searchers* or in *Comanche Captives*, by splitting the traditional formulary Western hero in two distinct characters. (270)

The outlaw as (misunderstood) hero has been present in various guises in the Western since its dime novel days. He gains more prominence, however, in times of general discontent, such as the 1920s (cf. Tatum *Inventing* 189-90), or the late 1960s, in which he surfaces in numerous A Westerns that play to a counterculture alienation from the American mainstream. The outlaw is an example of a heroic and masculine, but potentially somewhat immoral character, or at least one at odds with (capitalist) society's guiding code of ethics.

The *un*heroic male in contrast is not motivated by a sense of personal integrity or a cause larger than himself, which Peter French has identified as central to the

Aristotelian theory of heroism through which he reads the character of the gunfighter. The unheroic protagonist is motivated most often by fear, an instinct of self-preservation and a lack of manly restraint. According to French, true courage, which I would regard as the central defining criterion of the heroic male, is shown in situations which promise imminent death or suffering (108) and, following Aristotle, has to have both an internal and an external goal: "Its internal goal is the one it shares with other virtues: to be practiced for its own sake. Its external goal will vary from situation to situation, but will be some morally desirable end, or what Aristotle calls 'the noble'" (109). True courage does not strive for honor or to avoid punishment. It is not the "courage of experience" (113) which people like professional soldiers show, nor a "courage" resulting from anger, or a "courage of hope" (115) in which the success of the seemingly courageous action seems almost certain. Lastly, it is not a courage resulting from ignorance of the real dangers of an action. As French shows, such types of false courage are frequently shown by the Western gunfighter's antagonists, revealing them as unheroic and unmanly. The Western hero's courage, motivated by his sense of dignity and manliness (his internal goal) and an external goal such as the protection of a town from lawless elements, reveals him as sharing a lot of characteristics with Aristotle's citizen soldier and classifies him as truly courageous and heroic.

Joseph Früchtl proposes a different reading of the hero, one informed by a Hegelian philosophy. According to Hegel, a hero "is somebody who artistically embodies the unity of individuality and universality in mythical or violent times" (Früchtl 36). The hero, according to Hegel, transcends his society, as Früchtl makes clear by contrasting him to the bourgeois and bourgeois society: "[T]he hero is the stuff of mythology, whereas the bourgeoisie perceives him as a case for psychoanalysis" (40). The hero "is not only someone who aids the breakthrough of a new world," as Shane does stepping up to the old cattle baron for the new homesteaders, "but also one who does so in irreconcilable and hopeless confrontation with the old world, prepared to defend his views to the death" (40-41). In the Western the confrontation that brings the hero face to face with death often occurs in the gunfight. The almost inevitable violent encounter for which the duel serves as a short hand highlights that the hero is all that which a mundane bourgeois citizen is not, and in the Western he is thus almost always an outsider to the society he defends. The motivations for his actions have an archaic rationale that cannot be integrated into a modern, bourgeois society.

The unheroic protagonist of the revisionist Western, in contrast, is very unmythical, mundane, and almost always bourgeois in his self-interest and pettiness. Curt Marder, the narrator of Percival Everett's *God's Country* springs up as a perfect example, but there are countless others. Blue, the protagonist and narrator of E.L. Doctorow's *Welcome to Hard Time*, is less of a caricature than Marder, but he is equally

pedestrian, interested primarily in writing himself into history, motivated – when he shows anything resembling courage – by what Aristotle would define as the false courage deriving out of his striving for recognition.

In the Western, the marking of a character's lack of heroism and manliness is also often linked to the Western's traditional use of language. The hyper-masculine restraint of the hero, which makes him a man of few words, is a recurrent target of parody and revision. As Lee Mitchell explains, in the classic Western,

> [t]he restraint that the Western hero wears as part of his sign-laden costume sharply distinguishes him from other men – it requires the distinction of others whose lack of restraint provides a foil to the true man's achieved coherence. Talking too much or laughing too easily or expressing fear too readily are more than mere signs of bad form; they reveal a general inability to maintain composure under the pressure of vivid sensation. And in the recurrent enactment of such scenes of emotional excess, the Western offers a silhouette that helps construct its shadow image. (Mitchell 165-66)

Texts such as *God's Country* or *Welcome to Hard Times* play with this convention. As Leland Krauth notes about Everett's protagonist, "[a]s narrator of his own story, Marder talks of course, but within it, he talks too much. [...] Everett buries the conventional Western hero, turning him from a laconic master-man into a loquacious feeble-man" (317). It is of course not only Marder's tendency to talk too much that marks him as unheroic, but his loquaciousness serves as a recurrent source of trouble and a constant reminder of his lack of restraint and heroism. Blue, the narrator of Doctorow's *Welcome to Hard Times*, is also a much better talker than he is a doer. In fact it is Blue's use of words which gets most of the inhabitants of Hard Times in trouble. In his grand scheme to become mayor of the place he tries to convince everyone to stay although it is obvious that the bad man from Bodie will return, then fails to protect the town, including the women and children – a typical sign of his failings as a heroic Western man.

Charles Willeford chooses a slightly different path in *The Difference* to show his protagonist's lack of heroism. While he undergoes a rather classic frontier development of "becoming a man" by learning to shoot a gun, Willeford's narrator, Johnny, uses violence arbitrarily and specifically abuses and kills those who are weaker than he is. He also turns against those who help him when they themselves are helpless. After he has been hidden and learned to use a gun from a famous outlaw, Blackie Clark, who now poses as a blacksmith, Mr. Dover, and treats him like an adopted son, he attacks, and in the end kills, his teacher for no reason. His justification exposes his lack of respect, gratitude, and morality: "But in a way, Mr. Dover had brought it all on himself. By giving me his guns and by teaching me how to use them he was the direct cause of the loss of his future son-in-law" (158-59), one of the men Johnny plans to assassinate. In the final shootout, however, Johnny shoots the unarmed Mr. Dover during his

daughter's wedding, instead of her future husband, before he goes off to become a gunman himself, on the reputation of a number of killings whose implications he gravely overestimates and the "borrowed" notches on Clark's gun: "There were eleven notches on my gun already, filed there by Blackie Clark – and those would all be credited to me now. Eleven and four (the old Indian in the canyon, who would have died anyway, didn't count) made fifteen notches. I had an earned reputation" (167). By showing Johnny's utter lack of morals or true courage, *The Difference* makes the point that it does not take a real man to kill, only one callous enough to pull the trigger. Johnny's self-deception in a tale which shows the evolution of a hired gunfighter has the effect of undercutting the heroic male gun fighter and questioning the myth of the lives and times of the valiant frontiersmen by showing the immoral and unheroic underside of such a figure.

While many other examples of unheroic males in the revisionist Western can easily be found, in the following I want to focus particularly on two recurring ways in which the heroic masculinity of the male protagonist is questioned and undermined in the revisionist Western. The first is the inclusion of figures from the Western's pantheon of mythic gun fighters who have over the genre's existence been identified as exemplary of the heroic male. Texts either try to reinstate a more "realistic" picture of historical characters and their lives to bring the mythic hero down to human dimension or use characters such as Bill Hickok or Buffalo Bill as a target of outrageous parody. Many texts attack the mythmaking of popular culture, often symbolized in the text by dime novels, through their simultaneous portrayal of these characters and the myths they become in the popular imagination, and supplant older narratives by accounts that are more closely informed by historiographic metafiction than the archetypal / mythic view of the traditional Western.

The second strategy I will discuss is the targeting of the shootout as the action which most clearly defines the gunfighter. As Birgit Hans writes, the gunfighter "looms larger than life and becomes part of the American foundation myth" (55). Undercutting this heroic figure in his defining moment, allows the revisionist texts to question or supplant the traditional image of hegemonic masculinity underlying the Western, and, through its ties to such ideologies as Manifest Destiny, one particular version of America's self image expressed in such figures.

6.3.1. Targeting the Mythic West through the Heroic Males of "History"

"We have all misunderstood Billy the Kid," she said in parting.
Donald Barthelme, "Daumier."

Since dime novel days, the Western has always been the arena not only of a faceless everyman cowboy, but also of a number of "historic" personalities who have been elevated to super human status in myth. The encoding of such "historic" figures into mythic frontier heroes or villains usually began during their lifetime, as historians and folklorists such as Kent Steckmesser have explored. Later, Western films focused on a relatively small number of historical characters, including Bill Hickok, General Custer, Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday, Billy the Kid, and Jesse James, telling and retelling their stories over and over and making them into key actors in the imaginary West, representatives of the heroic Westerner, regardless of their actual historical importance. It seems that what Stephen Tatum suggests for Billy the Kid holds true similarly for Hickok, the James brother, the Dalton gang, General Custer, certainly for Buffalo Bill, and possibly for all frontier "heroes":

> One reason the Kid has endured is that even before his death his exploits were widely reported in territorial newspapers, and such reports were customarily reprinted in newspapers farther east whose editors realized that their audiences were keenly interested in sensational frontier happenings. (*Inventing* 6)

As this brief excerpt suggests, and as Tatum more thoroughly demonstrates in his monograph, the key to Billy the Kid – and by implication other frontier celebrities who gained a place in popular culture – is that he "crosses and recrosses any supposedly firm boundaries between folk, the popular, and the artistic imaginations, or any conventional boundaries between history and legend" (Ibid.). Kent Steckmesser also comments on the peculiar mix of fact and fiction surrounding these "heroes" and the influence of the press and dime novel:

> Typically they were men who had actually performed some notable or verifiable exploit. Then through literary elaboration and the workings of the folk imagination, their deeds were expanded to epic proportions, and new exploits were added to their names. As this process was repeated, the individuals who benefited from it *came to personify the frontiers of which they had been a part*. (3; my emphasis)

If they indeed personify the frontier, such mythicized and exemplary male heroes are ideal targets for authors of revisionist Westerns. They provide authors with an opportunity to make a comment about the fabrication of celebrity and history through writing. Such revisions of the heroic male in "history" usually take one of two forms. Texts either attempt to introduce more realism and historical accuracy into the account

of a character's life with the result of cutting the mythic frontiersman they target down from epic proportions to a more human size, or they parody historical figures in more outrageous ways, an approach frequently found in more anarchic wholesale attacks on the Western. Both of these approaches are frequently linked to the attack of the romantic clichés underlying the Western genre, which most commonly appear in the form of dime novels or exaggerated newspaper accounts which embellish or outright invent these characters' exploits.

This exploration frequently takes a form that Linda Hutcheon would identify as historiographic metafiction (as briefly defined in chapter 2), or is part of a larger critique of dime Western clichés which has been popular since Crane's days. By including characters who read dime novels or believe in a romantic dime novel West of heroes and outlaws, authors who position themselves within "serious" Western literature attempt to set their work off from the popular Western, even if this separation might not be as clear-cut as these authors would have it (cf. Bischoff). Frank Bergon's *Shoshone Mike* therefore is indicative of many revisionist Westerns' tendency of blaming dime novels as the motivation of another character's violent actions – a tendency reaching back all the way to Crane's "Blue Hotel." "I'll tell you what the problem is," Lamb said. "When we caught Urie after the robbery in Imlay, we found that kid's bedroll crammed full of magazines about outlaws and rustlers. That's the problem right here. Those guys think they're in a magazine story" (136). Other authors have taken more ironic and humorous attitudes, but the story remains the same. "Real" West and dime novel West clash, but some of the characters are stuck in their heroic vision of the dime novel and its heroes. Percival Everett's Curt Marder, for instance, as wrong about most things as he is about dime novels, is impressed by their accurate depiction of the frontier. His only objection is that the adventure stories leave out the smell of the dirty West – another topos used by quite a few authors:

> I had read what I could of the dime novels about the frontier, thinking it my duty as a citizen of it to make sure the truth be told, and generally the little books gave a fair account, but always failed to mention the smell. Hell, we hardly ever bathed and our stomachs were always grumbling and complaining and we wore our boots without stockings. If a vulture wouldn't attack us alive, it sure as hell wouldn't light on us dead. Out of good sense, we lived far from one another. We came together in bars and churches more or less to assure ourselves that our smells were normal and not an indication of coming death. (Everett 10)

Ron Hansen's *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* reads like a carefully researched historical novel. In his novel, Hansen contrasts the popular image of Jesse as printed in newspaper accounts and dime novels, which paint him as a Robin Hood-like figure opposing the evil corporate railroads, with the characterization of a balding, vain, uncommonly charismatic, but otherwise fairly regular man. Images

such as the one of Jesse standing in the kitchen, a typical female space, in an apron baking macaroons stand in stark contrast to the image of a hero, a figure who never has to perform such everyday activities, they just get done. In this passage the text describes him as "resigned, placid, grandfatherly; he seemed to have given up" (225). It is scenes like these with their banality, which compromise Jesse's masculinity and lead Robert Ford, the greatest admirer of Jesse's dime novel persona, to kill the actual person behind the idol he adores. Through his murder Ford also manages to fulfill his great obsession, to become the man who kills the *celebrity* Jesse James and thus achieves a sort of fame by proxy, enacting his one "great deed" time and again on stage before he is ironically killed at age thirty by an even pettier and more cowardly version of himself, the man who killed the man who killed Jesse James, Edward O'Kelley, a third-tier celebrity whose name few remember.

