**Spirit of the West:
The Alberta Cowboy in Canadian Cinema**

by
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In partial fulfillment of
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Master of Arts

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submitted by Ashley Grant, B.F. A., (Concordia)
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Abstract

Despite the presence of cowboy figures in many Canadian films, very little consideration has been given to Canadian cowboy films per se. Canadian film studies is often tied to an exploration of national identity and representations of Canadian culture in general. Yet in the overreaching ambition to define what is “Canadian,” the articulation of a Canadian cowboy has been overlooked. The cowboy is a highly important figure in the history of Alberta, and remains significant in contemporary Alberta culture. In their construction of the figure, these films are playing a role in reflecting and creating the culture and image of the Alberta cowboy. This thesis explores the Alberta cowboy in seven Canadian films: *Corral* (1954), *Circle of the Sun* (1960), *Standing Alone* (1982), *A Cowboy's Convictions* (1964), *Cowboy* (1985), *Cowboys Don't Cry* (1987), and *Road to Saddle River* (1993). It will be demonstrated that a distinct Alberta cowboy culture has been illustrated through Canadian films, with a cowboy figure that is self-reliant and rugged, but also law-abiding and peaceful. It is imperative that discussions begin on Canadian Westerns, for an identification of their nature will certainly contribute to a greater understanding of Canadian cinema, and the nation it articulates.

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To my parents, Barry and Bonnie Grant
For their ardent support of my movie-addiction
For their encouragement that I always study what I enjoy
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Introduction

For many Canadian film scholars writing on Canadian cinema, the initial interest in this topic emerges from a moment of recognition. In his article on Winnipeg film in the 1980s, Geoff Pevere opens with a referral to Peter Harcourt's *Movies and Mythologies* account of experiencing the National Film Board's Unit B documentaries for the first time. Pevere quotes Harcourt's chronicle of this experience as his "real discovery of [himself] as a Canadian."¹ Pevere likens Harcourt's experience to one of his own that took place at the 1984 Toronto film festival screening of *The John Paizs Trilogy*. Pevere writes that "the trilogy marked the very first time that something close to [his] own Canadian experience was being reflected back to [him] from a movie screen."² What struck me in reading these descriptions was the way they mirrored my own experience of revelation through a Canadian film. Early in his discussion Pevere distinguishes his encounter from Harcourt's, whose experience occurred when NFB films were essentially the only prominent works emerging from Canadian cinema. "By the time my own cultural epiphany arrived," says Pevere, "I had already seen dozens of the hundreds of Canadian movies produced since the early 1960s."³ Although my own revelatory experience also occurred at a much later date, my experience, like Harcourt's, was linked to the Unit B films. It was the first time that I saw Colin Low's *Corral* (1954) that I felt a real connection with a film as truly being part of my identity. It sparked in me a reaction shared by Harcourt, who wrote, "through these films, I knew I was Canadian."⁴ However, in my case it was not so much recognition of "Canadianess" in the larger sense of the word, but identification with a film that reflected what I felt to be

my “Canadianess.” I grew up in Calgary, close to where *Corral* took place. The subject of Low’s film is a cowboy working in the ranching country of southern Alberta. The topic is a very personal one for the filmmaker, who grew up on a ranch in southern Alberta. But what was it about this film that awoke a familiarity in me, who grew up in a city, a lifestyle far from ranches and cowboys? What was it in this film, in this quiet, yet intriguingly simple documentary that affected me so? Does *Corral* reveal a distinct quality that is quintessentially “Albertan?”

Much of Canadian film studies are tied to an exploration of national identity and representations of Canadian culture. Yet often in this process, the blocks that make up Canadian culture are passed over in the overreaching ambition to define what is “Canadian.” Through the historical, geographical, political and religious culture of Alberta, the province has fostered a sense of identity that is both a part of the greater Canadian makeup and unique to the region. I use this notion of regional identity in Alberta as reason for which specific attention is at least deserved for this western province. As with the composition of the greater Canadian culture, Alberta is made of multiple ingredients, with a variety of ethnic and religious groups contributing to the history and evolution of the province. The subject of *Corral*, a cowboy, is a highly important figure in the history of Alberta. The cowboy culture remains prolific in contemporary Alberta culture, despite the province’s ranching heyday having ended almost a century ago.

The Cowboy has been an integral part of the western Canadian life for over a century. He came with the great herds in the 1880’s, worked for outfits like the Bar U and Cochrane, and contributed much to the history, romance, and culture of the west.⁵

It is the cowboy figure that was so familiar to me in *Corral*. For while actual ranching in Alberta is now relatively minimal, and far removed from the daily life of most Albertans, the province uses cowboy symbols abundantly. Hockey arenas shaped like saddles, cowboy-inspired cheers at local events, country-music bars scattered throughout cities and towns, and most notably, the annual Calgary Stampede that hosts a world-renowned rodeo, all indicate a certain reverence for the province's cowboy history. Western historian Hugh A. Dempsey notes the various existing representations of the Canadian cowboy. This includes the sport of rodeo:

The most enduring and positive depiction of the cowboy through the years has come through rodeo. While the big-time shows in Calgary and Edmonton are dominated by American cowboys, the dozens of rodeos in smaller centers are purely Canadian events.⁶

Dempsey also points out the communication of the figure through country music:

Another positive representation has come through country music. Canada has taken a leading role in fostering cowboy ballads and promoting a concept that is universal and positive. From Wilf Carter of the 1930s to Ian Tyson of the 1990s, Canadian singers have helped keep alive a romantic and sometimes soulful picture of the Canadian cowboy.⁷

He rounds out the evidence with a description of the current ranching industry:

Ranching remains an important part of prairie life and despite the inroads of farming, it has flourished and prospered. The cowboy may have exchanged his horse for a four-wheel drive but his goals are the same – to look after the cattle and horses under his care.... And, like their counterparts of the golden age, they possess those same unique qualities of hardiness, independence, and determination so identified with western life.⁸

What remains absent from Dempsey's discussion is the representation of the cowboy in Canadian film. Pierre Berton addressed the representation of Canada's west in *Hollywood's Canada*, a study of films made by Hollywood that are set in Canada.

Berton asserts that these Hollywood films are rampant with falsities, and this inaccurate portrayal has led both Canadians and non-Canadians to believe a false image of Canada.

It is not so much that they have given the world a false picture of Canada; Hollywood pictures, after all, have given the world a false picture of almost every country, including the United States. What has been damaging is that they have given the world *no* real image of Canada at all, except that of a geographical absurdity – a vast, empty, snowswept land of mountains and pine trees. Taken together, the Hollywood movies about Canada have carried the implicit message that the Canadian image differs from the American image only in the matter of degree. They have said it to the world and they have said it to Canadians as well. They have said it especially in those motion pictures dealing with the frontier.... It's simply not true that there is no such thing as a distinctive Canadian identity.... From the earliest days we have had our own way of doing things and our own way of looking at life.⁹

Dempsey's perspective of movie cowboys is corresponding to Berton's, aligning it only with Hollywood representations, and blaming Hollywood cinema for coloring the Canadian perspective on their own cowboy figure. While Dempsey establishes the existence of a Canadian cowboy culture through various forms of representations, he pointedly omits cinema as a legitimate form of articulation.

Today, the image of the cowboy is a fascinating mix between Canadian conservatism and Hollywood ballyhoo.... The historical picture is inevitably affected by American stereotypes created by movies, television, advertising, and western novels.... So while the media-driven cowboy image has tumbled across the border into Canada, it is that of an alien American cowboy, not a Canadian one.¹⁰

Although Berton and Dempsey's Hollywood-oriented observations are applicable to representations of the Canadian cowboy, the fact that neither mentions the relevance of Canadian cinematic depictions is misleading. Dempsey does not even acknowledge the existence of Canadian cowboy films. Berton does cover himself with a brief endorsement of Canadian film in his introduction.

It is the movies that have projected our image to the world and also, to a considerable extent, to ourselves. And by “movies” I don’t mean the earnest and often brilliant documentaries of the National Film Board. I mean the commercial pictures that Hollywood made, scores of which are still being seen on smaller screens.¹¹

While Berton’s statement does explain his omission of discourse on Canadian cinema, what these two Canadian scholars infer with their exclusion is that Canadian-made cowboy films are somehow irrelevant by virtue of their minor influence. Does *Corral* reflect a larger understanding of the Alberta cowboy? If so, is it merely a lone ranger, or does it belong to a larger group of films concerned with a distinctly Alberta cowboy? Whether the absent discussion on Alberta cowboy films is due to few existing examples, or lack of exposure, their potential relevance should not be ignored.

Little attention has been paid to the Canadian cowboy in cinema. This lack of interest is to be deplored, for there exists a number of films, fiction and non-fiction, dating back to the silent era, that take place on the Canadian western frontier. This diversity of film and the lack of existing discussion make the Canadian cowboy in cinema an open subject. This thesis will explore the representation of the Alberta cowboy in Canadian cinema. The films that will be studied depict a particular cowboy figure that is self-reliant and rugged, but also law-abiding and peaceful. By relating films about the Alberta cowboy to historical studies, literature, and the larger topic of Canadian cinema, it will be demonstrated that a distinct Alberta cowboy culture has been articulated through Canadian films.

The analysis of films in terms of regional representation is a topic pertinent to discussions of cultural studies, for the imaging of a specific ethos in film is a text through which to examine the make-up of a community. The relation of cinemas to national or regional identities has been explored in many contexts, for as with literature or art, film is a way through which people articulate their self-image. And it is crucial to understand the complexity of studying “culture,” as Graeme Turner explains in his study *Film as Social Practice*.

Notoriously difficult to define neatly, culture, as I wish to discuss it here, is a dynamic process which produces the behaviours, the practices, the institutions, and the meanings which constitute our social existence. Culture comprises the processes of making sense of our way of life. Cultural studies theorists, drawing particularly on semiotics, have argued that language is the major mechanism through which culture produces and reproduces social meanings.¹²

Of course, it must not be assumed that films are an imperviously honest reflection of a community. Lance Pettitt addresses the complications of reading a culture through filmic representations in discussing the depiction of Ireland in that nation’s film and television:

A cultural studies approach to film and television seeks to combine textual and contextual analysis. Thinking about the text should go beyond noting which kind of images are on the screen, to ask *how* such images are constructed with different textual qualities and connotations, *how* they function as representations and what formal and conventional codes have been adopted by this representation over others. Film and television images are complicated cultural signifiers not simple reflections of reality.¹³

As would be expected with any topic of cultural composition, Albertan identity is not easily summarized or explained. Although this difficulty is present in any type of cultural reading in a film, the particularly complicated nature of cultural reflection in Canadian film has been pointed out. In the Canadian film studies anthology *Self Portrait*, Piers Handling opens with the provocative statement:

The title *Self Portrait* should perhaps be used with a qualifying question mark. It suggests an image that has been reflected back at us, an image that we can recognize. Is this in fact the case? Can we claim to have a “cinematic” identity comparable to that of, say France, Italy and Sweden, or even less-developed countries like Cuba, Mexico, or Brazil. Has our cinema given us a national image that helps define ourselves, that illuminates our similarities and our differences as a people? “Self portrait” infers an image that we can see, one that we are familiar with, which is either a collective, or an individual reflection.¹⁴

Both Pettitt and Handling identify the important difficulties in reading films as cultural texts, especially in the need to avoid accepting the face value of a descriptive analysis. This dimension of cultural film studies will be significant in my assessment of Alberta cowboy films. It is my intention to use existing notions of Alberta culture to explain the themes of selected cowboy films. But I also intend to use the films as a means of explaining the Alberta cowboy culture. For in their articulation of the figure, these films are playing a role in creating the culture and image of the Alberta cowboy. To accomplish this, both the films themselves, and the discourse surrounding the representation of the Alberta cowboy, will be read.

Images, as well as words, carry connotations.... When we deal with images it is especially apparent that we are not only dealing with the object or the concept they represent, but we are also dealing with the way in which they are represented. There is a “language” for visual representation, too, sets of codes and conventions used by the audience to make sense of what they see. Images reach us as already “encoded” messages, already represented as meaningful in particular ways. One of the tasks of film analysis is to discover how this is done, both in particular films and in general.¹⁵

Although there are many faces of Alberta culture, the aspect of the films in which I am specifically interested is representations of the Canadian *western* tradition. And what is highly significant in discussing Alberta cowboy films is that the symbols they offer are so strongly tied to the greater cultural representations of Alberta.

The frontier culture of Canada is not applicable only to Alberta. Cowboy stories may be stretched throughout the west and into the north. However, the ranching world of southern Alberta has brought it the reputation as a bastion of Canada's "old west" myths. While many of the historical writings used will pertain to the greater Canadian western traditions, all of the films to be discussed take place in southern Alberta. Distinguishing Alberta's cowboy culture from neighboring British Columbia is much clearer than from the other prairie provinces. The more defined historical and geographical differences of the province have been noted, whereas the prairies are normally referred to as containing a collective cowboy culture. "The cowboys of British Columbia ... originated at different times for different reasons; their intermontane locale presented unique challenges and obstacles."¹⁶ Though the Alberta cowboy is certainly part of a larger culture, from examining Alberta cowboy films a unique figure emerges. I believe the use of the cowboy as a classic Alberta theme and symbol offers an opportunity to explore why Alberta is compelled to foster this in their self imaging.

It is important to note that the focus of this thesis deals with the *appropriation* of the cowboy in Alberta culture. For example, Calgary's hockey arena is shaped like a saddle. But despite its location on the Stampede grounds, few events held in the "Saddledome" have anything to do with horses. Another, perhaps more peculiar example, is the use of the cowboy image to identify local politicians. Accompanying an article in *The Calgary Herald* on the retirement of Alliance / Reform founder Preston Manning is a caricature of Manning with a cowboy hat, riding a horse into the sunset. Yet the lifestyle of a prominent politician bears little resemblance to the lower-class cowhand of Alberta's ranching heyday. Why has Alberta adopted the cowboy image to

such an extent? Why is it used in association with people and events that are, in actuality, totally detached from a real working cowboy?

This thesis will examine seven Canadian films that offer characters and themes of the Alberta cowboy culture, and they include both documentaries and fiction feature films. The works span decades, from 1954 to 1993. I begin with Colin Low's *Corral*, because it is the most recognizable "cowboy film" in Canadian cinema. As the creator of this pinnacle film, other films by Low that express the Alberta cowboy culture are also relevant. In *Circle of the Sun* (1960) and *Standing Alone* (1982) Low continues to illustrate certain characteristics of *Corral*, but also augments the Alberta cowboy in their atypical subject of First Nations cowboys. In the subsequent chapter on documentary, I discuss *A Cowboy's Convictions* (Peter Kelly, 1964) and *Cowboy* (Darold Black, 1985), two films that demonstrate the influence of *Corral* in their similar styles and presentations. The final works to be examined are two feature fiction films, *Cowboys Don't Cry* (Anne Wheeler, 1987) and *Road to Saddle River* (Francis Damberger, 1993). These dramatic renderings offer more complex representations of the Alberta cowboy. *Cowboys Don't Cry* tells an insider's story of the Alberta cowboy through a troubled rodeo-champion protagonist. And in *Road to Saddle River*, we follow an outsider into the Alberta cowboy culture, as our cowboy-obsessed protagonist travels to southern Alberta in search of his fantasy frontier existence. In *Road to Saddle River* the pointed play with conventions and stereotypes of the cowboy culture serves as culmination to our own journey into the Alberta cowboy myth.

There are a number of potentially relevant Canadian cowboy films that I have chosen not to discuss. Most noticeably is Peter Pearson's *Paperback Hero* (1973). The

story of a hockey player in small town Saskatchewan who models himself after a Hollywood-style cowboy, *Paperback Hero* is perhaps the most famous Canadian western. Despite its interesting use of the cowboy myth, I do not include it in this thesis for a number of reasons. Primarily, it is because the film takes place in Saskatchewan, not Alberta, and therefore does not reflect the question of why Alberta seems to embrace the cowboy figure so strongly. However, I also believe that *Paperback Hero* is distinctively different from the feature films I consider, beyond just the location. Unlike *Paperback Hero*, *Cowboys Don't Cry* and *Road to Saddle River* do contain “real” cowboys. *Paperback Hero* is not about Canadian cowboys, but rather uses the American cowboy to comment on the absence of Canadian identity. Discussing *Paperback Hero*, particularly in comparing it to the Alberta films, would have opened the thesis up to broad questions of Canadian identity that can not be dealt with here. *Cattle Ranch* (Guy Coté, 1961), *No Big Money* (Doug White, 1976), and *A Slow Hello* (Tom Radford, 1974), are all NFB documentaries of B.C. cowboys. But my focus is the Alberta cowboy, and while other films may offer certain insights, my interest is with the cowboy as cultural icon. And as much as the cowboy culture might exist in B.C., the cowboy figure has not become an emblem of the province.

In the research for this thesis, there was no other substantial work to be found on the Alberta cowboy in cinema. I drew from studies of culture, history, politics, and literature, in an attempt to understand the illustrations of the Alberta cowboy. Tracking down films of the Alberta cowboy is a trying task. It is difficult to discern whether this is due to few existing films, or that they have simply been lost within the greater context of Canadian film. In either case, the lack of attention is why it is so imperative that

discussions begin on Canadian Westerns, for an identification of their nature will certainly contribute to a greater understanding of Canadian cinema, and the nation it articulates.

Notes

¹ Geoff Pevere, "Greenland Revisited: The Winnipeg Film Group During the 1980's," *Dislocations* (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1995), 37.

² Pevere, 40.

³ Pevere, 40.

⁴ Pevere, 37.

⁵ Hugh A. Dempsey, *The Golden Age of the Canadian Cowboy: An Illustrated History* (Saskatoon & Calgary: Fifth House Publishers, 1995), 1.

⁶ Dempsey, 3.

⁷ Dempsey, 3.

⁸ Dempsey, 3.

⁹ Pierre Berton, *Hollywood's Canada: The Americanization of Our National Image* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1975), 230.

¹⁰ Dempsey, 2.

¹¹ Berton, *Hollywood's Canada*, 12.

¹² Graeme Turner, *Film as Social Practice*, third edition (London: Routledge, 1999), 52.

¹³ Lance Pettitt, *Screening Ireland: Film and Television Representation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), xiv.

¹⁴ Pierre Veronneau and Piers Handling, eds, *Self-Portrait: Essays on the Canadian and Quebec Cinemas*, (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 1980), vii.

¹⁵ Turner, 54.

¹⁶ Dempsey, 1.

Chapter 1

The History and Culture of Alberta

Before delving into the cinematic representations of the Alberta cowboy, it is important to first place the historical figure within the greater Alberta culture. In describing the character of Alberta, many versions may possibly be cited. It is viewed as the bastion of conservatism, red-neck country, Canada's Bible belt. It is identified as the land of cowboys, rodeos, and country bars. It is perceived as the headquarters of right-wing politics, the haunt of anti-gun control advocates, and a place where fundamentalist Christians are smoothly elected into public office. But it has also gained a reputation as the end of a Canadian rainbow, a booming province where fortunes are waiting to be made. Despite the economic busts that have dotted its history, the alternating booms have shaped a province that still retains a frontier-style mentality of opportunity. It has been said that Albertans like to see their home as a type of *Promised Land*.

Alberta is a special sort of Promised Land, however. It is not the Promised Land for the already successful, for the genteel, for the retired company man, for the soporific and serene. Everyone knows that's British Columbia.... Rather, Alberta is a Promised Land for the young at heart and vigorous of body.¹

So from where does this reputation arise? The province has often been aligned to its neighbors: its prairie neighbor Saskatchewan to the east, its picturesque partner British Columbia to the west, or even its often like-minded southern neighbor, the American west. What is it that makes Alberta's character distinct?

The fur and whiskey traders were the first Europeans to establish themselves in what is now Alberta, arriving in the mid-1700s. The territory became part of Canada

shortly after confederation, when the Canadian government negotiated control from the Hudson's Bay Company and the British government in 1870.² Canadian expansionists had been interested in the agricultural possibilities of the west since the 1850s, and by 1870, the Canadian government was eager to settle and exploit the vast unpopulated land.³ A significant decision was made in these early days of the Canadian west with the creation of the North West Mounted Police in 1874. The force was created specifically to establish peace in the west, in the hope that a peaceful and orderly frontier would lead to an increase in immigration west. "Prime Minister John A. Macdonald had been planning a force of mounted riflemen since 1869. He wanted to avoid costly Indian wars like those that had marked American expansion westward because they discouraged settlement."⁴ The desire to settle the west was largely fueled by agricultural hopes, and the government felt it was essential to the future strength of Canada. However, in the early decades of settlement, a "transitional economy emerged" in Alberta: ranching.⁵ This era is the root of the cowboy tales of Canada.

The Canadian government approached the settling of the west aggressively with immigration campaigns and attractive land acts. But it was not until the 1890s that enough farming settlers had arrived to really shift the economy to a wheat-based one. In the meantime, while the climate and terrain of southern Alberta had a discouraging farming potential, the vast land and the climate was well suited for grazing. The "beef bonanza" in the United States was an indicator to Canada of the potential benefits of ranching,⁶ and the era of Alberta's "Cattle Kingdom" was born. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, this industry dominated southern Alberta, with Calgary as its center of activity.

The cattle kings of this era reigned supreme, holding both political and financial power in the region. The presence of the NWMP, and the dominating British backgrounds of the ranchers, are integral to the image of the Canadian west as peaceful and organized.

With their ranch homes decorated like English country houses, formal hunts with their etiquette straight from England, polo playing, and formal dress for dinner, British cattlemen preserved the amenities. Bringing to their area a welcome atmosphere of gracious living which now after nearly a century still sets the chinook belt apart as a distinct region, they played dramatic parts. And never in Canada's history have actors played on such a magnificent stage as the foothills belt or against such a majestic backdrop as Alberta's mountains.⁷

While the Canadian ranching culture was in great part rooted in British ties and allegiance, many Americans arrived as well. Often, it was the upper class British who owned the ranches, while the American cowboys managed them, passing on their skills to the Canadians.