Throughout the novel, Hansen questions the image of Jesse as Robin Hood, who steals from the rich and gives to the poor – an image also ridiculed in Ward's more parodic account of the outlaw as Robin Hood in his *Cattle Annie and Little Britches* in which Bill Dalton, the leader of the Doolin-Dalton gang, complains that the press focuses on the gang's deeds of charity by which they try to outdo the James gang and adhere to an imaginary outlaw code, ruin their profits:

> since we got billed as Robin Hoods, it got embarrassing to keep explaining to people we was only in it for the money, so we kept having to act like Robin Hoods, buying people drinks and sending kinds to the store with candy money and giving the moms and dads some liquor ... that Robin Hood shit was Bob's fault ... he jes naturally wanted to make everything like it was bigger than life. (113-14)

Hansen chooses a less humorous depiction, instead of showing the outlaw as the victim of his own myth, he describes how the gang led by the James brothers steals from the passengers of the train they rob, "stealing coins, dollars, watches, bracelets, rings, stickpins, pendants" (30). The gang's lack of morality and violation of the Robin Hood code the press associates with them is shown in the way they relieve the passengers of their entire possessions: they steal the three hundred dollars with which a "Dutchman" had hoped to purchase a farm, as well as other passenger's life savings, Frank snatches money from a little girl's hand when she picks it up to give it to her father, and the gang takes away an immigrant's insurance papers, ignoring his desperate pleas to return them to him, since it would be too much work to get his wallet out of the sack again in which they collect their loot. The result of their robbery is devastating, lacking romance, heroism, and manliness:

> Children wailed in corners, several women became hysterical and remained so throughout the night; men sat in chairs with blank faces, their hands lumped in their laps, having lost

> fortunes: their crabbed savings, the cost of a cottage, the auction sale of six Holstein cows, a laggard Silver Anniversary watch. (31-32)

Before they leave with the thousands of dollars they have stolen, Jesse gives one dollar and fifty cents to one of the brakemen from whom the gang had stolen fifty cents, his only possession, with the grandiose comment of giving him his "principal and interest on your money" (32).

Pete Dexter's *Deadwood* similarly counters the popular image of a Westerner with a more "realistic" and human portrayal of his protagonist "Wild" Bill Hickok. Shortly after entering the narrative, Dexter's Wild Bill rather unheroically tries to relieve himself, an act which occupies much of his time throughout the novel, as he has contracted a venereal disease which makes urinating extremely painful. When his horse is shot behind his back, Bill complains to his companion Charley Utter: "I hate to be in the bushes with my peeder out when the shooting starts" (12), words which hardly befit a legendary gunfighter (just as they don't bake, heroes rarely have to adhere to their bodies either). While Dexter's Hickok is thus brought down from his heroic position almost in his first appearance, he is painted in a more positive light than Hansen's Jesse James overall. He is an alcoholic, who at one point throws up in the bushes after dragging a dead moose towards a river during an ill-fated hunting expedition for moose that are so tame they walk up to the hunter to sniff him, an expedition organized by grandiloquent Captain Jack, whose lack of masculinity is expressed in his milk drinking. In all hardly the image of the hunting trip as a manly exploit which plagues U.S. culture until the present day. Yet the narration, even in such grotesque situations, while being humorous, is less interested in parody than the matter-of-fact relation of the less mythic and effulgent sides of the life of its protagonist.

In this spirit, Dexter's narrative is set in a West which contrasts with the shiny dime novel West. The first description of Deadwood we get is suggestive of a dirty West image *Deadwood* shares with other revisionist novels and the HBO TV series bearing the same name: "The mud was a foot deep, and every kind of waste in creation was thrown into the street to mix with it" (17). Later we are told that the saloon sports "a professor at the piano, and every kind of whore known to man, except a clean one," and so forth (109).

But the novel is not set on ridiculing Bill, rather it shows two sides of a character who has frequently been drawn as one-dimensionally heroic. It shows both the image of the mythic gunfighter, an image which also occasionally clouds Bill's self-image, and a much frailer human side, one he only lets his friend Charley Utter see. Dexter's Bill is full of contradictions, he is a sure shot, shooting whiskey glasses off a bulldog's head, but also runs into a crate which "nobody but a blind man could have missed" (63),

suggesting his blindness at twilight, a detail which more parodic versions such as Charyn's *Darlin' Bill* and McMurtry's *Telegraph Days* also include. In *Telegraph Days*, for instance, Nellie tells her brother to get glasses using Wild Bill as a warning example: "Remember how nearsighted Billy Hickok was? He was too vain to admit it and go get himself proper specs, and now he's dead" (122). Like Bill his sidekick Charley Utter is also past his prime. Charley's legs hurt so much he has to repeatedly take "some of the weight off his legs" (29), which limits him in his actions, and impacts on his masculinity. The ideal of heroic masculinity does not include age and injury, at least not when their symptoms are not ignored as "merely a scratch."

As in Hansen's *Assassination* and the more parodic versions discussed below, there is also an element of contrasting the narrative with the romantic myth surrounding the gunfighter, which Hickok occasionally complains about:

> "I wish there was a general reluctance to bring my name into things," he said. "The trouble is accuracy. You can't explain what you did to anybody, especially a reporter, because things don't come out the same in words. And the words you give them, they get it wrong. I tremble to think what the writers do after a body dies." (68)

When he states "things don't come out the same in words," Bill seems to replicate the bias against words which underlies masculinity in the Western, according to Jane Tompkins (*West* 47-67) – an odd situation in a novel as well-worded as Dexter's. But Dexter's Wild Bill is more plagued by his public image than by word, an image which, as he ironically suggests, will only fully get out of hand "after a body dies." In the same conversation with the "soft-brain" who runs the bathhouse in Deadwood, Hickok also expresses his suspicion of the potentially floating use of images:

> "I wouldn't advise it [having your picture taken]," Bill said. "You don't want to do something like that unless there's a reason, like if you were famous and had to. A picture is the beginning of misstatement and misunderstanding. You got people looking at it with all different opinions, and they make up stories to go with them." (68-69)

As Dexter's Wild Bill suggests, celebrity and truth do not mix well, a judgment also shared by Hickok scholar Joseph Rosa, who observes: "The legendary 'Wild Bill' was the creation of the fevered imaginations of the press and public; they wove his real exploits into a tangle of fact and fiction that has long confused, confounded and irritated historians, not to mention Hickok himself" (xvi). As in Hansen's account it is Hickok's image as a famous gunman, which ultimately brings about his end. As soon as he enters Deadwood, Boone May decides to find someone who will kill Hickok for him, since he is jealous of Hickok's public image, and finally finds this person in the luckless "cat man" Jack McCall.

In contrast to Dexter and Hansen, many authors take paths which are less indebted to historical accuracy than informed by postmodern or parodic attitudes towards the historical actors they employ as fictional characters. William Eastlake's 1957 novel *The Bronc People* could serve as a point of departure for many later parodic views. In it Sant asks the old Indian fighter Blue-eyed Billy Peersall about the historical West and its gun fighters and gets a laconic answer from the old man:

> "Tell us about the gun-slingers of the old West," Sant said. "Who had the fastest gun?"
> "The silliest gun was had by Billy the Kid, the most ridiculous gun was had by Mr. Hickok. Doc Holliday shot number-seven birdshot from a shotgun – he never missed. Mr. Earp lived in Hollywood and died in Frisco. That should finish him. They got those guns now, all of them, preserved in a museum, guns that were never fired, owned by people who didn't exist. Why, they're trying to make heroes out of people claiming they shot themselves into history. They was only, most of the time, trying to shoot their way out of a whorehouse without paying the fee." (74)

Eastlake's critique of the mythic west as voiced by Peersall mentions many of the characters who also feature in later revisionist Westerns, and draws into questions not only their heroism and manliness when he claims they were only "trying to shoot their way out of a whorehouse without paying," but expresses doubt over their very existence. They are "people who didn't exist," the guns which are now treasured as artifacts of the frontier "were never fired;" the only real gunman was, of course, Peersall himself.

The inclusion of historical characters in anarchic ways has also reached popular culture, as evident in Joe Lansdale's *Zeppelins West* (reprinted as part one of *Flaming Zeppelins*) which features the head of Buffalo Bill Cody conserved in a glass jar with a crank to provide his brain with oxygen, a drunken Ned Buntline, Annie Oakley, Wild Bill Hickok, lover to Little Sure Shots, who contrary to her historical model is less than puritanical, Sitting Bull and a prehensile seal named Ned, who travel to Japan in a zeppelin with their pageant, then get stranded on the island of Dr. Mureau (called in Lansdale's book Dr. Momo) after they are shot down for freeing Frankenstein's monster from the Japanese ruler Takeda. As this brief synopsis suggests, Lansdale's tale is an endless parade of innuendos and childishness, poking mild fun at its characters (none of whom have too much in common with the historical person they are based on), but like so many examples of comic Westerns, ultimately reinstates most of the Western's ideology, including heroic masculinity.

More literary works, such as Thomas Berger's *Little Big Man*, in contrast, are much closer to Eastlake's model. Berger takes a light-hearted approach to his historical characters, as to most things. During his life Jack Crabb meets countless famous frontier characters, if not in the first novel then in Berger's later attempt to cash in on his most

successful novel in *The Return of Little Big Man*. Leslie Fiedler has summed up Berger's treatment of such characters as Hickok, Earp, Custer, and Kit Carson: "[I]ndeed, all of the 'historical' characters in *Little Big Man* are undercut and debunked by a kind of merciless geniality that is likely to mislead the unwary reader about the real nature of the novel" (*Return* 160), this, according to Fielder, is that the West "was and remains essentially *funny*" (Ibid.; emphasis in original). Like Berger later authors operating in the parodic mode undercut their "historic" actors, but many have been more radical and systematic in their questioning of the hero of Western legend – after all, Berger leaves room to read Custer as a somewhat heroic character in his account of Custer's last stand, even if the general has clearly gone mad.