With such parentage, ranching in Alberta was a far cry from its cousin south of the border. From its father it learned the care of the stock, the distinctive dress and the lingo. But its mother's traditions infused it with a distinct spirit and it became a happy synthesis of the codes of Victorian England's upper-class with those of the Great Plains frontier. As Dr. L.G. Thomas had said, "the body is American but the spirit is English."⁸

Ultimately it is the *combination* of these influences that distinguishes the Canadian cowboy from his American counterpart, and this fusion will surface in the film representations of the Alberta cowboy.

The two-decade reign of the ranching barons began to diminish as the century came to a close. With the continuous arrival of new people, farming communities sprang up, slowly taking over the grazing lands of the ranchers. French, Scandinavian, German

and Ukrainians were amongst the increasing number of non-English-speaking immigrants who arrived in the prairies. The location of the first Alberta Canadian Pacific Railway station in Calgary initially led the bulk of immigrants to settle in the southern portion of the province. But settlements soon spread north, and Edmonton surged in population in the late 1890s with the Gold Rush. Many arrived in the city as the debut of their long excursion to the Klondike. A number of the gold-seekers, both successful and not, returned to the city to settle.⁹

Yet regardless of the new influx of people, and economic shift from ranching to farming, Alberta would remain essentially rural-based for many decades. The energy industry began to diversify the economy with coal mining, and with Alberta's first series of oil discoveries in the mid-1910s.¹⁰ Even though these oil findings would end up less fruitful than hoped, and the province's optimism was soon dampened with the onset of World War I, the excitement that surrounded this oil boom is an example of Alberta's explosive economic patterns.

Calgarians had gone wild. The recently subsided land boom had bankrupted many a man, but hard on its heels came this new boom. Sure, they had been deceived by land, but now there could be no mistakes, for this was the real thing. This was the path to quick and easy fortunes; this was oil. So at the close of 1914 Calgarians were floating on rosy-tinted clouds perfumed with oil.¹¹

However, the real shift from a rural agriculturally based society to an urban industrial one corresponds to a boom of the oil and gas industry in the post-World War II years. The discovery of oil at Leduc is legendary in Alberta.

Then early in 1947, within a couple of miles of the old fur traders' Trail from Edmonton to Rocky Mountain House, the trail which almost a century earlier had had seen so many gold prospectors coming and going, Leduc No. 1 roared in. Immediately, oil companies by the dozen set off on a wild scramble to track down other pools.

Alberta's latest resource had come into its own.... The fairy godmother, still astride her ring circled Edmonton and strewed the farmers' fields with derricks, valves, and oil tanks ... Albertans lived in a dream world. Their fairy godmother added rich prizes to her benefices and dotted the Prairies and parklands with wells strewn from the 49th parallel to Cold Lake.¹²

Population soared following the boom. While the population of Canada had grown ninety-three percent by 1979 in the decades following World War II, Alberta's had grown by one hundred and sixty percent.¹³ And Alberta has continued since to gain a rapidly growing urban population, despite certain economic downturns that have slowed this growth for brief periods.

In understanding the foundation of Albertan reputation and identity, one must look towards the way in which the political, religious, and economic culture of the province are intertwined in rendering its sensibility. The unique political culture of Alberta is one of the most distinct components of the province's reputation. Albertans have traditionally elected parties that are conservative, and, moreover, who are in opposition to whatever federal government with which it coexists. However, this political tradition denotes more than mere contrary political beliefs, for it is one of the traits of Alberta's disenchantment with central Canada.

Significantly, the roots of Alberta's conservative politics can be traced back to the ranchers who first settled the province. It was in these years that Alberta formed a romantic "promised land" image; a reputation that Albertans to this day hold dear. It is the province of the self-made fortune, the frontier where adventuring and hardworking individuals became cattle kings and oil pioneers. The lifestyle and fortunes of those who lived in the Cattle Kingdom fostered a creed that championed individualism and self-reliance. The ranchers' politics and agendas were fortified with the federal

Conservatives, who held power in Ottawa during most of the ranching heyday. The Conservatives were extremely accommodating to the wishes and demands of the ranchers, offering them favorable land grants.

Thus, during the 1890s, about two hundred large-scale cattlemen controlled the region. With their business and political friends, they formed a powerful economic, social, and political elite. At the top of this hierarchy was a wealthy elite composed principally of Britons and eastern Canadians, usually with Conservative political ties.¹⁴

Moreover, the ambitious building of the railway that brought the wealthy railroad barons to Alberta and “gave a tremendous boost to ranching and to Calgary”¹⁵ was closely tied to the Conservatives as Macdonald’s primary vision for the country. Things had shifted by 1905, when Alberta was inaugurated as a province under Wilfrid Laurier’s Liberal federal leadership. The newly organized Alberta provincial Liberals included a number of prominent Alberta citizens, who chose Alexander Rutherford, a lawyer from Strathcona, as their leader. In a survey of the political history of Alberta, Ernest Watkins describes the early Liberal regime as a result of the federal Liberals’ orchestration, using its power to attract Alberta’s popular public figures as members, and therefore accessing more control of the young province.

Over the whole period of this survey the policy of the Liberal hierarchy in Ottawa towards the Liberals in Alberta has shown a remarkable consistency. Its paramount objective has been to use this organization, and the energies of its supporters, to win and hold political power for the federal party, in votes, in parliamentary seats and in financial contributions, and the interests, ambitions and expectations of the party in the provincial field have been kept subordinate to these requirements.¹⁶

Although the federal influence in these years is relevant, other factors also played a major role in provincial politics. The provincial Conservatives during these years were

led by future Prime Minister R.B. Bennett, a man who, despite strong partisanship to the party, possessed a character that set off many. "The major cause of the malaise in the party was the presence, and the ambiguity, of R.B. Bennett ... Bennett was ... outwardly brilliantly successful, inwardly unsure, vacillating in his choice of objectives."¹⁷ Bennett was not the warmest of personalities, and an association with CPR (as a lawyer) did not improve his standing with the settlers, who held animosity towards the power-wielding institution. While the facilitation that the CPR initially brought to ranching was positive, the dependence that the later tide of settlers had on the railway would lead to many negative effects. Settlers situated businesses and farms in relation to the planned railways. Oftentimes, the CPR would change their agendas, leaving newly established farmers and business operators stranded. In the ambition to build a transcontinental railway, Macdonald's Conservatives granted the CPR great authority. Alberta settlers were at the mercy of the corporation, dependent on the location and toll decisions of the CPR.

Under the terms of the contract signed with the Canadian government in 1880, the Canadian Pacific syndicate received, among other concessions, a subsidy of \$25 million and 25 million acres ... of land. In addition ... their freight rates were temporarily free of government regulations, and a monopoly clause promised for twenty years, stipulated that no other rail line was to be constructed on the prairies south of the CPR main line.... While the generous terms of the contract seemed necessary at the time to get the railway built, they would for generations be a major source of grievance for prairie farmers, who felt they had to pay for the government's generosity.¹⁸

Despite "few real ideological differences between the Liberals and Conservatives"¹⁹ in early Alberta politics, the Liberals did strongly support the farmers, who in turn were taking over the territory of Conservative-supporting ranchers. "The Conservatives believed in the national policy and high tariffs, while Liberals believed in

free trade. The farmers who displaced the ranchers found the Liberals, with their free trade views, more sympathetic to farmers.”²⁰ This position advanced the Liberals into power by the recent influx of immigrants wishing to establish farms. Meanwhile, the Conservative tendencies of the ranchers were aligned with a pro-British contention that was more critical of lenient immigration regulations.²¹ In examining these early tendencies, a portrait emerges of a province with a strong Conservative heritage in the affluent ranch and railway barons who first dominated the province, followed by the multicultural settlers whose goals were strongly backed by the federal Liberals. As it will be demonstrated, this dialectic appears throughout Alberta’s history, and its influence becomes apparent on the illustrations of the Alberta cowboy.

The election of the provincial Liberals would usher in another distinct tradition of Alberta politics. Albertans have tended to elect leaderships with persistent and lengthy public support, only to be suddenly wiped out within one election by another party.

In the boom period of early settlement, and during World War I and the years immediately after, the Liberals were ascendant. They were replaced in 1921 by the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA), a dynamic farmers’ cooperative movement. The UFA collapsed in 1935, when the scandal-ridden party was swept aside by a Social Credit landslide. During Social Credits thirty-six-year reign, the voices of rural and smalltown Alberta dominated provincial politics. This era ended abruptly in 1971, when the movement was overpowered by an urban-based Conservative party.²²

The UFA was a farmers’ organization begun in 1909. The birth of this party symbolizes an important aspect of the Alberta political culture. While it signals one of the first explicit affronts to central Canada, it also stands as the political embodiment of a balance between independence and collectivism that would find its way into the cinematic image

of the cowboy. The UFA would answer to the topic of tariffs and trade issues that were at the forefront of Albertans' concerns.

Above all classes in Alberta, however, the farmers were in an anomalous and at times an unenviable position.... And in Alberta, as on the prairies generally, in their eyes at least, they groaned under a system where an eastern oligarchy called all the shots and collected all the tribute. They were merely a part of a larger Canada which naturally was ruled by a more populous East to which they had to turn for both capital and markets. They had to borrow the one at the prices demanded by the East and sell the other at whatever the East would pay.²³

Despite the provincial and federal efforts at answering these concerns, the farmers' dissatisfaction grew into agitation. As the 1910s continued, the UFA became highly influenced through a partnership with the American Non-Partisan League, who encouraged the UFA to take more direct political action.²⁴ The UFA answered to the sentiments of alienation growing amongst the mostly rural based province, whose residents were feeling their concerns to be unnoticed and misunderstood by the traditional parties.

Thousands of Alberta farmers began to feel a common sense of exploitation and grievance, and a common determination to change their status. The ideas of eastern Canadian agrarianism, American populism, and the British cooperative movement fused with frontier economic and social conditions to produce a politically uncontrollable force that erupted dramatically during the latter years of the Great War.²⁵

In the 1921 election, the UFA won a large majority of the ridings in the province. The party was based on a belief in the need for more cooperative forms of leadership, that the current mode of governing consisted of traditional parties with biased goals who were unconcerned with the real issues of the people. This commencement of partiality to non-established political parties flourished in Alberta for a number of reasons. Aside from the feelings of emotional and geographical distance from the ruling style of the traditional

parties, the still young province in the early 1920s housed many new immigrants who held unformed partisan ties. "The large proportion of immigrants, without strong ties to the national parties, encouraged independent thought. Immigrants often brought with them radical ideas of a new, cooperative, and egalitarian society."²⁶ Despite the unique set of circumstances that came together in the creation and reign of the UFA, it would not be the only new political party Alberta would deliver. And the merging of independent thought with cooperative spirit found in the movement would return with these new parties.

As Alberta entered the 1930s, the popularity of the UFA began to dwindle. The UFA's inability to answer the economic problems of Albertans suffering from the Depression lead voters away. Some voters began turning to other forms of radical politics, including a growing popularity of communist and socialist groups.

Canada's Red revolution ... came much closer to success than many Canadians later in the century would realize. Its peak in the early Thirties would see hundreds of Alberta farmers marching behind the hammer-and-sickle flags of international Communism, strikes, riots, and skulls routinely cracked by police truncheons at Edmonton, Calgary, Drumheller and a dozen other centers, and finally a march on Ottawa by the unemployed of the West that would be stopped dead at Regina under a hail of gunfire from the RCMP.²⁷

While such movements offer evidence of an Alberta political culture that is not so easily definable as conservative, UFA's decision to join the socialist organization Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in 1932 has been cited as a contributor to their demise.

"Some historians have argued that the radicalism of the CCF alienated Albertans, who then turned to Social Credit as a less radical and more concrete means of dealing with the Depression."²⁸ Ultimately, it was a number of scandals in the personal lives of prominent

UFA members that led to its political demise, including a sex scandal involving Premier Brownlee. In 1935, the UFA was cleared out of office by a new radical movement called Social Credit.

The election of the Social Credit party in Alberta is one of the most studied periods of the province's history. In fact, "Social Credit is one of the most studied phenomena in Canadian history."²⁹

The election of the most radically minded government ever to hold office in Canada or perhaps even the United States. The unexpected victory of an upstart political movement was summed up by a headline in the *Boston Herald*: "Alberta Goes Crazy."³⁰

In 1932 William Aberhart was introduced to the theory of Social Credit, an economic theory of Major C.H. Douglas which attempted to remedy low economic periods in capitalist systems.

Social Credit principles included a monetary theory that explained the inner workings of capitalism and offered a remedy for its unsatisfactory functioning in periods of economic depression. According to Douglas and his famous A plus B theorem, the paradox of "poverty in the midst of plenty" could be ended by printing and distributing "social dividends".³¹

Why would Albertans be moved to accept such a radical party? As with the creation of the UFA, which answered more directly to the needs of a mostly rural-based Alberta than the existing traditional parties, Social Credit was a more direct answer to Depression-weary Albertans. But most important, was the message of Social Credit brought to them by the charismatic William "Bible Bill" Aberhart.

Although we will never be able to recapture the motivations of those who joined Social Credit or voted for the party.... The Great Depression did much of the work in preparing the people. Then the teacher, Aberhart, finished the job when he explained social-credit ideas.³²

When William Aberhart became a proponent of Social Credit, he was a Calgary High School principal, Bible College founder, and a popular radio-evangelist. He began discussing the theory on his evangelical radio broadcasts in the early 1930s, and implemented the theory in the classes of his Calgary Bible College as well, weaving the economic theory with Christian principals. The medium of radio had an enormous role in Aberhart's ability to propagate his message to a still largely rural-based province. The radio accessed a vast audience, and through it his message could be carried to rural residents. Moreover, Aberhart's already established position as a trusted evangelist through the popularity of his radio program allowed him further opportunity to impact people. "Aberhart's new message of good and evil, hope and salvation, soon attracted followers who accepted him as a political leader as well as a religious one."³³ Enormous controversy surrounds Social Credit, both the theory itself, and the way in which Aberhart applied it to Alberta. The responses to the movement have run the gamut, and seem to demonstrate the almost "infinitely malleable"³⁴ nature of Alberta Social Credit.

They have portrayed it as a monetary-reform movement, a farmers' party, a religious crusade, a secular millenarian movement, a progressive party, a right-wing populist movement, a left-wing populist movement, and, most enduringly, a western protest party.³⁵

Once again, a combination of the ideals of both individualism and collectivism emerges in Alberta. And while the explanations of what exactly the theory stood for is endless, perhaps it is within these contradictions that Depression-weary Albertans were able to find an alternative from the traditional answers being offered.

Social Credit, as an alternative to both socialism and capitalism, could appeal to almost all sectors of the population. Douglas's theories did not advocate overthrowing capitalism, but rather controlling the financial interests who had usurped power. These views enabled Douglas (and Aberhart) to uphold private ownership

and enterprise while denouncing those aspects of capitalism – such as the concentration of economic power – that were widely disliked by farmers and the urban middle and working classes.³⁶

Whatever the reason for the party's popularity, the 1935 election would usher in a highly influential political period of the province's history, as the radical religious-economic political party led the province for the next thirty-five years. In the end, the effectiveness of Aberhart's approach to solving the economic crisis of the Great Depression was never really tested. While Aberhart struggled to make his social credit system work, the arrival of World War II brought the province out of financial hardship, and shifted Albertans' focus to national concerns. Aberhart died in 1943, and leadership was passed to his longtime protégé, Ernest Manning. The World War II period of transition would have enormous impact on the orientation of Alberta Social Credit.

It is difficult to judge what would have become of the Social Credit party, or Alberta in general, had there not been the massive oil discovery at Leduc in 1947. The discovery ushered in immense capital, and allowed the province to develop, affirm, and some might say return, to a conservative approach to politics. Ernest Manning moved the eccentric, radical Social Credit party to a right-wing style of politics that appears to remain today, despite the change of leadership to the Progressive Conservatives in 1971.

It was this unheard of wealth that kept the Manning administration, which began just before the great oil strike at Leduc and ended with Manning's retirement at the peak of Alberta prosperity in 1968, in power so long. It could maintain its politically unique status, achieved during the thirties, because it could afford such eccentric tastes. In a sense, Alberta's bumper crops, its cattle, its coal and other minerals, and especially its oil and gas, were the fulfillment of the Moses-like prophecies of Aberhart and Manning. The dream had always been there, or at least since the lure of the Klondike in 1898, which in part put the province of Alberta and the city of Edmonton on the map. Alberta's emblem may be the wild rose, but its flagpole is the oil derrick.³⁷

Manning's leadership was characterized by social and political conservatism. While Social Credit retained strong support throughout the thirty-five-year reign, and Manning himself remained extremely popular, the transfer of leadership in 1968 to rancher Harry Strom led the Party into their final three years of leadership. However, the newly elected Progressive Conservatives were not very different from their Social Credit predecessors, sharing a very conservative stance. What the Progressive Conservatives offered Albertans was fresh blood, and young dynamic leaders who were more appropriate to the now mostly urban and worldlier Alberta. The leader of the Progressive Conservatives was Peter Lougheed, a lawyer and ex-football player who was raised in Alberta and educated at Harvard. Lougheed had the fresh energy and charisma Albertans desired. He initiated moves that led the province to more direct monetary returns from the lucrative oil industry. Moreover, his aggressiveness would make him a "spokesperson for a new Alberta" giving a "voice to Albertans' frustrated pride and their determination to be taken seriously on the national stage."³⁸

Because of his stand on the price Alberta should get for its oil, Premier Peter Lougheed immediately became the *bête noire* of eastern Canada. The old rift between the East and the prairie province widened. Lougheed was dubbed "The Blue-Eyed Sheik," and classed with the Arabian leaders who had upset the oil pricing apple-cart and precipitated North America's "Energy Crisis." He and Prime Minister Trudeau squared off for a battle of political strength.³⁹

While the Progressive Conservatives are now entering their third decade of provincial power, it has not always been steady. The 1980s saw many changes from the 1970s, as an economic bust hit Alberta in the early part of the decade. Leader Don Getty was also far less popular than Lougheed had been. The economic slowdown, and the federal leadership of the Progressive Conservatives during much of the 1980s, shifted

priorities away from national-provincial relations. Throughout the reign of the provincial Progressive Conservatives, the party has maintained a political conservatism that encourages low-taxes and tends to discourage provincial spending on such things as social programs. This economic orientation was evident with an aggressive government-spending cutback strategy of a newly elected leader, Ralph Klein, in the early 1990s. Despite far-reaching consequences for many with his drastic cutbacks to social programs and services, public jobs and salaries, Klein has remained popular, as he currently serves his third term. And as the province enters the 21st century, Albertans continue to show enormous support for politically conservative groups and figures that bear many of the same markings of past leadership.

In Alberta's political development, a number of distinct characteristics emerge that are relevant to understanding the Alberta ethos. The political parties that have been elected demonstrate the province's strong sense of alienation from central Canada. This is most obvious with the UFA and Social Credit movement, when Albertans fervently accepted new political parties, in lieu of the traditional parties. One would assume that the last thirty-year reign of the provincial Progressive Conservatives would decrease this alienation. In fact, the current leader of the federal Progressive Conservatives is Joe Clark, an Albertan. However, that Albertans still feel distant from the traditional federal parties is evident in the creation of the Reform / Alliance party in the late 1980s. Once again, Alberta nurtured and delivered a new political party. This time the party expanded throughout the west. News reports in Alberta surrounding the retirement of the Alliance founder, Preston Manning (son of Social Credit premier Ernest Manning), reveal the

continued alienation of western Canadians, and the expression of this through their support of the Alliance.

Manning ... Wasn't the first western Canadian to found a new party, but he was the first to nurture a party of western protest into the official Opposition. The raw material for this was a keenly felt alienation in Western Canada.... Central was a widely held belief that there was no place for honest conservatives to park their vote.... The PCs ... were a huge disappointment to the west, conservative in name only and practicing the same brokerage politics as the Liberals.⁴⁰

The Alliance party also shares another tradition of Alberta politics, and that is a tie between the party and fundamentalist Christianity. This association may be traced most clearly to the Social Credit movement with its fundamentalist Christian leaders. William "Bible Bill" Aberhart, was an evangelist who weaved his economic and political theory with Christian ethics. Ernest Manning was the first graduate of Aberhart's Calgary Bible College, and was very openly dedicated to his faith. However, a number of the UFA officials were also very religious, adhering to somewhat unorthodox religious movements. UFA leader Henry Wise Wood "belonged to the Disciples of Christ, a denomination that emphasized the need for Christian ethics in economic affairs."⁴¹ The political unrest that surfaced while the UFA was in power included movements of social gospel. These movements were largely based in the efforts of Anglo-Protestants to refine the rough and tough Canadian frontier through attempts to institute prohibition and eliminate prostitution.⁴² The UFA stood behind the prohibition decree, and its implementation from 1916 until 1923 demonstrates the tie of religious life in Alberta to the public sphere at that time. Although the current Progressive Conservative provincial party is secular, the bond of Alberta politics to evangelical Christian beliefs continues today with the province's federal choice of the Alliance party. While any religious and

political agendas of the party are not directly anchored, the personal affiliation to evangelical churches of many members, including both past leaders Preston Manning and Stockwell Day, are closely associated with their public personas. Moreover, the right-wing views of the party do reflect a certain Christian fundamentalist strain of moral beliefs. Such affiliations between religious and political institutions figure prominently in the perception of Alberta as a Canadian Bible Belt. But is this perception accurate?

Alberta has certainly been host to a number of unorthodox religious movements, including large and long-existing Mormon and Hutterite communities. And with the arrival of multiple ethnic groups to the province in the settlement years, Alberta developed a mosaic of religions. However, many of the denominations brought by settlers are not reflective of the proclaimed evangelical garden of Alberta.