In Percival Everett's *God's Country*, for instance, Custer fares much worse. Like many Westerners, Everett's Custer is obsessed with his masculinity, ridiculing his troops for having their meat cooked, he observers "A *man* eats his meat raw," hoping that this practice will make his "balls bigger than apples." "You should see my balls," he muses with an accidental display of both alpha masculinity and homoeroticism. "They are something to behold" (128).[234] Custer's masculinity is soon cut down, however, in a chess game with Marder he initiates. The scene is an hilarious, ironic comment on Custer flaw of hastiness and deconstructs his image as a great general, which in popular culture typically is linked to an expectation of a general also being a great chess player. "I'll be white," Custer opens, "White always moves first" (129). In the game, Marder beats Custer, despite the fact that Marder is not the brightest bulb in the box, and furthermore has just learned the game. Consequently Marder plays with no sense of tactics: "I didn't have no idea what was going on, but every time I looked at the board, Custer had put a piece right in a place where he taught me I could take it. He had pieces flying everywhere and I just killed them. He would mutter 'Drat' each time" (129). His cursing when one of his figures is taken shows Custer's lack of restraint, another key ideal of the frontier hero. As it turns out Custer is also a sore looser: he has Marder let from his tent before he has time to finish the game: "Custer looked at the chess board. 'Lieutenant, get this man out of here. No civilians in camp'" (130). Their second encounter shows Custer's lack of masculinity even clearer. When Bubba decides to kill Custer after his troops have murdered the tribe of Bubba's friend Big Elk, Marder and Bubba find Custer in "ladies' unmistakables" (182). The ensuing situation, in which

[234] Carol Adams traces a link between images of masculinity and meat-eating through history and contemporary culture which continuously sends out the message that real men need meat whereas vegetables are for women. This view also surfaces occasionally in the Western in the image of the hunter who only eats a buffalo's testicles, e.g. in John Williamson's *Butchers Crossing* or the revisionist *Perdue* by Jeoffrey Ursell with its disturbing images of Sir and his men gorging themselves on the buffalo they had slaughtered in images recalling a frontier war more than a hunting scene, as well as Sir's enactment of a male buffalo in his sexual intercourse with his wife which Perdue witnesses.

the cross-dressed Custer is caught by the lady whose undergarments and lipstick he has put on and attempts to blame his state on the "enemies of God's United States" (185), ultimately leads Bubba to decide that Custer is not man enough to kill.

bpNichol's *The True Eventual Story of Billy the Kid* is another work which more obviously undermines images of heroic masculinity through its inclusion of a historical gunfighter. Being, as its title suggests, a spoof of Pat Garrett's account, *The Authentic Life of Billy, the Kid* and its claim to authenticity, Nichol goes further than most authors in showing no real regard for the historical Billy. Instead he takes Billy simply as a stand-in for a famous outlaw, while making fun of other authors – such as Garrett – who operate under the illusion of authentically representing Billy. Nichol's poem includes the parody of an authorial declaration which, tellingly, comes at the end of his poem, not the customary beginning:

> this is the true eventual story of billy the kid. it is not the story as he told it for he did not tell it to me. he told it to others who wrote it down, but not correctly. there is no true eventual story but this one. had he told it to me i would have written a different one. i could not write the true one had he told it to me. [6; capitalization in original]

Nichol's insistence, "had he told it to me i would have written a different one. i could not write the true one had he told it to me," could be an ironic reference to some "historian's" and folklorist's tendency to ignore sources – a point Larry McMurtry's "eyewitness" Ben Sippy also repeatedly complains about in *Anything for Billy* – it could also be a writer's insistence on his right to embellish the facts rather than being tied down by them. Stephen Scobie has read it as both, when he calls the poem "one of Nichol's metafictions" and claims:

> [I]t is not so much 'about' Billy the Kid as it is about stories about stories about Billy the Kid. It is a commentary on the popular genre of Western fiction. [...] For Nichol, as for Ondaatje, Billy is not a historical figure but a literary one; he is *already* subject to the deferrals of language, and to the deconstruction of intertextuality. (*bpNichol* 89; emphasis in original)

Indeed, despite their racially different form and their degree of seriousness as art, a similarly exists to Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, which likewise operates from the understanding that history "has lost its accepted status as a positively ascertained science and become 'Western myth,'" as Wolfgang Hochbruck has argued ("Metafictional Biography" 447). Others have taken similar approaches, Michael McClure has written a non-Western play about Billy,[235] and Larry McMurty's *Anything*

[235] McClure's *THE BLOSSOM*, like his better known *The Beard*, features a character named Billy the Kid, who is supposed to be the famous gunfighter, but is freed even further from his historical

for Billy, which is discussed in more detail below, likewise "has more to say about writers organizing experience than it does about Billy the Kid" (Linck 631).

Unlike Ondaatje's and McClure's accounts, Nichol's poem cuts Billy "down to size" in a way that is quite literal. By making fun of the typical cliché of compensating for a short dick ("short for Richard" [2] – a possible reference to Richard Nixon who was in office at this time) through a large gun and the resulting violence, Nichol's text questions Billy's masculinity in a way which is among our culture's most common obsessions / conceits. In Nichol's poem, Billy shoots people because their "pricks & penises were big & heavy as dictionaries." As a poorly endowed man who as a result cannot quite make it in society, he finds his only ally in the sheriff who has "a short dick too, which was why he was sherrif [sic] & not out robbing banks. these things affect people differently," quips Nichol and thus deflates the bias for large members [4]. Stephen Scobie explicates Nichol's extended joke and his debunking of the cliché of the gun as compensatory penis further:

> The central conceit of Nichol's book is the reversal of 'Kid' to 'Dick.' Indeed, reversal of the normal image is Nichol's central tactic. So Nichol presents the extended joke that all Billy's activities were due to his having a small penis. At one level, this is a light-hearted version of the too easily oversimplified theory that guns are used as compensation by males with fears of sexual inadequacy. Nichol recognizes that this can be used too simplistically, and also makes fun of psychological determinist attitudes by revealing that 'the sherrif [sic] had a short dick too.' ("Two Authors" 194-95)

Larry McMurrty also turned to Billy the Kid in one of his most obvious revisionist debunkings of the Western myth, *Anything for Billy*. According to Mark Busby, McMurtry was "surprised by the powerful romantic reactions to *Lonesome Dove*" when he discovered that "many readers filtered out the anti-mythic material and responded only to the powerful romance of the western legends" (237). In *Anything for Billy* McMurtry thus chose a more directly oppositional approach to the West of myth, and one which does not leave any space for romance. His goal is two-fold, not only does he debunk Billy the Kid, the outlaw of myth, he also examines more closely how myth is written and how history is mediated by making his narrator, Ben Sippy a dime novel writer whose eye witness account differs radically from the account of his contemporary historians. In an interview McMurtry has commented on the figure of Billy and brings up many of the issues also raised in his novel:

> He was a man, a boy really who had a short, commonplace life. How could he have produced a legend, and a bibliography with thousands of items in it? There's elements of sheer publicity in it. It was a time when the Old West was becoming very useful in popular fiction,

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surroundings. McClure's Billy is not even of the West anymore, since the play is set in "eternity," supposedly a comment on Billy's status as an eternal celebrity.

> for the exploits of westerners were beginning to have importance in the national imagination. (quoted in Busby 238)

McMurtry's Billy the Kid differs markedly from the Kid of legend, who, as Tatum has describes, has been seen as a great frontiersman and marksman, "an excellent musician, dancer and lover" (*Inventing* 10), as well as a noble outlaw in the Robin Hood sense (Ibid. 11) by some, as the Satan of the Southwest by others. As Tatum explains: "[T]he Kid has been since his death in 1881 many things to many people – a flexible container, in other words, into which particular audiences' hopes and fears, ideals and prejudices, have been poured" (Ibid. 11). One of the things the Kid has seldom, if ever, been, however, is unremarkable and commonplace, and that is exactly what McMurtry's Billy turns out to be – a victim of a legend whose basis is unclear, rather than an actor with the power to shape his own fortunes.

The difference between the historical Billy and the other actors in his legend and McMurtry's take on them, is already suggested by the name changes McMurtry applies: William Bonney becomes Billy Bone, John Chisum, the cattle magnate, Will Isinglass, and Pat Garrett turns into Tully Roebuck, who on top of everything does not shoot Billy. Contrary to legend, McMurtry's Billy cannot shoot, and thus is lacking what is perhaps the most central skills of the Western male as gun fighter. Rather than being the sure shot of legend,[236] McMurtry's Billy "would have been all day hitting a snake with his pistol" (*Anything* 311), and is such a bad shot that even his lover Katie Garcia remarks: "I can't understand how a man who can't hit the side of a hill from fifty feet could get himself in so much trouble" (334). Furthermore, McMurtry's Billy is afraid of the "Death Dog," of crossing the Rio Grande, of lightning, and of pretty much everything else. What deeds he does – none of them manly or heroic – are undertaken out of recklessness or high temper, both certain signs of false courage according to Peter French. Billy thus is a complete reversal of the manly hero in the classic Western, a figure who, according to both Jane Tompkins and Peter French, defines himself through his fearlessness in the face of death (rather than fear of the Death Dog).[237] Indeed, Mark Busby gives an apt summary of Billy's character and his many flaw when he writes:

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[236] E.g.:

> Like any true legendary hero [...] the Kid possessed the instinctual talents for survival in the West. According to the legend, the Kid survived as a wild man in wild times because he was an excellent marksman who could shoot off the heads of six snowbirds with only six shots or could shoot the Texas braggart Joe Grant three times and leave only one bullethole [sic] in the corpse. (Tatum, *Inventing* 10)

[237] E.g. Tompkins's reading of Grey: "'Now I'll die a man,' says Venters when he gets his pistols back. Which is to say, now that he can risk death in a gunfight, he can be a man" (*West* 33).

> Ugly and unappealing, suffering from migraines and myopia, frightened of lightening and shadows in the night that remind him of the "Death Dog," a poor shot and poorer horseman, and a failed cowboy, certainly Billy Bone is not an heroic figure [...]. In fact, McMurtry's unremitting emphasis on Billy's shortcomings makes it difficult to understand why *anyone* likes him at all. (238-39)

One could add Billy's lousy sense of humor, his egocentrism, vanity, lack of a sense of morals, spells of sulkiness, and a number of other unappealing, unmanly and unheroic features, but the result remains the same – he is neither heroic nor manly – as does the question: Why would *anyone* like Billy? The reader certainly does not, yet his lovers Katie and Mrs. Snow apparently do (although he is anything but a ladies' man – another turn against the legend), as does McMurtry's narrator Sippy; after all, the title of the novel goes back to his observation that "there was a time when I would have done anything for Billy" (12). Yet the only reason he gives for his feelings and his occasional apologetic attempts to explain Billy's actions does little to change the sense of Billy as a spoiled brat: "When he laughed at one of his own jokes you couldn't help liking him – he was just a winning kid" (Ibid.).

In portraying the Kid, McMurtry not only parodies the manly outlaw of legend, like so many of his fellow revisionist authors he furthermore tackles the writing of this legend. McMurtry shares the view of cultural critics such as Stephen Tatum who have seen the myth as more based in audience interest than the Kid's actual exploits. According to Tatum, "[b]efore the Kid had exhaled his last breath, his exploits had been reported, magnified, and distorted by both a politically-motivated regional press and a sensationally-motivated national press" (*Inventing* 15). When Sippy first meets Billy, the Kid already has a reputation big enough that "[e]veryone in the West had heard of him, and plenty of people in other parts of the world as well" (*Anything* 13). It soon becomes questionable, however, what this reputation is based on. While the myth initially plays to Billy's vanity, he is not even close to living up to it, and eventually even Billy – like so many other targets of myth in the revisionist Western – realizes: "I'm getting too big a reputation, Sippy. [...] Sometimes I wish they'd just let me fall" (*Anything* 289). As with Hansen's Jesse James and Dexter's Hickok, his reputation is what finally ruins him, although the details of their struggles are markedly different. As Mark Busby explains: "Billy Bone is an innocent, and he eventually becomes the victim of his own legend, one that McMurtry makes clear had little basis in reality. But eventually young Billy feels the weight of his reputation and sets out to make the reality fit the myth" (237). Billy's attempts "to make the reality fit the myth" upset his image even further, for – as mentioned – Billy has neither the skill nor the personality to become a person anywhere close to his public image. Instead he becomes a callous murderer of innocent people, eventually murdering a ten year old Apache boy. In the

process he turns so many people against himself that the final shootout, in a ridiculous version of the *High Noon* situations, sees Will Isinglass, Tully Roebuck, Bloody Feathers, and Long Dog Hawkins approach Billy "from the wind's four quarters," each with the intention of killing him, before Katie cheats them all out of the opportunity by shooting Billy first (367).

Not only does Billy not live up to his legend, however, the legend is further fabricated and falsified, according to McMurtry's narrator, by those who record it. In *Anything for Billy*, as well as *Buffalo Girls* which is often seen as its companion piece,[238] "[t]he historical record is cast into doubt, and the reader is asked to consider not just what experience has been lived, but also how it has come to be written in the way that it has," according to John Reilly (115). One of the themes of the novel is thus that "of the *real* West at odds with the made-up West of romance" (Ibid. 127). This sense is expressed most symbolically in an episode in which Sippy loses his ability to write dime novels after seeing a man killed, but its more serious implications are linked to the writing of history, not dime novels whom most readers who are not characters in the revisionist West should not take at face value anyway.