Despite Alberta's reputation as a center for religious eccentricity and fundamentalism, the vast majority of the population in the province's formative years belonged to religious groups with which Canadians were already very familiar.... Most of the fundamentalist sects were brought by immigrants from the rural American Midwest.... The strong degree of lay participation and informality, and the close social bonds in the sects, harmonized with the social ideals and needs of frontier society.⁴³

During the 1920s in particular the evangelical movement would grow more prolific in the lives of Albertans with radio evangelism, which allowed the evangelists to easily communicate to the largely rural province. There were also a number of fundamentalist Bible schools opened across the province. This included the Prairie Bible Institute at Three Hills, which was and remains one of the largest and most important Evangelical Bible Colleges in North America.⁴⁴ And perhaps most significant is the position of Alberta's evangelical sects in recent decades. Whereas the mainline churches in Alberta have declined in members, the evangelical churches, and other "unorthodox conservative

groups,” are thriving.⁴⁵ But what is important to remember, is that despite the relatively strong history of evangelical sects in Alberta, such churches have only ever claimed about ten percent of the population. And the strength of evangelical sects in recent years appears more prominent because of the comparative “decline in size and strength of the mainline denominations.”⁴⁶ In truth, much of the present public support for the Alliance comes from a very secular population. Ultimately, most of the vote is based on the party’s conservative stance, a position that also happens to be shared by evangelical Christians. Most Albertans likely find that the platforms of western protest, and social-economic conservatism, simply outweigh any religious tie.

It is the apparent consistency of Albertans’ political choices that make the political history instrumental to understanding the province. The strongly conservative social-economic leanings, lack of partisanship to Canada’s traditional political parties, and sentiments of alienation, are all long-existing Alberta traditions. Of course, even Alberta is not completely uniform, and the province had its share of leftist and progressive movements. Even in a retirement letter from Preston Manning to the city of Calgary, the Reform / Alliance founder notes the roots of socialist group CCF as an example of Calgary’s openness to new political ideas. This reveals how the “extreme right” has, in fact, the same source as the “extreme left” – in an Alberta political environment that resists the middle-ground politics of eastern Canada.

Historically, Calgary contributed to the birth of both the new political parties born out of the Great Depression. It was the home base of William Aberhart and the Social Credit movement.... Several of the key organizational meetings that led to the birth of the Canadian Commonwealth Federation [sic] and the proclamation of the Regina Manifesto were held in Calgary.⁴⁷

Alberta was home to a number of labor movements over the years, with communist and socialist groups attracting many Albertans during the Great Depression. The collective approach of the UFA, and more significantly, the Social Credit, demonstrate a certain rejection of capitalist orders. “Although under Manning Social Credit became increasingly conservative ... it cannot be assumed that because Social Credit became a right-wing movement that it began as one.”⁴⁸

Another important movement in Alberta that somewhat counters a uniformly conservative province is the important feminist advancements that emerged from the province. The most prominent example of this is the “famous five,” five women from Alberta who were pioneers in Canada’s suffrage movement of the 1910s. Yet often, examples of liberal movements in Alberta seemed to only reaffirm conservative ideals. Even if the “famous five” were pushing to advance the status of women, the group was oriented towards a decidedly Anglo-Saxon audience, and in retrospect their stance is marked by a tone of exclusivity. Although the extremity of this ranged between the leaders and groups, some strains were profound. “Some leaders of women’s groups were caught up in the pseudo-scientific eugenics movement, which demanded immigration restriction and the compulsory sterilization of the ‘feeble-minded.’”⁴⁹ While Social Credit may have rejected capitalist ideals, the almost pathological de-emphasis that the party placed on their socialist aspects are contradictory. The early years of Social Credit reveal a party and a people that accepted the socialist solutions offered during such a time as the Great Depression, yet wanted to believe they were standing by conservative ideals. This is perhaps most humorously evident in the story of William Aberhart, an ardent

evangelical Christian and anticommunist, who solicited a communist acquaintance, Henry B. Hill, for help in understanding Douglas's theory.

Ironically, the man who explained Social Credit to Aberhart was at that time a dedicated Communist.... Driving Aberhart home one day, he pointed out that what his passenger proposed was the forerunner of a socialistic state. "He was angry; I was a Red. It was a waste of health to argue with him," writes Hill. "He had a real horror of socialism or communism and wouldn't hear them spoken of. They were anti-Christ or something, and that was that. The old fool."⁵⁰

These examples of Alberta's contradictory nature are extreme. However, they demonstrate that while Alberta is a mosaic of people, politics, and religion, there remains a pull in the province's self-image towards a frontier-minded, individualist-oriented society. The diversity of the province is evident in the progressive movements that have occurred. Yet despite the circulation of these radical thoughts and opinions, there is a continuous and overwhelming presence of social conservatism. The cowboy represents these ideals, and this is why Albertans try to conserve this image, even if it is slowly fading away.

David Carpenter notes a characteristic of Alberta writers to use "the backdrop of a story in which there is a poignant sense of loss."⁵¹ If there is any cultural event in Alberta that reflects nostalgia for the past it is the Calgary Stampede. The yearly event has become an icon of both Calgary and Alberta.

In 1912, a wandering promoter, Guy Weadick, perceived that in Calgary he had found the three ingredients which if touched by his showman's magic would combine to make one of the world's greatest spectacles: a ranching environment, wealthy men deeply loyal to their background, and a populace steeped in the rich lore of their region.⁵²

Each year, for two weeks, Albertans revisit their frontier heritage with a mix of world-class rodeo events, chuckwagon races, midway rides, agricultural events, and country

music. The other important component is a celebration of Native culture through the performance of native dances and ceremonies, and even the existence of an “Indian Village” right on the Stampede grounds. “The Stampede was a celebration of an era that had been shaped by two sharply contrasting ways of life: that of the self-sufficient Plains Indians and that of the ranching community.”⁵³ The year of the Calgary Stampede’s inception is highly significant. By 1912, the preeminent reign of the cattlemen was coming to a close, and the Calgary Stampede became a farewell and a salute to Alberta’s cowboy roots.

It is ironic, but not surprising, that the Calgary Stampede, the symbol of the Alberta cattle industry, should have been born in 1912, when ranching had been replaced by farming as the major industry in southern Alberta. The Stampede was an exercise in nostalgia for a declining ranching industry, and for a frontier West that was being supplanted by settlers and cities.⁵⁴

The Alberta sensibility is highlighted in its contrasts to neighboring Saskatchewan, the hotbed of collectivist tradition. David Carpenter distinguishes a differing ethos of the two provinces in terms of their opposing circumstances. This is primarily rooted in the harsher experiences of Saskatchewan that gave way to a need for cooperative efforts. However, the prosperity that has permeated Alberta’s economic history yielded experiences of romanticism and fanciful hopes. Carpenter articulates this with an excerpt of Edward McCourt’s travel book *Saskatchewan*.

The Saskatchewan man has thus been shaped by a sterner physical environment than that of most Canadians. Having been compelled to adapt himself to that environment, he has made his own rules for survival and looks with suspicion on traditional values cherished in softer lands. He tends to take a less optimistic view of life than do his neighbors, particularly those who live in Alberta.⁵⁵

Although shifts in politics and economy occurred, the prosperity of Alberta, perhaps most

significantly through their oil, has allowed the province to uplift and maintain a romantic memory of the early ranchers. But even with Alberta's rosier history, they too are certainly affected by the harsh territory, and this too impresses the ideals of their cowboy image. Implicit in their memory is a figure that embodies the strong, peaceful cowboy, who tackles the daunting range with resilience, dedication, and hard work. A recent depiction of this image accompanies the retirement of Reform / Alliance party founder Preston Manning. In an open letter to Calgarians, Manning parts with the words, "Please don't ever lose that innovative and pioneering spirit."⁵⁶ With the letter appeared a caricature of Manning on a horse, wearing a cowboy hat, riding off into the sunset. This is the story of David and Goliath, the lone cowboy (Manning / Alberta) who fought against the big and powerful easterners.

Contemporary Alberta is a province of multiple contradictions. While the province's wealthy economy continues to attract high numbers of new and diverse residents from across Canada and the world, there remains in Alberta a dedication to its cultural and political traditions. The province is host to artistic and cultural events, institutions, and figures that range from radical to conservative. However, despite the evidence of a progressively diversified and sophisticated region in its interests, a frontier heritage seems to shadow the province of Alberta. The following chapters will show how this complicated culture illustrates its cherished cowboy symbol.

Notes

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- ² Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, *Alberta, A New History* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1990), 31.
- ³ Palmer and Palmer, 30.
- ⁴ Palmer and Palmer, 35.
- ⁵ Palmer and Palmer, 51.
- ⁶ Palmer and Palmer, 53.
- ⁷ James MacGregor, *A History of Alberta* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1981), 130.
- ⁸ MacGregor, 130.
- ⁹ Palmer and Palmer, 137.
- ¹⁰ Palmer and Palmer, 164.
- ¹¹ MacGregor, 222.
- ¹² MacGregor, 290-292.
- ¹³ MacGregor, 298.
- ¹⁴ Palmer and Palmer, 54.
- ¹⁵ Palmer and Palmer, 58.
- ¹⁶ Ernest Watkins, *The Golden Province: A Political History of Alberta* (Calgary: Sandstone Publishing Ltd., 1980), 31.
- ¹⁷ Watkins, 40.
- ¹⁸ Palmer and Palmer, 59.
- ¹⁹ Palmer and Palmer, 136.
- ²⁰ Palmer and Palmer, 136.
- ²¹ Palmer and Palmer, 137.
- ²² Palmer and Palmer, viii.
- ²³ MacGregor, 251-252.
- ²⁴ Palmer and Palmer, 194.
- ²⁵ Palmer and Palmer, 153.
- ²⁶ Palmer and Palmer, 153.
- ²⁷ Ted Byfield, ed., *Alberta in the 20th Century, Vol. 6, Fury and Futility: The Onset of the Great Depression* (Edmonton: United Western Communications Ltd. 1998), 48.
- ²⁸ Palmer and Palmer, 255.
- ²⁹ Bob Hesketh, *Major Douglas and Alberta Social Credit* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 3.
- ³⁰ Byfield, 305.
- ³¹ Palmer and Palmer, 258.
- ³² Hesketh, 64.
- ³³ Palmer and Palmer, 259.
- ³⁴ Hesketh, 3.
- ³⁵ Hesketh, 3.
- ³⁶ Palmer and Palmer, 259.
- ³⁷ Carpenter, 13.
- ³⁸ Palmer and Palmer, 327.
- ³⁹ MacGregor, 304.
- ⁴⁰ Editorial "Hail and Farewell," *The Calgary Herald*, January 31st 2002, Sec. A, p. 20.
- ⁴¹ Palmer and Palmer, 183.
- ⁴² Palmer and Palmer, 173.
- ⁴³ Palmer and Palmer, 103.
- ⁴⁴ Palmer and Palmer, 242.
- ⁴⁵ Palmer and Palmer, 336.
- ⁴⁶ Palmer and Palmer, 337.
- ⁴⁷ Preston Manning, "My Heart and Thoughts Will be With You," *The Calgary Herald*, January 31st 2002, Sec. A, p. 21.
- ⁴⁸ Palmer and Palmer, 277.
- ⁴⁹ Palmer and Palmer, 182.
- ⁵⁰ Byfield, 307.
- ⁵¹ Carpenter, 15.

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- ⁵² MacGregor, 224.
⁵³ Palmer and Palmer, 126.
⁵⁴ Palmer and Palmer, 125.
⁵⁵ Carpenter, 11.
⁵⁶ Manning, "My Heart and Thoughts Will be With You."

Chapter 2

Documentary I – The Alberta Cowboy Films of Colin Low

In the previous chapter, the forces behind Alberta's devotion to its cowboy heritage were examined. Yet to fully understand the Alberta cowboy, the nature of its illustration must be determined as well. Colin Low is one of the most prolific filmmakers in English Canadian cinema. Describing Low as an "Alberta filmmaker" is somewhat complicated, considering that the two hundred films on which he has collaborated cover a variety of topics that often had nothing to do with Alberta. But what does make Low's works about Alberta significant is his own background as an Albertan. And the fact that Low was raised on a ranch in southern Alberta makes his documentaries illustrating the Alberta cowboy particularly interesting. Three such films are *Corral*, *Circle of Sun*, and *Standing Alone*.¹ Each of these films explores the Alberta cowboy culture, and offers an intricate representation of the cowboy figure.

It is appropriate to begin a discussion on Alberta cowboy films with Low's *Corral*. The film is a Canadian classic, the recipient of awards and praise. The documentary also emerged from an important cycle in Canadian cinema, a product of the National Film Board's Unit B during its highly celebrated 1950s and 1960s period. Peter Harcourt identifies the weight of these films to Canadian cinema.

For Unit B in particular, their most creative period occurred between 1953 and 1962. During this time, they produced film after film that won prizes throughout the world but which are virtually unknown to the majority of Canadians. Little known as they were, all these films were investigating the very quintessence of Canadian life: just what it really means to be Canadian.²

Corral begins with a cowboy riding across the southern Alberta landscape, herding horses into a corral. He works carefully at breaking a spirited horse, eventually mounting it for a high-speed ride through the foothills, with the magnificent Rocky Mountains in the background. The only accompanying sounds are the quiet and simple guitar chords of a musical score composed by Eldon Rathburn. In an interview with *Take One*, Low discussed how the project, his first non-animated film, came about:

Because the sedentary life of an animator drove me crazy most of the time, coming from the kind of background I came from. I used to get homesick for the West and especially for my family. *Corral* was a summer holiday that I cooked up with Wolf (Koenig), who loved the idea of taking a 35mm camera out West.³

When asked by the interviewer about the relation of the film to his background, Low responds:

I spent my childhood on horseback. I rode to school, I knew the cowboy in the film when he was a small boy. So I knew what it was like to be on a horse and half of the film I spent rounding up and looking after the horses. My father turned 40 head of horses over to us.... *Corral* came out of my background and looking back I had found that stuff really quite boring. A year before shooting I saw Wally Jensen (the cowboy in the film) on his horse in the rain with his dog delivering cattle to auction. Five hundred head of cattle; suddenly, I saw him very differently.⁴

Harcourt's description of the Unit B films as "the very quintessence of Canadian life," and Low's inside knowledge of the Alberta ranching world, make the film's representation of the Alberta cowboy key in understanding the way the figure has been articulated.

In his history of the NFB, Gary Evans describes *Corral* as "one of the purest statements of the great Canadian western myth: a humble, revolverless cowboy becomes

part of a corner of the wilderness and leaves his imprint upon the world more by accommodation than by conquest.”⁵ The film’s cowboy does convey a certain mythic property. The use of 35mm black and white film captures the cowboy, his animals, and the landscape, with great clarity and depth, generating a majestic character. The camera angles framing the cowboy are often low, creating a “larger than life” aura. The activities documented also emphasize the mighty nature of the cowboy, as he masters the wild horse. These elements, combined with the absence of any spoken narration, and the quiet and unassuming musical score, bestow on *Corral* a poetic and lyrical quality. While the representation of the cowboy in *Corral* may be romantic, it does not contain the excessiveness of Hollywood western heroes. There remains an unmistakable simplicity in *Corral*’s cowboy and his way of life. This is not a cowboy who would be involved in a gunfight at high noon. This cowboy is too preoccupied with the quiet and precise dedication of his trade.

L.G. Thomas, an authority on Western Canadian history, always asserted that the “Canadian West was not the ‘wild and woolly West,’ so beloved of dime novelists.... Rather ... the pioneer society of Canada’s West was generally peaceful, orderly, well-defined, and highly structured.”⁶ In detailing the cowboy tradition in the early ranching days of Alberta, Edward Brado addresses the distorted view on the extent of gun use in the old west.

According to the popular image, no self-respecting cowboy would venture forth without his trusty ‘gun’ (the North West term for six shooter). Guns were far less common than generally portrayed by later books and films, even in the United States for they simply got in the way of a busy, working cowboy. If a cowboy did in fact own a six-shooter, he usually left it in his bedroll at the camp wagon or back in the bunkhouse. Nevertheless there were plenty of guns

of all sorts, as might be expected on any frontier. While the six-shooter originated with the early Texans in their wars with Indians because it was a weapon which could be discharged from a fast-moving horse, the principle use of the weapon during the ranching period in Canada was killing varmints, not humans.⁷

In these descriptions there is a pull towards a perception of the Canadian frontier as one that is peaceful. Moreover, this depiction is emphasized implicitly in its difference from the American western myth. These accounts support Evans' citation of the Canadian cowboy myth, and *Corral*'s expression of that figure, as "humble" and "revolverless." Contrary to the nomadic and violent lifestyle that signifies the American western hero, a key component to *Corral*'s cowboy is the dedication and expertise in working his ranch. This seems consistent with the leanings of scholars who point to the Canadian frontier as distinctly orderly. The view of the well-structured, transplanted-British ranching culture would seem in alliance with a portrait of the gentle, work-oriented cowboy. Ranching in Canada was a less explosive experience, considering the extensive government control and presence of the NWMP. But perhaps this obedient character is somewhat false, or at least exaggerated.

The reputation of the Canadian west as orderly is primarily ascribed to the presence of law enforcement. While the NWMP may have resulted in a more controlled society than in the United States, it does not necessarily mean that the circumstances of a frontier environment were eradicated.

The "tame" image is also a reflection of a widespread belief that certain forces of law and order were at work in western Canada that were missing on most frontiers, in particular those south of the forty-ninth parallel... The police symbolized the government's full commitment to the western hinterland. They spearheaded an extensive, determined, and unrelenting metropolitan influence. As a result, Canadian cattlemen did not have to fight for possession of their

land... The fact that the Mounties secured property, this view maintains, did much to create the peaceful environment upon which the ranching industry in western Canada could rise and prosper... The lease system also receives credit: initially it facilitated a peaceful occupation of the land, and it afforded the dominion government a strong source of control over a fledgling society.⁸

Although the imposition of law and regulation by the federal government led to a more controlled ranching industry, the difficult nature of working and living in the wilderness must be acknowledged as well. And while the conditions of law and order are evident in *Corral*'s representation, so too is the influence of a vigorous frontier situation.

Corral is documenting the quintessential duty of a rancher: rounding and taming wild horses. And the nature and context of that work evoke the rest of Evans's description, that *Corral*'s cowboy "becomes part of a corner of the wilderness and leaves his imprint upon the world more by accommodation than by conquest." A key detail in *Corral*'s cowboy representation is the way the hero's isolation is figured. Of course, many American cowboy figures are "loners," and vast landscapes such as Monument Valley have become trademarks of American western films. However, the isolation of Low's cowboy is emphasized by his solitary work in a massive landscape void of any other signs of civilization. There is no wild frontier town, or the impending threat of Indians. *Corral* emphasizes the beauty and immensity of the Alberta landscape, but also the overwhelming nature of it. The attention Low pays to the landscape, and the clarity of the 35mm film, reveal the imposing Rocky Mountains, the vast and unconquered rolling foothills, and the mighty "big sky" crown. Even the animals of the film act as undomesticated extensions of the wilderness. The Alberta cowboy of *Corral* is not paired with a tamed and reliable partner named Trigger. Instead, he must confront spirited, wild horses. This is our Canadian frontier: vast and overwhelming. And with

this *Corral* holds somewhat of a contradiction to the perspective of a highly organized ranching culture.

Corral is drawing strong attention to the Alberta cowboy's frontier situation.

L.G. Thomas downplayed the concept of an environmental influence in the shaping of Canada's frontier culture.

The essence of the environmentalist view of history seems to me to be that, no matter what human ingredients you put into the environmental pudding bowl, they will emerge, given the passage of generations, homogenized into a particular type.... To generalize is often to oversimplify, and this is a step towards homogenization, something which is the essence of Canadianism to resist.⁹

While Thomas's assertion is fair in its efforts to avoid oversimplification, perhaps he pays too little attention to the effects of living in the harsh frontier environment.

Historian Warren M. Elofson contests the dismissal of a Canadian frontier mentality, and addresses the particular influence of Thomas, and scholar David Breen, on the lack of credit given to it.

My main purpose is to offer serious resistance to views about the ranching frontier that have gained currency amongst academics and been disseminated to the general reading public.... The first is that the frontier environment itself made a comparatively minor impact on the society that participated in the ranching industry. This argument did not originate from, but it has, at least inadvertently, been bolstered in recent years by two major ranching authorities. First, it is implied in L.G. Thomas's seminal work *Rancher's Legacy*. Thomas depicts the families in the High River area as British and eastern members of polite society who looked after their lands with minimal physical effort and spent their leisure hours attending polo matches, grand European balls, and turf club gatherings. Substantial support for his depiction has come from the prodigious research of David Breen.¹⁰

Elofson does not disregard the importance of Thomas's and Breen's historical works, nor does he dismiss the relevance of a more orderly society on the Canadian frontier.

However, he does point out the need to acknowledge the intrinsic influence of a frontier environment.

The problem is not that these two historians are wrong but that their conclusions have been pushed too far. Because they demonstrate that Old World Cultural, legal, and political influences were stronger on the Canadian than the American side, other scholars have deduced that the power of the frontier environment was weak and that western Canadian ranching society had an extraordinarily deep respect for the law. It is those points alone that are contested here through two basic arguments. The first is that while the frontier may have made a less substantive mark in some respects on Canadian than on American ranching, its impact was nonetheless profound. The second is that while many Canadians may have shown more regard for authority than their American counterparts, they at times behaved in an astonishingly undisciplined and intemperate ways.¹¹

Although this statement does not appear directly relevant to *Corral*, considering its very humble representation of the cowboy, Elofson's desire to bring together both the tough elements of frontier life and the influence of a more structured and law-abiding society is fundamental to understand the film's illustration. "Indeed, until it is bridged modern historiography will not be able to claim to have offered a sophisticated portrayal of ranching society in the Canadian West nor to have precisely outlined what was in fact 'uniquely Canadian' about it."¹² The bridge between the frontier and law-abiding society appears in Low's cowboy illustration. The fusion is best depicted in the climax of the film, with the cowboy taming the wild horse, and then taking it for a thrilling ride through the foothills. In this act, the cowboy brings a firm, but respectful control to the wilderness. The representation of the Alberta cowboy in *Corral* has the elegant refinement of an elite society through the soft musical score, beautiful photography, and peaceful disposition. But the attention paid to his solitary and arduous work in the wild frontier brings certain ruggedness as well.