Sippy occasionally intersperses the episodes of his and Billy's life with his strife with various historians who question his eyewitness accounts. There is, according to Sippy, a school of historians who want to whittle down the number of Billy's killings, in order to make the historical outlaw fit more closely the version of the Western hero they want to see in him and consequently invent "an entirely different version of events, [in which] they claim that Ben could not have been present" (Reilly 129). Sippy's eyewitness account is also questioned by a newspaper man who "has written the longest book yet" about the killing of Billy (365). As Sippy remarks:

> Of course, like all the rest, the historians and outlaw collectors, he came up against the awkward fact that I was sitting there in Lord Snow's camp chair, not thirty feet from where Billy fell. He was polite, though – he came to see me and told me what happened that day, and when I demurred and explained how it really happened, he smiled and did his best to overlook my bad manners. (365-66)

While the newspaper men and the other historians and "outlaw collectors" disregard Sippy as an eyewitness, the only man to discredit their tale, it is Tully Roebuck (Pat Garret) who fares worst in Sippy's tale. As Reilly claims,

> another historical personage takes the award for brassiest rewriting of Billy's end. That is Tully Roebuck, who somehow has convinced himself that he, not Katie, shot Billy dead. Not surprisingly in a novel whose theme is revisions of historical reality, Tully's book becomes more popular, and is taken as more authentic than *Billy the Kid* or *The Wandering Boy's*

[238] E.g.: "If readers missed the point in *Anything for Billy*, McMurtry tried to make it again in his next novel about a nineteenth-century character [*Buffalo Girls*]" (Busby 252).

> *Doom*, the book Ben Sippi himself wrote immediately after Billy's death in the hope that it would finally assure his glory and income as a writer of "true" Western tales. (Reilly 129-30)

Roebuck's success as a novelist is also what historians use again Sippy, whose own book fares less well, claiming that Sippy only contradicts Roebuck's account out of envy.[239] Reilly overlooks that Sippy himself is not necessarily truthful just because he is the narrator of *Anything for Billy*. By his occupation alone, which necessitates the embellishment and exaggeration of fact, the reinterpretation or making up of history into a format that will catch a dime novel reader's attention, not to mention his initials B.S., Sippy is not exactly the most trustworthy source. Sippy also stands alone in his account, against Roebuck who is as much an eyewitness of the killing. Furthermore, as we learn at the end, not even Sippy's estranged wife trusts his sanity anymore: she "adopted Cook's view of my travels and let it out that I had contracted brain fever in Cincinnati and could no longer summon the coherence to fulfill my duties as husband" (378). Sippy's is merely one among many contradictory versions, none of them verifiable anymore as representing an "objective" truth, as Reilly seems to realize in his conclusion in which he links McMurtry's approach with a new historicist take on the construction of history despite his earlier implied privileging of Sippy's account:

> [I]t seems that if McMurtry is not a conscious adherent to the school of New Historicism, he is at least an intuitive new historicist. Each of the novels [*Anything for Billy* and *Buffalo Girls*] is constructed to present differing views of events, and both novels thematically enforce the point that the history of the Old West retailed by American culture is an invention, nor a record. (Reilly 132)

This take separates McMurtry from what Reilly calls iconoclasts, those who merely aim to replace what they perceive as a false idol, or in this case a false version of events, with their own truth – a take at odds with a more flexible, postmodern dedication to contradiction and heterogeneity:

> Iconoclasts may be as dedicated to an absolute truth as the false believers. They just want to set things straight. The works of New Historicism are more skeptical than that. Objective, conclusive evidence of the true reality, New Historicists contend, is impossible to obtain, because all communications from or about the past are mediated, which is to say, filtered by a selective point of view. (Ibid.)

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[239] Sippy's lack of success as a dime novelist, after he has returned and seen the real West is another side blow at the romantic West which readers prefer over the "real" West, as McMurtry has stated in an interview:

> Ironically [Sippy is] the world's most successful dime novelist. When he's living in the East, he knows nothing real about the West. He goes to the West; he gets involved with the most famous outlaw that's ever been; he goes back home expecting to be even more successful, and he is a complete failure. (quoted in Busby 240)

This take makes McMurtry postmodern rather than modern in Lyotard's sense. It also connects him with other authors of revisionist Westerns and clearly shows an approach of historiographic metafiction common in the deflation of "historic" gunfighters. By ridiculing and deflating these mythic Westerners the writers are undoing one of the very foundations of the Western genre. The deconstruction of "historic" icons of the Western frontier is thus an area in which history, masculinity, and the relativization of heroism intersect. The inclusion of dime novels, sensationalist newspapers, and other means of mystification, such as Buffalo Bill's Wild West in *Telegraph Days*, and the juxtaposition of their accounts with those shown in the main narrative are a central techniques in this critique of these traditional heroes. Dime novels, newspapers and stage shows are the motors of the superelevation of the frontier and its "historic" actors the revisionist Western writes against. Often the revisionists do not aim to replace a fake West with a real West in their accounts, but to demonstrate that untangling the mythic strands of the Western leads to the realization that its "essence" is part of the same thread as its myth, and that the two are thus inseparable, as Annie tells her friend Jennie in Robert Ward's *Cattle Annie and Little Britches*:

> "Do you love Bill Dalton? Or do you just love the idea of Bill Dalton the outlaw king? . . . Is it him you are talking about or them dime store romances?"
> Now Annie came toward me and looked into my eyes deeply . . . large and black.
> "It's one and the same," she said. "You don't see it? You think I am cold and calculating, and swept away by dreams. But that is what I am trying to tell you. Outlaws live by dreams, and so you can't say 'Here's the dream, but underneath is the real man.' It ain't like that. You see, the real Bill Dalton is the dream guy from the books. You can't separate them." (208)

6.3.2. The Shootout as a Target in the Revisionist Western

> 'Who are you? We are seven here.'
> The rider dropped his sombrero and made a rapid movement, singular in that it left him somewhat crouched, arms bent and stiff, with the big black gun-sheaths round to the fore.
> '*Lassiter!*'
> It was Venter's wondering, thrilling cry that bridged the fateful connection between the rider's singular position and the dreaded name.
> Tull put out a groping hand. The life of his eyes dulled to the gloom with which men of his fear saw the approach of death. But death, while it hovered over him, did not descend, for the rider waited for the twitching fingers, the downward flash of hand that did not come.
> Zane Grey, *Riders of the Purple Sage* (emphasis in original).

The quick-draw gunfight is one of the hallmarks of the Western. It stands at the end of many Westerns as a "clean" means to resolve the conflict the text was centered around; a sanctioned and justified use of violence. Whereas the villain does not shy away from dishonorable behavior and often resorts to all means necessary in his attempt to intimidate the defenseless villagers, and kill or chase off the protagonist, the hero adheres to a "code of the West." This code is defined by the key ideals of white

American manhood, dignity, reliability, honor, and fairness. In a sense the gunfight brings out the "essence" of the Western hero. The code requires that the gunfighter kill only in self-defense, never shoot an opponent in the back or when he is unarmed, and never harm an innocent bystander, especially a woman or a child.

Perhaps the most iconic representation of the code in action is the shootout, particularly in its most codified form, the quick draw duel, the last stage of a sequence of events, which Birgit Hans has described in her article "The Ethics of the Gunfight":

> The ethics of the gunfight require a certain sequence of events: first, to challenge the victim if there is evidence of his guilt or to accept the villain's challenge; then, the confrontation between the gunfighters, and, finally the shootout. That way, both parties are on equal footing. In such a case, skill with the gun and the steadiness of the gunfighter's nerves reign supreme. (52)

In the duel the hero usually allows his opponent to draw first, which not only shows his superior skill as a gunman and his superior nerves, but also allows him to claim self-defense later. This convention seems to go back to what may be one of the few historical duels, which took place between "Wild Bill" Hickok and Davis Tutt in Springfield, Missouri, on July 21, 1865, an event which was immediately written into the mythology of the West. The duel appears only two years later in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, authenticated by an "eyewitness account" complete with Western slang (cf. Bruce Rosenberg 160). Based on Hickok's acquittal by a jury after the duel, it also enters the myth of the gunfight that the winner may claim self-defense if he only draws last. Steven Lubet, examining the Hickok-Tutt gunfight, debunks the idea of the gunfight as an encounter that has no legal consequences in an article in the *UCLA Law Review*.

In the Western, the duel stands at the end of the hero's quest to avoid the use of violence, a moral stance which shows his superior judgment and restraint. The duel furthermore offers him a chance to showcase his competence and heroism. In short it brings together a combination of traits which define the traditional hero's manliness. While the hero refrains from violence throughout much of the text,

> [t]here is no suggestion, however, that he draws the gun reluctantly. The Westerner could not fulfill himself if the moment did not finally come when he can shoot his enemy down. But because that moment is so thoroughly the expression of his being, it must be kept pure. He will not violate the accepted forms of combat though by doing so he could save a city. And he can wait. "When you call me that – smile!" – the villain smiles weakly, soon he is laughing with horrible joviality, and the crisis is past. But it is allowed to pass because, it must come again: sooner or later Trampas will "make his play," and the Virginian will be ready for him. (Warshow 48)

Thus the gunfight is a central part of the ritualized performance of masculinity which I have earlier worked out, following Mitchell. The quick draw duel is an

interesting illustration of the duality of sex and gender at play, which Mitchell discusses. The camera or authorial eye frequently gazes upon, and in fact celebrates, the motion- and expressionless male body. His manly heroism defines him as a (gendered and heroic) Man. The increasingly stylized stand-off before the duel, which reached a new level in Sergio Leone's films, with its cross-cutting, the camera shooting from under one of the participants' arms, the extreme close up of Clint Eastwood's eyes, the camera moving around the duelists etc., is matched in fiction by the description of the gunfighter's hand hovering over the gun, crouched in suspense. It is the very stylization of the shootout that makes it a perfect example of the performativity of gender which, as Mitchell has argued, underlies the Western's use of violence. The gun fight is also a courting of death, which Tompkins has defined as central to the Western's view of masculinity (*West* 27-45), or a chance for the hero to show his courage or at least his integrity, as Peter French has argued at some length (107-32).

The stand-off preceding the gunplay with its long period of stillness and silence also reminds one of one of Jane Tompkins' other arguments. It epitomizes Tompkins' view of the Western as "antilanguage" (*West* 50), part of the gendered dichotomy she identifies as "parlor versus mesa, East versus West, woman versus man, illusion versus truth, words versus things" (Ibid. 48). The duel renders most of the words exchanged earlier irrelevant. It also requires all the skills that define the hero as a Western man. It celebrates him as a gendered personification of the harsh aspects of the wilderness he pushes back through his actions, and it seems no coincidence that in older Westerns the duel often preceded the hero's integration into society through matrimony – the reward for fulfilling his manly, civilizing mission through feats that identify the protagonist as heroic, as discussed in chapter 2.

The quick draw duel, then, is an instance of the linked concepts of heroism and masculinity. As such, the gunfight can work both to celebrate a male who has been built up throughout a work and to reinstate the hegemonic masculinity of a more problematic character in texts with revisionist tendencies. In Westerns which incorporate some of the revisionist elements becoming popular after the 1960s, such as Charles Portis's *True Grit* or Glendon Swarthout's *The Shootist* (and the novels they are based on), the hero ultimately redeems himself through his legendary, almost superhuman performance in the final shootout and his adherence to the gunfighter's code. While John Bernard Books in *The Shootist* initially rides into town somewhat unheroically with a cushion on his saddle and is tortured by the cancer that eats him throughout the text, and promises a death that is all but heroic, he adheres to the gunfighter code throughout the novel and in the final shootout shows his superior skill by killing multiple opponents. He is only defeated when he is shot in the back by a treacherous bar keeper – that is he is defeated through a breach of the code of the West according to which he operates. While Books

cannot be regarded as truly courageous according to an Aristotelian understanding, as Peter French argues, for he faces his opponents not "in the cause of some end that is over and above the expression of courage itself" (109), he "preserves his integrity, his pride, and his dignity" (110-11). These virtues mark him, in my opinion, as manly in the classic sense, and the duel allows him to "die with his boots on" and saves him from the unmanly and painful death from cancer the novel initially seems to promise. Rooster Cogburn in *True Grit* is an even clearer example of the reinstitution of a battered male through a shootout. Rooster is initially a less than heroic character.[240] He is greedy, dirty and incompetent, as evident for instance in the scene in which he shoots at corn dodgers and keeps missing them (144-45). Later he falls off his horse because he is too drunk and leads his party astray, leading to Mattie's capture by Ned Pepper's gang. Most damaging to Rooster's heroic masculinity is the fact that he plans to shoot one of the gang in the back to demonstrate his serious intentions. The second major male character in the novel, LaBoeuf, initially is an equally lousy shot; he too misses the corn dodgers, and falls asleep during the first attempt to capture Ned Pepper's gang, then misses his shot. Eventually, however, the novel reinstates their formerly battered manliness by showcasing their competence and fearlessness in the final confrontation. Rooster charges his opponents, and rescues the wounded Mattie, and LaBoeuf shows super-human accuracy in sharp-shooting when he saves Rooster's life. Through these acts *True Grit* shows that, when push comes to shove, both LaBoeuf and Rooster can still "do what a man has to do." Through this approach *True Grit* adds "parodic elements [to the Western formula] without changing the basic theme and structure." It thus "does not mock the familiar myth so much as it creates new variations" (49).