Alienation is a frequently expressed sentiment in Canadian cinema and culture, and calls on the remoteness of *Corral*'s cowboy within the daunting Canadian landscape.

Northrope Frye wrote:

I have often thought that Robert Frost's line "The land was ours before we were the land's," however appropriate to the United States, does not apply to Canada, where the opposite seems to me to have been true, even in the free land grant days. Canadians were held by the land before they emerged as a people on it.¹³

The issue of isolation and alienation in Canadian culture has been compared to a "Garrison mentality." John Moss, writing on the pattern of isolation in English Canadian literature, asserts that while proponents of the Garrison mentality are accurate about its existence in the Canadian conscious, its influence is often not fully explored.

The reclusive self-containment of the garrison, in *our* history, gave way to frontier aggressiveness which was the only alternative to being crushed by the harshness of land and its seasons, its immensity and indifference, or being seduced to impotence by its grandeur and abundance.¹⁴

This influence of the garrison relates to *Corral*'s representation. The overwhelming terrain harnesses the cowboy to a community in the need to survive. With this, he must consider, and submit to, the collective good. But survival also demanded confrontation with the frontier environment. *Corral*'s cowboy embodies both the submission, and the aggression, which are required to exist in the Canadian west. He is strong yet humble, forceful yet dutiful, a figure who comprehends the land, but does not command it. In *Corral*, the camera, the viewer, and the cowboy are all held by the land. This resonates in *Corral* a distinctly Canadian western myth. Low continues this myth, although with some variation, in his films *Circle of the Sun* and *Standing Alone*.

Sun is up
 Day is on
 Look for me
 I'll be gone
 'Cause today's the day
 I'm gonna see him again

He's an Indian cowboy in the rodeo
 And I'm just another little girl
 Who loves him so
 He's an Indian cowboy in the rodeo
 And I'm just another little girl who loves him so

Once he stopped
 And talked to me
 I found out
 How dreams can be
 With a big wide smile
 And a big white hat
 (excerpt from the song *He's An Indian Cowboy in the Rodeo*
 by Buffy Sainte-Marie)¹⁵

Circle of the Sun and *Standing Alone* need to be discussed together, despite being made twenty-five years apart. Despite the first film, *Circle of the Sun*, being more concerned with the larger culture of the Blood Tribe in Southern Alberta, Blood Indian Pete Standing Alone narrates both. It is his perspectives on his Native culture and identity that make up the basis of both films, although the second film, aptly titled *Standing Alone*, is a more pointedly personal film. It is crucial to observe these films in the same context as *Corral*, for despite documenting the classic antagonism of “the cowboy” and “the Indian,” it is the *shared* cultures of the subjects which ultimately complicate Low’s interpretation of Alberta’s ranching culture. As with his intimate experience of growing up in Alberta’s ranching culture, Low was acquainted with the Blood Indians. Low had experienced the Sun Dance ceremony, the central narrative event of *Circle of the Sun*, a number of times when he was younger. Low describes,

I had seen it for several summers, but I wasn't allowed to participate in the ceremonies. The Indians were quite private about all that, but I had got to know a man who had known my grandfather, who was a minor chief among the Blood tribe. We got to be friends and he arranged for me to shoot what was available to shoot.¹⁶

Like *Corral*, both of these films are very personal. Even if *Corral* is not autobiographical, the solitary character results in undivided attention from the viewer. Though there are many individuals documented in *Circle of the Sun* and *Standing Alone*, the autobiographical narrative of the protagonist cultivates an intimacy between him and the viewer. While *Circle of the Sun* is documenting a sacred tradition, it is also concerned with the question of the tribe's future direction. This is incarnated in the narration of a young man named Pete Standing Alone, who acts as a type of representative for young Blood Indians. Standing Alone, along with the other youths of the band, is less concerned than their elders with maintaining their native ties and traditions. He does not participate in the Sun Dance and has only recently returned to the reserve after living in the States for a number of years. He acknowledges his strong comfort with the "white man's world." Considering the tribe is located in the ranching heartland of southern Alberta, it is relevant that the "white man's world" Standing Alone refers to is not in the form of a city slicker, but of a cowboy. The amalgamation of these two cultures is epitomized with a simple statement made by Standing Alone early in *Standing Alone*. Sitting on a hill overlooking the Alberta badlands, wearing a white cowboy hat, his horse next to him, Standing Alone narrates, "My father was a cowboy. My great-grandfather was a buffalo hunter."¹⁷

Similar to the representation of the cowboy in *Corral*, Standing Alone is marked by his ranching activities. In *Circle of the Sun* Standing Alone describes his keener

interest in rodeos and ranching than in his Native traditions. This continues in the follow-up film, where his devotion to such cowboy-related activities is even more firmly addressed. In *Standing Alone* he often describes his love for ranching and rodeo, and this is demonstrated when he devotedly teaches his children rodeo skills. In one sequence, while teaching his children how to break a colt, Standing Alone explains, “*I wanted these kids to love this work, not just do it because I want them to.*” His daily dress in both films includes cowboy gear, and by the period of *Standing Alone*, he has become a noted saddle maker. There is even a segment devoted to Standing Alone’s construction of a commissioned saddle for Prince Charles, which he presents during a royal visit to the reservation. Although the films document the greater subject of the Blood Indian culture, there remains a sense of isolation in the central narrator and protagonist, as with the main figure of *Corral*. The narrative draws heavily on the subject of alienation. Standing Alone discusses at length his feelings of distance from his tribe’s traditions in *Circle of the Sun*. And in *Standing Alone*, both his fears of whether his younger tribe members will carry on their culture, and his reflections on the genocide of the Native culture, also address issues of displacement. This solitude is often brought out visually with the landscape. *Circle of the Sun* and *Standing Alone* are full of scenic shots of southern Alberta, emphasizing the vastness of the region. *Standing Alone* immediately identifies the rural existence of Standing Alone, highlighting the protagonist’s reverence for the open land.

The film opens with shots of a barbed wire being erected on the range. Standing Alone is watching the construction from atop his horse, stating, “*I hate what barbed wire does to my horses. A horse has to learn about barbwire. Some never get over the lesson.*”

When I was a kid you could ride all day without hitting a fence. Open range then." The choice to place a solitary Standing Alone within many of the landscape shots illustrates the daunting terrain. This emphasis on the frontier location brings to the representation acknowledgment of an environmental influence. One could argue this lends credibility to Thomas's perspective that frontier determinism leads to "homogenization." After all, it is the frontier that establishes the dualism of the "Native cowboy." But while there are many identifiable similarities between *Corral*, *Circle of the Sun*, and *Standing Alone*, whether Low is homogenizing the cowboy culture is a more complex matter. In examining the forces behind the Native cowboy culture, the implications of Low's use of it may be better understood.

While the Native cowboy culture in Canada may seem like a peripheral topic within the discussion of the Alberta cowboy, historians and scholars have marked its existence. In a study of Native cowboy culture, Morgan Baillargeon and Leslie Tepper narrow their discussion to the rodeo and ranching traditions of Natives who live in the northern plains and plateaus. The Canadian portion of this region includes southern Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and southwestern British Columbia. The study was based on an exhibition at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, organized by a committee that included Pete Standing Alone. Baillargeon and Tepper state, "*Legends of Our Times* began with two clear goals. The first was to help break the stereotype of 'the Indian versus the cowboy.'... The second was to acknowledge the contributions Native people have made to the ranching and rodeo industry."¹⁸ Hugh A. Dempsey acknowledges the important position of Native Canadian cowboys:

While all these British, American, and European cowboys were making their mark in the Canadian West, so were its Native inhabitants. Indians

had been expert horsemen generations before the days of ranching and naturally gravitated to that work. Almost from the beginning, ranchers hired Indian or Metis on their roundup crews and in the branding corrals.... During the 1880s, the government established band herds in fulfillment of its treaty obligations and hired Indians to look after the stock. Soon, many of them switched to cowboy attire or combined the two cultures. It was not uncommon to see an Indian with the usual western gear but wearing long braids. Many had only a smattering of English but enough to carry out their duties. In the 1890s some Indians began to raise their own cattle and became ranchers as well as cowboys. And as young men graduated from boarding schools, they dressed and talked like other western cowmen.¹⁹

Dempsey's description of how the two cultural identities merge coincides with the lifestyle of *Standing Alone*. An implicit reading of the film may lead one to consider the comparatively less violent relations between the settlers and Natives in Canada than in the United States. Albeit the history of treatment towards the First Nations of Canada is by no means proud, the brutality was less annihilating than in the United States. The more peaceful Canadian frontier is partially explained with Canada's west being settled at a later date and slower pace. The NWMP also acted as a form of mediator between the settlers and Natives. The differing western expansions of the two nations may be traced to the independence of the United States from British rule after the American Revolution. This removed British restrictions on the American Western frontier. The Royal Proclamation of 1763 declared that:

A huge area of the country between the Mississippi and the Appalachians to be "Indian territory." Purchases or settlements of that land were strictly forbidden without special 'leave and license' from the Crown.²⁰

This proclamation may be seen as an early move towards First Nations' rights, for it

indicates somewhat of an admission by the British rulers that the First Nations had a distinct claim to the land. However, such protections would be removed once the American colonies achieved independence.

After the American Revolution, the Royal Proclamation of 1763 ceased to have any bearing on relations between First Nations and Americans. In Canada, however, the proclamation had established a framework for undertaking any future settlements of First Nations lands. Thereafter, it was accepted policy that while title to the land mass of Canada was vested in the Crown, the Aboriginal peoples maintained an underlying title to use and occupy the land. No settlement of land could be undertaken, therefore, until the First Nations' rights had been surrendered in negotiation between the Crown and First Nations occupants.²¹

While the ranching culture found in all three Low films may be influenced by the more peaceful Canadian frontier history, the explicit discussion in the *Standing Alone* films on the destruction of the Native culture still make it difficult to accept this as the only influence. And there are other motivations behind the amalgamation of these two seemingly opposite cultures.

In *Corral*, a bridge is illustrated between the well-structured, orderly Canadian west and the rugged nature of frontier life. In *Standing Alone* and *Circle of the Sun*, another bridge is illustrated. This is the synthesis of the Alberta cowboy and Native cultures. But there is also a bridge between the character of a peaceful and hard-working rancher, and the democratizing nature of the frontier. John Ware is a legendary Alberta cowboy. Ware was an African-American, born into slavery in the American south during the 1840s, who came to Alberta in 1882. He lived and worked in the Alberta ranching industry until his death in 1905 from a horse accident. His success in Alberta has become a symbol of the frontier culture. Grant MacEwan's biography of John Ware pointedly addresses Ware as a representation of the Canadian west. MacEwan writes that Ware

“symbolized the spirit of the early range – where pedigree, race, wealth, and color set nobody apart, and where honesty, friendliness, and resourcefulness were the real measures of a man.”²² Whether or not L.G. Thomas is correct in placing emphasis on the affluent British as the determining influence in the Canadian ranching culture, MacEwan’s statement is indirectly supportive of Elofson’s assessment of that perspective as narrow. If the culture of the Canadian west were based exclusively on an elite British minority, “pedigree, race, wealth and color” would be what determined “the spirit of the early range.” MacEwan’s choice to document the life of Ware may be compared to Low’s choice to capture the experiences of Pete Standing Alone. They both illustrate a humble, revolverless cowboy, and a resilient, proficient frontier-man. And within these representations, they articulate an Alberta cowboy culture that valued “honesty, friendliness and resourcefulness” above “pedigree, race, wealth and color.”