It is only in more radical and iconoclastic revisions and parodies that the protagonist's heroism is not reinstated, and the gunfight, as a formulaic element that defines the male gunfighter, provides a means to more seriously question or deflate the heroic male. In such works the protagonist's heroism and masculinity are questioned or redefined in ways that do not allow a simple reiteration of traditional formulaic elements. Obvious examples can be found in the violent and gritty West of such works as Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* or Carlos William Blake's *In the Rogue Blood* in which a French blade master who teaches his pupils to duel in a gentlemanly fashion is essentially gutted like a fish by one of the protagonists (127-28), a clear statement that his particular idea of courage and honor has no place in the gritty West Blake creates. Works such as Blake's and McCarthy's, or Charles Willeford's *The Difference* with its amoral protagonist, upset the familiar assumption that, "[l]ike the Virginian,

[240] Michael Cleary has made a similar argument in much more detail showing how the novel moves "from parody to myth" ("Saddlesore" 21-49).

[other cowboy heroes] are perfect men, absolutely incapable of doing the wrong thing unless deceived" (David Davis 21). In fact, in the West Willeford, McCarthy and Blake create there is no clear distinction between right or wrong, as expressed most clearly time and again by the Nietzschean *Übermensch* Judge Holden in *Blood Meridian*, what ethics enter the texts must be supplied by the reader's own code of morals. Just as there is no clear right or wrong, there is no place for honor or gun fights either.

The novel that parodies the gunfight most frequently is Richard Condon's *A Talent for Loving*. It involves three duels, one more outrageous than the next. The novel opens like any number of popular Westerns with the arrival of a gunfighter:

> Bat Dongin was a professional gunthrower the Moore boys brought in to kill Maurice Hanline. The Moore boys – Hogger, Fred, and Shorty – owned most of the town and most of the land around it, except the Hanline place. The Moore boys had decided they would be able to deal better with the new owner of the Hanline place after she had been made a widow. (3)

This beginning is so stereotypical a reader cannot help but role her eyes. Shortly thereafter we are told, however that "waiting made him nervous" (4), an admission which violates the gunfighter's manly restraint, which leaves him untouched by emotions. This unmanly lack of restraint is also shown in his behaviour at cards, where he "threw his cards untidily and with no regard for custom. He swore at his bad luck. He crowed when he won" (10). Furthermore Dongin does not look like the classic gun fighter, he has "a strong sour smell" and "whine[s] everything he sa[ys]" (4). When the novel explains Dongin's usual mode of operation, at the very latest, do we start to reconsider his position: he does not engage in an honest quick draw gunfight which he wins because of his superior skill; instead he approaches his victim with the words: "I'm a-goin' tuh kill you fer whut you done to my sister" (10), a line which might be a jab at Zane Grey who liked killed sisters as a motivation for his heroes. After delivering this line as an excuse, he plans to shoot his opponent, which would mean that he at least follows the role of the villain in a shootout, a role he quite obviously fills, but he always shoots before he finishes his sentence, because he is too nervous. Needless to say, Dongin, the first character introduced, and one would assume the main villain, is dead by page 13 of the novel without ever having met the person he was supposed to shoot. He is instead killed by another character, and his employers, the Moore boys, follow shortly thereafter – the entire setup provided at the start of the novel thereby becomes irrelevant. While Dongin is in fact killed by one of the protagonist's of Condon's novel he is such an unmanly opponent that he cannot reflect positively on his killer's personality or manliness. The whole episode remains a farce.

Later in the novel there is a gunfight in which two drunken cowboys face a posse while being strapped together by a giant gun belt so big that they have to share it (150-

52). And there is another gunfight in which the participants (a cowboy and a Mexican outlaw who expected to become his father-in-law) have such greasy hands from the feast of pork they were in the process of enjoying that they cannot hold on to their colts, which in typical slap stick fashion fly all over the scene "the way a clutched bar of soap will sail out of the bathtub" (222). The duelists bang their heads together when they try to reach the guns again, stagger backwards, and trip over the fallen pork bones in their third attempt to reach the guns. When their fall lets both crash head first into opposite walls, the Mexican outlaw is left unconscious and the cowboy, Irish, makes his unmanly escape (223).

Generally the duel does not fare well in the revisionist Western. In *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down*, Ishmael Reed spoofs the duel as the classic ending of a yellow back Western, by setting it up, then withholding it: when Theda challenges Drag to a duel, Drag falls off a platform set up for the execution of Loop while pacing backwards to get into position and is eaten by his murderous swine (173). In Thomas Berger's *Little Big Man* the duel is part of the deflation of historical gunmen discussed in the previous section. Crabb tricks Wild Bill Hickok from whom he has learned shooting in typical picaresque style when he blinds him with a mirror-ring (310-11). And in Larry McMurtry's *Telegraph Days* a shootout between the narrator's brother and the notorious Yazee gang is part of the larger debunking of the mythic West(ern) undertaken in the novel. Jackson Courtright has been made deputy mainly because the sheriff is after his sister, Nellie, and his main task is sweeping the floor in the jail. When the Yazee gang arrives, an event that the entire first part of the novel has been building up towards, Jackson somnolently stumbles out of the jail having been disturbed in his nap. When he stands in the middle of the road, Nellie orders her dumbfounded brother around during the shootout: "draw your gun" and "Jackson! Shoot!," a situation which neither implies a good ending to the confrontation, nor bodes well for Jackson's masculinity. The remainder of the fight follows along the same lines, as the depiction of Jackson's actions breaks every convention of the quick-draw gunfight: "When Jackson realized he had his pistol, he did draw it, but my Lord! He was slow as molasses. Getting his pistol out of his holster seemed to take a week, and then he nearly dropped the pistol, which, as far as I knew, he had never fired" (63). Yet suddenly an unlikely transformation happens. Jackson becomes a hero and a gunfighter when he kills all six Yazees with the six shots he has in his gun – quite likely the first six shots he has ever fired in his life:

> I saw Bert Yazee with his killer's grin raise that big Ponca war club, meaning to club Jackson first.
> But before the club fell Jackson raised the pistol and shot Bert Yazee dead as dead.

> Then Jackson swung his pistol in a short arc and fired five more times. Each shot rendered a Yazee fully as dead as Bert. [...] On the faces of the dead men were looks of profound surprise. (Ibid.)

The town is relieved and incredulous, yet Jackson remains largely unimpressed by his deed, a deed which in the further narration and particularly Jackson's reaction remains mundane rather than heroic. The conventional masculine task of saving the town through outstanding skill is questioned when Jackson's simple answer with its practicality shoots down the gunfighter myth: "I guess shooting a pistol is a lot easier than I thought it would be. [...] When I finally got it out of my holster it was like it just became part of my arm" (64). Jackson's actions are the result of neither heroism nor manliness, but simply of a lack of alternatives, as Nellie explains: "Jackson was just a youth, seventeen years old, and he had done the only thing there was to do, other than die. He hadn't died, and he still looked sleepy. In fact he yawned while I was telling him what a big hero he was" (Ibid.). The scene finally ends when Jackson returns to the jail to put on his shoes and continue his nap. As if this were not enough to damage Jackson's standing as a manly hero, it turns out that this was his one moment of glory as a gun fighter, since he never manages to repeat his sharp-shooting. In fact, Jackson cannot even shoot straight and promptly becomes a drunk after he fails to live up to his reputation as a gunfighter. Even if he were the sharpshooter he is given credit for, however, his actions would likely become pedestrian in the commercialized world McMurtry draws in *Telegraph Days*. To his contemporaries it seems a sign of Jackson's naïveté and backwardness not his heroic dedication that he does not "put on a shooting show," as Nelly's beau, Zenas Clark, suggests, as becomes apparent in his reaction to Nelly's frontier rhetoric inspired defense of her brother:

> "He's hired to subdue the criminal element in No Man's Land, not put on expensive exhibitions for a bunch of scribbling drunks."
> "He's out of step with the times, then," Zenas said. "Shooting shows are all the rage and there's big money in it, you bet! I suppose a top shot can make fifty thousand a year." (*Telegraph Days* 118)

Indeed, the times seem to have shifted to the likes of Buffalo Bill, who see the West and the frontier myth as an area to be economically exploited. And the business-like Cody is the true "hero" to his contemporaries, although the novel clearly draws him as a creator of simulations, as discussed above. Heroes are those, *Telegraph Days* suggests, who market themselves accordingly.

Canadian playwright Anton Piatigorsky's Jewish would-be cowboy Lenny Lazmon in *Easy Lenny Lazmon and the Great Western Ascension* also continuously enacts a version of the gunfight. Lenny practices for a test to get into the mythic Great

Western Coastal Ranch he has heard about, a nostalgic imaginary place which contrasts with the contemporary West of "burnt-out truck stops, bad country bands and alcoholic football players," which Lenny detests (32). Unsurprisingly the mythic ranch, the last link to what "was once a good land. Genuine cowboy country, until all the frauds came in" (33), turns out to be a pipe-dream. Lenny refuses to acknowledge this fact, however, in his stubborn rejections of Mayer, who wants him and his female companion Jesse Jameson, who is named "sort of like the outlaw" (25) (but just as sort of like the pornographic actress, Jenna Jameson) to take over his ranch, although it seems for a time that this ranch would be the closest thing to the mythic ranch he searches for. Eventually, however, Mayer's Western yarns are also exposed as fictional stories, "plenty real," according to his wife. "Just from books" (71) – a comment on the inextricable link of myth, story, and reality in the West.

In his repeated enacting of the duel, the secret key to enter the ranch, Lenny puts on a performance, which always includes the same words and actions – an ironic comment on the return of essentially the same gunfight scene in so many Westerns. The scene is made even more bizarre by its strong parallels to Robert DeNiro's mirror scene in *Taxi Driver*. Like DeNiro's Travis, Lenny draws on an invisible opponent after threatening him in words that evoke Travis's famous "You talkin' to me?" monologue: "What's that? Who am I? Who I am? Walking in your path?" Lenny's little act ends with an affirmation of his masculinity, which is counteracted through the framework of its delivery – in the middle of a deserted road, with no opponent and noone to hear him but Jesse who has witnessed his act so often she sometimes quotes along with him –, ridiculing the cowboy identity Lenny (who wants to be called Easy) strives for in his attempt to leave his Jewish Montreal background behind: "Now, y'all remember to tell your boss look out, 'cause Easy Lazmon's comin' to town" (3, 12, 20-21, 40, 47-48, and 78).

While the above examples unmask ossified genre codes or ridicule masculinity and heroism as expressed in the gun fight as crafty constructions, other novels use the duel for different purposes. As examined in chapter 4, in Percival Everett's *God's Country* the gunfight scene stays within the larger context of the work and its highlighting of Western society's racism. Anne Cameron takes another interesting, if somewhat campy, take on the shootout in her novel *The Journey* integrating it into the novel's larger critique of patriarchy. She replaces the phallic gun, symbol of male prowess in so many movies (think of the clearly ironic panning shot along Clint Eastwood's gun barrel in *Dirty Harry*), with the actual physical penis. The objective is reversed, however, as Belle challenges the misogynist, bible toting, and sex-phobic sheriff Luke Wilson to a version of the duel in which he is not allowed to "shoot": Belle, the madam, promises she will close her brothel and open "a convent dedicated to the

rehabilitation of all fallen women and working girls" (109), an obvious ironic jab at patriarchy's dichotomizing of women into whores and saints, if he can resist her sexual lure and stay limp, a reversal of the usual display of masculinity. As Davidson writes,

> the overtly high-camp concretizing of Freudian symbolism (the pistol here really *is* a penis) reminds us of how much sexuality, desire, even, is excluded from the Western tradition. That exclusion is further emphasized when Luke's "pistol" fails him by not failing him, and his erection, instead of attesting to his male mastery, transforms him, according to the terms of the travesty duel, into Belle's boy and the passive object of her sexuality. Furthermore, Belle's victory (which even Luke soon comes to enjoy) affirms life and so questions, the death-dealing ethos of the more usual (i.e. masculine) Western confrontation. (*Coyote Country* 129; emphasis in original)

While revisionist texts and parodies strive to problematize and deconstruct the Western's clear-cut concepts of heroism and gender by targeting the genre's most iconic character, the cowboy / gunfighter, in the moments which most clearly defines him as a masculine hero (the gunfight), this deconstruction is always in danger of ultimately not being as radical as it seems at first. Whereas many texts spoof the genre's iconic gunfight scene, generic patterns and the need to tell a gripping story that is at least somewhat in accordance with audience expectations often ultimately lead such texts back onto more well-trodden paths of heroic, if somewhat ridiculed, masculinity. There lurks an inherent contradiction in a lot of parodies and some non-parodic revisionist texts that deconstruct the hero by questioning his skills as a gunfighter: especially in films, the hero's skill and courage are questioned, but the plot often stays true to more traditional generic patterns in its overall plot arc. The eponymous three amigos in John Landis's film, for instance, or Lee Marvin's drunken gunfighter Kid Shelleen in *Cat Ballou* are the target of laughter throughout much of the films, but they are also the heroes in a very traditional sense: by the end of the film the initially un-manly heroes save the day through their classic, heroic action.[241] While their earlier actions are comic, they nevertheless have to be skillful or witty or just lucky enough to survive until the end and usually their solution is the classic one of defeating their opponents in a gun fight.

Many of the novels I have discussed above do not fall into this trap. While *True Grit* and *The Shootist* are, as I have pointed out, ultimately classic in their use of the shootout, many of the other novels move the climactic gunfight forward to the novel's earlier parts and thus do not resolve their plot through this classic display of masculine violence and skill. The duels in Condon's *A Talent for Loving* are silly and do not have

[241] Matthew Turner makes a similar argument about the Western parodies he examines in his article, one of them being *Cat Ballou*: "In these films, although the shoot-out is parodied, it ultimately plays a crucial role in the outcome of the plot; as a result, the convention is simultaneously undercut and reinforced" (231).

much effect on the plot, Reed refuses to let the duel he sets up take place at all, and McMurtry's duel, while it serves as the climax of the first part of his *Telegraph Days*, is so unrealistic, humorous in its narration and unheroic that it mocks the entire convention rather than installing Jackson as the novel's hero. Cameron's take on the duel, finally, reveals the full iconicity of the duel scene as well as its flexibility when she transform the violent male encounter into a playful bet between open female and repressed male sexuality.

6.4 The Deconstruction of the Heroic Male in David Markson's *The Ballad of Dingus Magee*

As a final part of this chapter I want to examine the deconstruction of the heroic male in one novel, David Markson's *The Ballad of Dingus Magee*, which employs all of the strategies of deflating the heroic male discussed previously. Markson's novel, first published in 1965, is perhaps *the* perfect parody of the Western. It is modeled after a sensationalist pulp or dime novel about a "good bad man." *The Ballad of Dingus Magee* tells the story of the namesake character, who is initially introduced as a famous outlaw, quite possibly modeled on Billy the Kid, as his youthful age suggests, but as it turns out is in fact more of a harmless prankster fabricating his own legend. Dingus's antagonist is the imbecile sheriff Hoke Birdsill. The plot of Markson's short novel is convoluted. In following the novel's protagonist's exploits the plot constantly twists and reveals layer upon layer of pretense, upsetting the reader's previous interpretation of events, and continually chips away at the image of both its "heroic" pair, Dingus and Birdsill, and the Western tradition. From its first paragraph the novel "holds little epic promise," as Marc Chénetier remarks (281). Indeed, the novel's opening sets the tone of what is to come, a hilarious, raunchy parody of the Western and its classic character types:

> Turkey Doolan's crotch itched. His scalp was gamy. Poised in the saddle, with one freckled hand inside his jeans and several stumpy fingers of the other beneath his sombrero, he relieved himself by scratching simultaneously and with vehemence. (3)

Dingus's "sidekick," Turkey Doolan, becomes the novel's first target of parody. Dingus tricks Doolan, whom he recognizes as an idiot of the first rank when Doolan attempts to rob a bar in which Dingus is having lunch, into wearing his hat and Mexican vest, both of which are riddled with bullet holes, as they ride into Jerkey's Hole, the novel's Western town. On account of wearing the hat and vest Turkey is mistaken for Dingus and ambushed and shot by sheriff Birdsill, who soon realizes his mistake: "Sure, it's Dingus's vest [...]. And that makes three blasted times in six months I done put a bullet clean through the turd-wiping thing, too – with some other hero-worshipping durned

imbecile wearing it every blasted time" (15). This passage shows both Birdsill's stupidity – he falls for the same trick thrice – and his lack of morals and heroism. Not only does he shoot Doolan from an ambush without first making sure he has the right man or warning his opponent as the rules of the duel would require, he fears to leave his cover even after Doolan is down, and furthermore cares more about having missed Dingus than having accidentally shot Doolan. It also shows the novel's use of the dime novel West as a (mis)guiding principle for its inhabitants, a connection already suggested by the novel's hyperbolic and drawn out subtitle, crafted by Markson in the finest sensationalist dime novel style including the novel's customary insistence on its own authenticity, a feature I have already discussed with regard to bpNichol's poem. The novel's full title is

> The Ballad of Dinus Magee: Being the Immortal True Saga of the Most Notorious and Desperate Bad Man of the Olden Days, his Blood-Shedding, his Ruination of Poor Helpless Females, & Cetera; also including the Only Reliable Account ever offered to the Public of his Heroic Gun Battle with Sheriff C.L. Hoke Birdsill, Yerkey's Hole, New Mex., 1884, and with Additional Commentary on the Fateful and Mysterious Bordello-Burning of the Same Year, and furthermore interspersed with Trustworthy and Shamelessly Interesting Sketches of "Big Blouse" Belle Nops, Anna Hot Water, "Horseface" Agnes, and Others, hardly any Remaining Upright at the End. Composed in the Finest Modern English as taken diligently from the Genuine Archives by David Markson (*The Ballad of Dingus Magee* 1; capitalization in original)

As Birdill remarks, Turkey is just one of a number of "hero-worshipping durned imbecile[s]" who follow Dingus on account of his fame. This fame, as it turns out, was fabricated by Dingus himself, for the only crime Dingus ever commits is to rob Hoke Birdsill twice. When Dingus, who had only planed to steal Birdsill's derby while both urinated outside a saloon, accidentally also steals eight hundred dollars Birdsill had hidden in his hat, a vendetta begins during which Dingus tricks his opponent time after time. After Birdsill catches Dingus in the second chapter, the "outlaw" convinces the greedy sheriff to let him go, with the argument that he will be worth more reward money in another year. Indeed, the money offered for Dingus rises continually as his fame takes on a life of its own. Even when he is not in the country crimes are laid at his feet. As Dingus remarks, "[l]ooks like if a feller gets a mite of a reputation they'll hold him in account fer everything, even if'n he's tending to his own business somewheres else" (44-45).

As it turns out, it was Hoke Birdsill who accidentally robbed a stagecoach in Dingus's name when he is taken for the outlaw during a failed attempt to rid himself of his Indian wife, Anna Hot Water. Since both the passengers and the stage driver are so familiar with the mythic stagecoach robbery they essentially force the scenario on Birdsill who only meant to stop the coach (64). Encouraged by the simplicity of his first

crime, the immoral Birdsill soon commits two more robberies to drive up the price on Dingus's head even further. In the meantime the reader realizes that Dingus's own career was launched only by a desire to impress an Eastern cousin who moons over the romantic dime novel outlaws. When the novel relates how Dingus acquired his fame the "outlaw" is further cut down to size. As we learn, it takes him two months to muster up the courage to attempt his first crime, a stagecoach robbery, but this endeavour fails when his horse dies from the heat as he tries to mount it after Dingus has waited for the stagecoach in the sun for nine hours. Instead Dingus decides to follow a more promising path to a reputation as an outlaw, for "how is *Harper's New Magazine* or anybody else gonter know what a notorious desperado you are less'n some writer feller happens to walk in and catch you at it" (90-91). After Dingus realizes that an outlaw is made by the publicity he receives rather than by his deeds, he claims other people's crimes rather than perpetrating them himself. He takes credit for a stagecoach robbery by writing in the sand "*Dingus Billy Maggee done this. Beware*" (91-92; italics in original), and spreads the news that Dingus Billy Magee is to blame when he hears that a sheriff was shot in a town he passes through.

Hoke Birdsill is similarly deflated. He begins his career as a luckless cowhand who is misdiagnosed with consumption, a reference to Doc Holiday, the West's most famous consumptive gunman. After quitting his job and winning money in a card game, which Dingus promptly relieves him of, he finds himself stuck in Jerkey's Hole. When he tries to become sheriff, he will not be hired because he is not an outlaw who has been chased out of some other place like Wyatt Earp, and the mayor gives him the advise to first make a reputation "like say that feller Dingus Billy Magee [...] and we'll make you sheriff in no time" (22). Hoke nevertheless becomes sheriff, when Belle, the whorehouse / bar owner, hires him. Since Hoke objects to being seen as a pimp, Belle arranges to make him sheriff instead, since she owns nine tenths of the town.

The novel's attack on its two protagonists' heroism is part of a larger parody of the Western's typical representation of gender, as well as a questioning of the Western's mythic heroism, which the novel portrays as the result of Westerners' lies and tall tales and a sensationalist Eastern audience. As in the other novels I have discussed above, the latter point is made through the inclusion of historical / mythic frontier heroes. While they are not central to the novel, *The Ballad of Dingus Magee* features an appearance by the Earps and Doc Holliday. We first hear of Doc Holiday and Wyatt Earp when Dingus relates a tall tale of how he has beaten them to the draw and "jest poked 'em around with the butt end of a pistol" (32). Instead, however, Dingus himself is robbed by Earp and Holliday when they find him sleeping in the prairie. After they find his money, Wyatt Earp is scared, since he fears that "this critter is very doubtless a outlaw hisself, I mean a authentic one." They, in contrast, have "been inending at least one gen-

u-ine daring deed fer years now, instead of jest writing to them newspapers, and this has got to be it," as Doc Holliday insists, and so they uneasily take the money expecting the authentic outlaw Dingus to hunt them down (94-95).

The issue of gender is more central to the novel. Dingus's and Birdsill's masculinity is not only questioned by itself, through their lack of courage, restraint, and heroism, but gender roles are also upset through a parody of traditional female archetypes. There are three prominent women in *The Ballad of Dingus Magee*, Anna Hot Water, the Indian squaw, Belle, Markson's version of the prostitute with the heart of gold, and "Horseface" Agnes Pfeffer, the Eastern schoolmarm. Anna is an "anti-Pocahontas," as Leslie Fiedler has called her whose function Fiedler describes as follows:

> [I]t is basically so – as a whore begging to be screwed – that the anti-Pocahontas has flourished in the New Western ever since [since Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*], growing fatter and fatter, as well as ever more slatternly and insatiable. [...] [I]n David Markson's *The Ballad of Dingus Magee* [...], she enters at Hotwater Anna [sic], "short and square-headed," stinking from her "thickly buttered hair," and crying, "You look for bim-bam, hey? Twenty-five cent, real hot damn bargain." (Fiedler, *Return* 152)

Indeed, Anna fulfils the role of anti-Pocahontas, chasing after various men throughout the novel, while poking fun at the men with her amusingly vulgar vernacular. While she is not particular about the men she pursues, Anna is most eager to get her hands on "Dean Goose," holy grail of horny squaws, and the "greatest bim-bam there is," a man much better than "that floppy-dong old Hoke Birdsill" (103) whom she had married earlier. Anna's entry into Markson's novel is strongly reminiscent of an episode in John Ford's *The Searchers* in which John Wayne's partner (Jeffrey Hunter) accidentally acquires an Indian wife he consequently wants to get rid of.[242] After being banned from Belle's bed, Hoke also goes out to buy an Indian squaw, but has to first prove that he can please her sexually, while the chief's wives are watching. When he fails to even attempt with any of the seventeen squaws sent into the tent, only Anna lies about his impotence, since she is eager to get away from her tribe (and to a man), whereas the chief would have shot Hoke "pretty damn quick. Chief say man can't

[242] Jonathan Lethem describes this scene and its implications for the film as follows:

> During a comic mix-up at an Indian barter session, Wayne's sidekick has inadvertently acquired an Indian wife. The sidekick and Wayne tolerate her presence, barely, until nightfall. When they bed down by the fire the chubby Indian girl slides in beside the sidekick, drawing exaggerated and unfunny derision from Wayne. The sidekick, enraged, kicks the girl out of his bedroll, so hard she cascades down a hill. There she ends in the dust, weeping, her ludicrous marriage in ruins. Wayne hoots with pleasure, his eyes maniacal. The scene is odious. The chance Wayne might be some kind of hero, that the filmmakers might redeem him, or themselves, has been pissed away. ("Defending" 6)

get it up one time in seventeen ought to be shot anyways," as Anna informs him (59). Dingus on the other hand has acquired legendary status with the Natives when he manages to please the seventeen squaws in less than twenty hours. Through their opposed roles as impotent lover and legendary stud, Hoke and Dingus serve as a parodic comment on the simultaneous sexlessness and implied sexual desirability and prowess of the Western hero.

The second woman, "Horseface" Agnes Pfeffer, the schoolmarm who has an ugly face but a body to make up for it, is equally defined by her sexuality, an attribute which, as in the case of the Pocahontas figure, stands in stark contrast to the traditionally chaste Eastern schoolmarm, as a complimentary role and final reward for the mal hero. Instead, like Anna, Agnes pursues all men, after she has been tricked into having sex by Dingus, attempting to recover her honor and image of chastity through matrimony, in a way that is all but honorable or chaste. After Dingus has slipped out on her Agnes next gets her hands on Hoke, whom she gets into bed with the same lame trick Dingus had used with her (that is pretending he was freezing and needed to be warmed), and tries to emotionally blackmail him by threatening to shoot herself if he will not marry her. Birdsill on the other hand is dumfounded and his answer is very stereotypically male, when he expresses his interest in only one thing: "But Miss Pfeffer, ma'am, I know I been courting you and such, but it weren't for – I mean I jest couldn't afford to go to Belle's too often, but now I already done got what I – I mean..." (70). When Birdsill leaves Agnes's house, Anna waits outside with a shotgun and gives him until midnight to marry *her* and when he flees to Belle's, the only place he can think of. Belle believes he wants to marry *her* too, which makes the sheriff faint out of shock, and Belle take his place in a duel Dingus has set up, as discussed below. Agnes, finally tries her move on Turkey Doolan, too, when he tells her his opinion that Sheriff Birdsill has died in the duel, but Turkey is only interested in following Dingus's exploits. As the name provided under the ballad which follows the novel suggests, Agnes's trick finally works on a minor character, Army Captain Fiedler (named of course after Leslie Fiedler).

The novel's third major female character is Belle**,** the whorehouse and bar owner, who not only runs much of Yerkey's Hole, a town founded around a brothel in the first place ("It were a whore [...] name of Yerkey" [133]), but also frequently takes control of the situation and domineers the men around her. As mentioned she hires Birdsill as sheriff, and later "mans up" to take Birdsill's place in the duel, since she wants to protect the man she believes to be her fiancé, an act which, ironically, she believes to reflect positively on his masculinity – a masculinity she has defended in his stead: "He sure comprehends Hoke Birdsill is no titty-licker to be trifled with now, by golly" (127). This statement is doubly ironic considering who the speaker is, since "titty-licking" (in the broader sense) is exactly the activity that defines Birdsill's interaction with Belle. It

seems only fitting that the muscular Belle calls Birdsill her fiancée not her fiancé (127), since it is quite literally she who wears the pants in their relationship, as evident when she makes Birdsill follow Dingus, who has escaped with her safe, in a dress, while she wears his pants, which she had borrowed for the earlier duel. Coincidentally Dingus, too, wears a dress during their final encounter, for he had masqueraded as a woman to trick Hoke into carrying Belle's safe down the stairs for him. The final confrontation between the two antagonists thus happens in drag.

The novel's ending adds a final element to the interaction of male and female gender. After a *Tom Jones* episode in which it is revealed that Belle is in fact Dingus's mother who now has plans of reforming both her son, Dingus, and her soon-to-be husband, Birdsill, the two former antagonists turn Huck Finn and light out for the territory. Pursued by Belle, who empties her gun into the boats smokestack, they get on a boat to Valparadiso, where they meet Turkey Doolan and Rowbottom, both of whom have also fled from female company. This ending is an exaggerated spoof of Fiedler's theory of men fleeing from the company of women, a union with whom Birdsill, contemplating his three outstanding marriages, had earlier regarded as "three separate catastrophes all scheduled for the same solitary hour" (122).

The last strategy to deflate the heroic male that I have discussed in this chapter, the parody of the gunfight, features prominently in Markson's novel. As in other parts of the book, there is an underlying note of sharp criticism of the genre's myth making in the encounter. The gunfight, which supposedly takes place between Dingus and Hoke Birdsill, in fact involves neither. Birdsill recovers from the shock of having found out that he had to marry either Anna, Agnes, or Belle, and Dingus has only set the encounter up as a distraction to get to Belle's safe, tricking yet another character, the Reverend Rowbottom, into wearing his vest. Immediately before the duel, the local doctor talks to Turkey Doolan, who still admires Dingus and still believes himself to be the outlaw's sidekick. During their talk the Doc expresses his doubts that the duel will take place by debunking historical gun fights. This passage questions the plausibility of the gunfight as a whole in no uncertain terms and fits in with the novel's earlier portrayal of mythic gunfighter characters, such as Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday, as well as Dingus and Birdsill, as pranksters with a sense for false publicity:

> "Wild Bill were sitting at a poker table with'n his back turned when they shot him in it. Billy Bonney were on his way to carve hisself a slice of eating beef when Pat Garrett kilt him in a dark room without no word of previous notice neither. Bill Longley got strung up by the neck, and Clay Allison fell out'n a mule wagon and broke his'n. That feller Ford snuck up to the ass-end of Jesse James, and John Ringo blowed out his own personal brains, and John Wesley Hardin is doing twenty-five years in the Huntsville Penitentiary." The doctor looked up almost sadly. "But now all of a sudden either Hoke Birdsill or Dingus Billy Magee is gonter become the first individual in modern-day history, outside of maybe in that there traveling show Buffalo Bill Cody done put together to bamboozle a bunch of lard-headed

> Easterners, who's gonter get kilt by sashaying accommodatingly on up to another feller he knows is carrying a primed firearm in his hand." (Markson 110)

As the doc foresees the gunfight that ensues is more of an accident and it is not between Dingus and Birdsill, but between Rowbottom, Belle, and Anna Hot Water, who tries to get back at both Hoke and Rowbottom, whom she is also married to. What makes the scene most comic is the narration, which focuses entirely on Turkey Doolan, who, like everyone else, sees nothing at all, but throughout the scene continuously talks to himself, rehearsing how he will tell about the duel even before it has taken place. Ironically it is the doc, however, who ultimately turns the "duel" –people discharging guns in the dark without seeing or hitting each other – into a mythic narrative, for he has realized through his earlier exchange with Doolan that there is money to be made from people's desire to believe in frontier clichés. As he announces at the end of the chapter he plans to start his own traveling show capitalizing on the duel, although it is clear to the reader, but not to Turkey, that he has seen even less than Doolan. Through this passage the novel provides another scathing comment on the Western tradition's preference of dime novel and stage show clichés over reality – a common approach in revisionist texts, as I have argued.

It is finally in a ballad composed by "Horseface" Agnes, who at the time of the duel was busy attempting to seduce Turkey Doolan, that the novel provides the mythologized version of the duel and its participants. Its position after the novel's main narrative, makes the ballad with its pompous tone and pathos even more ironic. Agnes's account through its juxtaposition to the real events as portrayed in the novel ridicules the traditional blown up images of Western masculinity when it describes the duelists: "So both were calm, and hard as rock, / Though bullets flew like hail, / As they staged their mortal duel that night, / In the street before the jail" (155). Since both Birdsill and Dingus go missing after the duel, legend has it that both died, but since the reader knows better, the ballad's last lines before the refrain ring with a particular irony: "And none can judge, are heroes born, / Or are they only made?" (156). Markson's answer, as well as that of other like Larry McMurtry is clearly that heroes are made, and they are not made through events which harden them, as Agnes's lines imply, but through the exaggerated publication of their (non-existent) deeds and the mythologization of their characters.

6.5. Summing Up

As I have argued in this chapter, heroic masculinity is a central category in the Western. The traditional Western with his cowboy hero has for the longest time stood in for ideals

of hegemonic masculinity, in the Western's case images of the white, heroic male. The hero's centrality to the genre makes his role a target for parody and subversion. Consequently the deconstruction of the image of the heroic male is a way in which many revisionist Western novels take on the genre.

While there are numerous variations to the deflation of the Western male, in this chapter I have focused on three strategies which many texts share: the inclusion of strong female characters which, with a varying degree of success, contest the traditional male hero's role, the revision or parody of "historic" figures in the Western myth, such as Wild Bill Hickok, Custer or Billy the Kid, who through their use in countless novels, movies and other narratives have a firmly established persona in popular culture and stand for many of the ideals of the Western male, some have argued become representations of the frontier they were a part of, and the gun fight, which stands at end of many Western films and movies as a "clean" means to resolve a conflict and a chance for the hero to showcase both his heroism in the face of death, often against a superior number of opponents, and his manliness. Such approaches are fairly effective and less ambivalent than another famous recent example of the critique of the Western male, Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain*, based on Annie Proulx's short story of the same name. While the inclusion of queer cowboys into a Western landscape has caused an uproar in the Western United States, the change of sexual orientation is neither exactly new (Mel Brook's had toyed with it in *Blazing Saddles*, as had Reed in the depiction of the Loop Garoo Kid's antagonist Drag),[243] nor necessarily an attack on the Western hero's masculinity. In *The Place of Dead Roads* William Burroughs changed his protagonists sexual orientation, but clearly leaves his heroic masculinity in tact – at least for those broad-minded enough to accept the fact that manliness and homosexuality are not mutually exclusive.

[243] On *Queer Cowboys* cf. Packard.

CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK: TRANSNATIONALIZING THE REVISIONIST WESTERN

Jesse What do you say when you fire?
Lenny "Zehirrinal! Meet your maker! Broniah! In the face!"
Jesse Then that cowboy's dead, right?
Lenny No, ma'am. The cowboy, he's bigger than that. You're just shooting his body. But the cowboy's a legend that always lives.
Anton Piatigorsky. *Easy Lenny Lazmon and the Great Western Ascension.*

7.1. Trends in the Revisionist Western as a North American Narrative

When Bonanza Jellybean wants to surrender to "America" whose representatives have surrounded the farm on which the cowgirls have drugged whooping cranes to convince them to stay for mating at the end of Tom Robbins's *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*, she is shot in exactly the same spot in her stomach where she already had a scar – a scar she claimed derived from being shot by a silver bullet as a child: at this point in the novel "life" has come full circle, imitating and authenticating her earlier story. With her dying breaths, Jelly recognizes that there is no difference between fact and fiction:

> "I wasn't *really* shot with a silver bullet," she confessed to no one in particular.
> "Or was I?"
> She smiled the deliciously secretive smile of one who instinctively recognizes the reality of myth. (346; Robbins's emphasis)

Bonanza Jellybean stands in for the project of revising the Western. When the myth is as intertwined with reality and as powerful as the myth of the West, in which – to quote another fictional text, Piatigorsky's *Easy Lenny Lazmon* – "the cowboy's a legend that always lives" (80), it becomes a prime target for postmodern authors and other revisionists.

Despite the efforts of these revisionists, the Western genre proves astonishingly resilient, as has become apparent throughout my analysis. Spoof, parody, and revision have been a major mode in the genre for the past fifty years. In the 20th and early 21st century the period of parody and revision has gone on for almost as long as the genre had existed in its more "serious" forms, and, in fact, as I have shown in chapter 2, parodies and counter myths of the Western have existed for as long as the genre. It seems telling that while the biggest Western box office hit of all times remains Mel Brooks' *Blazzing Saddles*, a Western parody, the Western nevertheless remains usable as a symbol of a more traditional, conservative ideology, spoofed in Brooks' film. In fact, the genre's formula remains recognizable, held alive in part *by* the very attacks on

and rewritings of the genre. While these rewritings draw much closer attention to the genre's thematic, stylistic and plot-related obsessions and clichés, thus exposing the artificiality and arbitrariness of established rules and clichés, they also heavily rely on and replicate the "original's" conventions.

The use of generic elements in ways that transcend the genre's narrower borders and ideologies proves more complex than simply evoking a genre and then unmasking and deconstructing it. There exists a mutual influence of broader genre and individual text, in which the myth / convention / formula undermine the revision or the postmodern reapplication of the concept, and vice versa. Just as the "straight" Western influences the reading of the Western revision, so does the revision influence the original text when a reader goes back to it.

In this respect the revisionist Westerns I have examined resemble other postmodern texts which engage with earlier narratives, living off and deconstructing a "host text" while simultaneously breathing new life into that which they dismantle, as David Cowart has argued in his examination of Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and its relation to William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*:

> [P]ostmodernist fictions, as they replicate older fictions, are inherently parodic: they depend on irony and subversion of any and all fictions previously taken for reality or truth. Nevertheless, Stoppard's play, whether characterized as parodic, postmodern, or symbiotic, revitalizes as it subverts. Thus even as the truth quotient of the host text diminishes, even as its pretensions to absolute insight dissipate, the host benefits from the attachment of its postmodern guest. (39)

The challenge of successfully revising a genre that writes a myth as deeply engrained in a transnational, global culture as the Western, affects both Canadian and American writers. While Canadian critics Arnold Davidson suggests a "Reinvention of the West in Canadian Fiction," a West which is, as Davidson's introduction to his *Coyote Country* suggests, already inscribed with the American frontier myth as expressed in the Western, this view as an independent process limited to Canadian fiction seems too simple for the novels I have examined. Davidson repeats an unfounded bias frequently expressed in Canadian regional criticism when he claims that Western American novels, seemingly of necessity, remain "closer to the formula western than are their Canadian counterparts" ("Reinvention" 75). Like most broad generalization along national lines this statement seems informed by a nationalist agenda rather than an intimate familiarity with Western American literature.[244] A transnational approach as I have undertaken in

244 Cf. Davidson's paradoxical claim about Clark's *The Ox-Bow Incident*: "[A]s Milton notes, 'what characterizes *The Ox-Bow Incident*' as serious literature 'is the lack of the strong will and the fast gun' (203). Yet that absence, along with its consequence, serves to validate much the same ethos affirmed by the presence of the hero and his trusty Colt .45 in more standard westerns" ("Reinvention" 75). This is clearly a misrepresentation, the whole point of *The Ox-Bow Incident* is that it questions the ethos of

this study, in contrast, shows that while some differences exist between American and Canadian texts, these differences are only in part related to how closely an author follows the classic Western formula. A careful reading of revisionist Westerns shows that they do not fall into neatly separable national camps, Canadian novels with their particular concerns in one, American novels stuck in an obsession with the frontier in the other. Canadian Patrick deWitt's *The Sister's Brothers*, for instance, is closer to the formula Western than are Leslie Silko's *Ceremony* or James Welsh's *Winter in the Blood*, neither of which I would regard as Westerns, although both of these American novels feature cowboys (for Davidson a sign of a text's proximity to the classic Western). Both Silko's and Welsh's cowboys are cowboys by profession, however, not generic stereotype, and in both cases they are Native American cowboys, and thus already different from the stereotypical Westerner. *The Sisters Brothers*, in contrast, has no cowboys and instead features two professional killers as its protagonists, yet it stays much closer to a classic Western narrative. In fact, it could be argued with some justification that Anne Cameron's *The Journey*, one of the novels Davidson discusses at length in his *Coyote Country* as radically different from the Western and informed instead by a Canadian model of a wilderness novel, is still fairly close to the formula Western with its pursuits and moral dichotomies, and closer still to one of the American Westerns Davidson dismisses, A. B. Guthrie's *Way West*, although Cameron's is a "way West" with reverse gender roles.

Nevertheless, Davidson's title can serve as a point of departure, for there is always a reinvention of the Western in a transnational environment. Canadians reinvent the Western by combining elements from both sides of the border, just as the Western reinvents itself through Canadian texts, in accordance with Cowart's observation on postmodern appropriations. Because of Canadian postmodern authors' sensibility of their position as not-Americans, the Western, the American genre *par excellence*, is almost always revisionist in a Canadian setting, featuring an ironic appropriation, according to Linda Hutcheon's definition. This ironic stance, far from making Canadian author's "reinvention" of the Western nationally unique, connects it to the work of postmodern revisionist American writers. These authors also reinvent the Western. They do so not from a feeling of national difference, but by approaching it through a postmodern sensibility and wariness of the ideologies and meta-narratives traditionally inscribed in the Western.

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gun and hero by whithholding them, as Robert Warshow remarks: "It is significant that *The Oxbow Incident* has no hero; a hero would have o stop the lynching or be killed in trying to stop it, and then the 'problem' of lynching would no longer be central" (53). Heroes are not part of Clark's world and their lynching ethics which were established by the Virginian's hanging of his friend Steve, the "rustler," do not fare well when confronted by the complexities of reality Clark tries to introduce into his novel.

Texts by Canadian and U.S. American authors share more than this ironic, often postmodern difference from the Western formula. A transnational approach following Siemerling and Casteel, and Wyile, which explores parallels between countries but does not gloss over local specificities, reveals that there are both shared topics and "local" concerns treated in the texts examined. The concerns which transcend national boundaries I have examined in some detail include an examination of the historical treatment of indigenous people and their marginality and portrayal in contemporary society, as well as a critique of the Western's bias for heroic masculinity. While these approaches share a joint concern and ideological stance, the treatment of Native American / First Nation peoples also reflect local specificities and historiographic myths, namely the myth of a more just Indian policy in Canada and the consequently greater ease with which Canadian authors align themselves with Indian characters. I have also identified topics which reflect the unique interest of one of the two nations. Many Canadians use the Western for their national sport of setting off a Canadian national identity against America, even if they sometimes ironically reflect on or question their own practice. A number of American Westerns, in contrast, strive to include the United States' largest visible minority, African Americans, into the Western genre, which for the longest time has functioned as a narrative excluding all racial Otherness – disregarding a more diverse history of the 19th century West and writing the West as white, national space.

Even where a truly "national" character seems to show, as in the construction of a national identity through a "Mild West" myth in Canadian Westerns, some texts, such as Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, bp Nichol's *The True Authentic Story of Billy the Kid*, or Patrick deWitt's *The Sisters Brothers*, upset the construction of a "national" literature entirely distinct from American texts. My findings consequently complicate the clear distinction between American and Canadian literature, which has long been proclaimed, particularly by scholars of Western Canadian literature. Indeed, as has become apparent, the title of the conference proceedings *One West, Two Myths* (Higham and Thacker) is misleading. To begin with, there is more than one West. Geographically speaking there is the canyon and sandstone Southwest of Southern Utah and Northern Arizona, the humid Pacific Northwest of coastal Washington, Oregon, and British Columbia, the Rocky Mountains West, the deserts of California, Nevada and parts of Oregon and British Columbia, the grasslands, prairies, and so forth, some of them stretching across national boundaries. More importantly, from a cultural and historical point of view there are the white man's Wests, the women's Wests, which as both historians and literati have shown was quite different, the Native American or First Nations' various Wests, the Métis and "half-breeds'" Wests, the European and non-European immigrants' Wests, from African

American (former) slaves, to Chinese railroad builders, the Chicana/os' Southwest, and the list could be continued. The works I have discussed reflect some, but by no means all of these many Wests, some of which do not fare well within the Western genre. They thus target not two distinct myths, but one myth, the myth of *the* Old West which lies at the heart of the Western genre, and try to replace it not with two separate myths, one American and one Canadian, as the above mentioned conference's title suggests, but with a diversity of myths in accordance with a postmodern heterogeneity, and the many interests these authors carry to the genre. In some instances this picture more adequately reflects what is today accepted as historical "reality," a reality presented in the findings of the New Western Historians as more diverse and less heroic than its popular image. In other texts, which come out of the ethics of historiographic metafiction, such a past is revealed to be the construction of writers of fiction and myth. Still others could not care less about history and continue to see the West as a "landscape of the mind" there as a "free for all" reflecting not historical reality but contemporary concerns and aesthetic interests.

In their rewritings these texts always operate between two poles. On the one hand there is always the possibility one of the three old Indians in Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*, Robinson Crusoe, mentions regarding their attempt to "rewrite" a John Wayne Western: "If we try to do too much […] things don't turn out so well" (276). This problem arises from time to time in revisionist Westerns which are too preoccupied with formal revision, a mode which often appears as mere formal parody, which is not always the most effective way to revise the genre's ideologies. On the other hand, there are limitations through generic codes in less formally radical texts, which can sometimes seem rather narrow, resulting in works that continue to write the genre more than revise it. Those authors who manage to extend and revise the Western most effectively, often break its narrower conventions, sometimes through formal means, but ones which come out of a distinct ideological stance rather than mere postmodern play, e.g. Reed's *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* which stands in contrast to Coover's more directionless (and consequently less effective) *Ghost Town*, at other times through genre mixing or the targeting of one particular ideological area, e.g. Bergon's, Welch's, Lethem's and Bowering's revisions of the "Indian."

As my study has shown, revisions of the Western in a North American context begin to question many of the assumptions underlying classic narratives of the West. They broaden the scope to question images of masculinity and racial purity, and sometimes incorporate other races and genders (women, "two-spirited" Indians) into the Western. They thus are part of a larger trend in (non-generic) Western literature, which Christine Bold and Victoria Lamont have commented upon: "The task of race-ing, queering, and recovering the western formula is far from complete" (117). While

their remark certainly holds true, as I have shown the project has at least begun – even within the genre.

7.2. Outlook: Transnationalizing the Western Beyond North America

The transnational and transcultural dissemination of the Western is captured in an image in John Yau's short story "Hawaiian cowboys." The narrator and his estranged wife enter a bar on one of the Hawaiian islands in a town that looks "like something you'd see in Wyoming or Texas, or maybe a movie of the west" (99), and find the barroom full of men "dressed like cowboys, and almost all of them Asian or Hawaiian. Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Polynesian, Hawaiian. They're all sizes and shapes" (100). While the narrator recalls his failed attempts to "become" Wyatt Earp or Jesse James as a child, presumably because of his own ethnicity, and consequently gave up pretending, he is forced to realize looking about him at the Hawaiian cowboys that "[n]one of them are pretending, like I was when I was a child" (100). Instead the Western has reached a larger transcultural dissemination which allows these Hawaiians to claim a cowboy identity on their Pacific Island, which earlier seemed impossible, as seen in Richard Brautigan's use of Hawaii as a setting in which the Western code does not function in the first chapters of his *Hawkline Monsters*.

The Western has now also reached other parts of the world, which do not share a common "Western" history and culture and an examination of Westerns from such countries would certainly broaden the insights of how the Western operates in a broader transnational, globalizing world. Whereas the Canadian Western is obsessed with America, as I have argued, and consequently retains a connection to the genre's country of origin, a larger transnational view, taking into account different national appropriations of the genre would likely reveal that in the 21st century the Western is *not* necessarily always about America reinventing herself as Philip French had claimed (*Westerns* 13). The post-modern Thai Western *Fah talai jone* (*Tears of the Black Tiger*) can serve as an example of this trend of severing the bonds which tie the Western to the United States. Wisit Sasanatieng's film uses the Western's iconography, costuming, its gun fight scene, and its generic codes, but there is very little, if anything, that is specifically American in a film which mashes up the Western with the tradition of the Thai musical. Instead, the film uses the Western as it would any other genre, as a source of various elements, drawing on its visual style – relying on the already transnational source of Sergio Leone's Spaghetti Westerns rather than the genre's more classical American form – its characters and stock situations, but not making any presumptions of saying anything about America, as Leone's earlier films did. The characters in *Tears of the Black Tiger* are obviously Thai, their field of action obviously Asian when they

ride – in slow motion – out of the forest and through a rice field. And the film's climactic duel is set, not against the sublime American desert Southwest, but in front of a green tree on a meadow in the rain. Its visuals are those of the Asian action genre at least as much as those of Leone's hyper-violent West. And an earlier scene of a face off set against a background of an obvious matte painting of the Western's desert scene in bright, false colors reminiscent more of Andy Warhol than any existing landscape seems like the film's ironic tip of the hat to the Western's landscape, which in its new guise has become postnational, truly a "landscape in the mind" with no connection to the United States.

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[245] Cf. Lilly:

> Ray [Brown] had recently established the Popular Press and was in the process of creating the Popular Culture Association around this time so he published **The Six-Gun Mystique** [formatting sic]. It was all casual enough that we never put a date on the copyright page and later couldn't remember whether the book had come out in 1970 or 71.

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