In examining Low’s three films, revelations are made on the nature and forces behind Alberta’s tie to its cowboy heritage. Peter Harcourt asserts that *Corral*,

while externally dealing with the breaking in of a horse on a ranch in Southwestern Alberta, Colin Low is really concerned with something else, something more inward.... The film seems to be a recreation less of an actual event than of an atmosphere that has vanished. As to a degree there is in all his films, there is here the feeling of a quietly private world, of something reflective, plus the sense of something lost.²³

Harcourt’s observations are interesting considering that the period of *Corral* was a time of rapid change in Alberta. In 1954, Alberta was still reeling from its massive oil discoveries seven years earlier, which sent the province soaring in population and wealth. The rural communities were quickly diminishing, as people flocked to urban centers like Edmonton and Calgary. And within these rapid changes, a desire to stay close to their western heritage emerged in symbolic gestures.

Rapid growth and affluence in the cities brought a new era of confidence and assertiveness, which was best reflected in a renewed boosterism.... Reflecting this trend during the 1950s was the fact that, in each of the province's largest cities, a flamboyant, self-made promoter was elected mayor. In Calgary, radio announcer and manager Don Mackay popularized the white Stetson hat as the city's symbol.... Alberta's cities cultivated their western image as a source of identity and pride and as a tourist attraction. Perhaps the Calgary Stampede, as well as Whoop-up Days in Lethbridge and Klondike Days in Edmonton, were attempts to stay close to western (and in Edmonton's case northern) roots at a time when the pioneer generation was passing away and the relevance of symbols of rural identity was fading.²⁴

That a film so loaded with romantic nostalgia was made by a filmmaker who himself belonged to a disappearing way of life positions *Corral* as evidence of how Alberta perceived its history. If the romantic ruggedness of *Corral* may be seen as an extension of a larger historical perception, the context from which it grew is integral to understanding what fostered it. Nineteen-fifties Alberta was well into the reign of the conservative premier Ernest Manning. With the transition of power from Aberhart to Manning, and from the arduous Great Depression to the comfortable Post-World War II era, Alberta was establishing itself as a conservative bastion, the radical politics of the UFA and Aberhart's Social Credit behind her. However, that did not remove the influences that led Alberta to embrace the radical thoughts. Perhaps the roots of the multicultural immigrants who held no traditional partisanship, and the sense of alienation from central Canada, led Albertans to hold up a cowboy heritage that represented these forces. Whether or not the British elite were *the* influence in the Alberta ranching culture, in a province largely populated by non-British groups, the rugged illustration of a frontier land open to any person willing to tackle it, was likely an attractive one. And as signs of the frontier's inclusiveness, John Ware and Standing Alone are appropriate

representations. It was the perceived lack of understanding and regard for Albertans' situation that led to a long-standing sense of alienation on the part of Alberta from central Canada. And what set Alberta apart was their geographical and cultural distance from the east. Alberta's reflection is rooted in what distinguishes her people: their frontier origin.

Even considering the shared values of all three films, there does exist a fundamental difference in the *Standing Alone* films from *Corral*. Though the cowboy culture of Pete *Standing Alone* has many of the same attributes, and the perception of an all-encompassing Alberta frontier may explain the films' representation, there is not the same sense of romantic nostalgia placed on the cowboy culture as it exists in *Corral*. In *Circle of the Sun*, there is a recurring shot of young Pete *Standing Alone* sitting in front of a teepee. It is the time of his Nation's sacred Sun Dance, and he is sporting a cowboy hat and western style clothing. Along with the contrast of his cowboy dress, juxtaposed against a mighty symbol of Native heritage, his expression appears uncomfortable, his face tense and his eyes shifting. *Standing Alone*'s perception of the cowboy culture as a more familiar mode of existence translates into a somewhat pragmatic representation of the cowboy culture. That is not to say there is no romanticized description of his cowboy lifestyle. In *Standing Alone*, he does make comments concerning a changing cowboy culture, sadly reflecting on the absence of authentic wild horses in the rodeo, cynically commenting that "professional bucking horses" are now rented. However, these moments of nostalgia for the cowboy tradition are few and far between in comparison to reflections of his Native traditions.

The central focus of both films is the question of whether or not Native traditions, such as the Sun Dance, will continue. In *Circle of the Sun*, Standing Alone admits to his own sense of distance from his tribe's traditions, and doubts the future of his culture. In *Standing Alone*, he has become a proponent of maintaining his tribe's traditions, but now laments whether the current youth of his tribe will continue them. While the cowboy of *Corral* seems to be a part of a disappearing mythical world, the cowboy embodied in the Standing Alone figure is one of a tangible existence that is highlighted in its contrasts with a vanishing Native world. This, in turn, validates Alberta's cowboy symbols by confirming an existing cowboy culture, and not merely the fading memory of one.

The reflections of Alberta in *Corral*, *Circle of the Sun*, and *Standing Alone* are resolved in their shared celebration of the province's frontier roots, which includes both the cowboy and Indian heritage. The acknowledgment of both heritages is expressed in the Calgary Stampede. "The Stampede was a celebration of an era that has been shaped by two sharply contrasting ways of life: that of the self-sufficient Plains Indians and that of the ranching community."²⁵ The lonely figure of both the Standing Alone films and *Corral* serve as reflection of a community of British elite and gentle NWMP law enforcers. In addressing the potentials of his medium Colin Low states, "As far as I am concerned, the documentary is a medium of reflection. It is a chance to reflect on the exploration you do with a camera."²⁶ Low's three cowboy films reflect a province that remains dedicated to its frontier roots.

Despite explosive urban growth during the 1970s, Alberta's urban landscape was dotted with reminders of the province's agrarian and small-town past: the popularity of western style clothing, suburban sprawl reflecting a strong attachment to the single-family dwelling, backyard vegetable gardens, and acreages and hobby farms situated just beyond the urban perimeters. Despite these remnants, the way

of life of most Albertans differed only marginally from people living in other metropolitan centers across Canada.²⁷

Corral, *Circle of the Sun*, and *Standing Alone* all evoke a rugged and humble cowboy heritage. But what is most strongly shared by both the Native and cowboy cultures is the self-reliance necessary to survival in the frontier environment. Although present-day Alberta houses a kaleidoscope of views and perspectives, the right-wing politics still dominant are based in a prevalent orientation towards self-sufficiency. And while the actual cowboy trade nowadays is rarely part of the average Albertans' life, the self-reliant nature of it represents the individualism that is still so championed. But the individualism illustrated in these cowboy films is different than that of the American western. The Alberta cowboy is not like the John Wayne cowboy who is set apart from the community and does its dirty work for it.²⁸ Rather, the Alberta cowboy's individualism embodies the community's values as his own. In the following chapter, we will examine other documentaries of the Alberta cowboy, and discover how Low's representations belong to a larger articulation.

Notes

- ¹ These are not the only Colin Low films that contain cowboy figures. There are other films by Low that explore the Canadian frontier, such as *The Days of Whiskey Gap* (1961), or refer to the cowboy influence in Alberta, such as *Moving Pictures* (2000). However, I choose these three films in particular because of their concentration on the cowboy itself.
- ² Peter Harcourt, "The Canadian Cinema – Years of Promise," *Movies and Mythologies* (Toronto: CBC Publications, 1977), 136.
- ³ Marc Glassman and Wyndham Wise, *A Filmmaker of Vision, Take One's Interview with Colin Low, Part I*, (Toronto: Canadian Independent Film and Television Publishing Association, Spring 1999), 22.
- ⁴ Glassman and Wise, 22.
- ⁵ Gary Evans, *In the National Interest: a Chronicle of the National Film Board of Canada from 1949 to 1989* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 38.
- ⁶ Lewis G. Thomas & Patrick A. Dunae ed., *Rancher's Legacy: Alberta Essays by Lewis G. Thomas* (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1982), vii.
- ⁷ Edward Brado, *Cattle Kingdom, Early Ranching Days in Alberta* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1984), 216.
- ⁸ Warren M. Elofson, *Cowboys, Gentlemen & Cattle Thieves: Ranching on the Western Frontier* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), xiv-xv.
- ⁹ Thomas, 154-155.
- ¹⁰ Elofson, xiv. The author cites G.F.G. Stanley, "Western Canada and the Frontier Thesis," *Canadian Historical Association*, 1940, 111. Lewis G. Thomas & Patrick A. Dunae, ed., *Ranchers Legacy, Alberta Essays by Lewis G. Thomas*, 1986.
- ¹¹ Elofson, xv-xvi.
- ¹² Elofson, xvi.
- ¹³ Northrop Frye, Conclusion to "Literary History of Canada," *Divisions on a Ground* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1982), 79.
- ¹⁴ John Moss, *Patterns of Isolation in English Canadian Fiction* (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart Limited, 1974), 13.
- ¹⁵ This song was cited from a reprint that appeared in Morgan Baillargeon with Leslie Tepper, published in association with Canadian Museum of Civilization, *Legends of Our Times: Native Cowboy Life* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998), 217. The authors credit: "He's an Indian Cowboy in the Rodeo," copyright Buffy Sainte-Marie, Gypsy Boy Music. Used by Permission.
- ¹⁶ Glassman and Wise, 31.
- ¹⁷ To distinguish film quotes from literary quotes, I will always italicize quotes from films.
- ¹⁸ Baillargeon and Tepper, 2.
- ¹⁹ Hugh A. Dempsey, *The Golden Age of the Canadian Cowboy: An Illustrated History* (Saskatoon & Calgary: Fifth House Publishers, 1995), 42.
- ²⁰ Published under the authority of the Honourable Ronald A. Irwin, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, *First Nations in Canada* (Ottawa, 1997), 71.
- ²¹ *First Nations in Canada*, 71.
- ²² Grant MacEwan, *John Ware's Cow Country* (Vancouver/Toronto: Greystone Books, 1973), 189.
- ²³ Peter Harcourt, "The Innocent Eye," *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Winter 1964/65), 22.
- ²⁴ Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, *Alberta, A New History* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1990), 310-311.
- ²⁵ Palmer and Palmer, 126.
- ²⁶ Colin Low, "Sees Future for the NFB and the Documentary," *Cinema Canada*, No. 165 (July / August 1989), 34.
- ²⁷ Palmer and Palmer, 337.
- ²⁸ Examples of this include *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956) and *The Man who Shot Liberty Valance* (John Ford, 1962).

Chapter 3

DOCUMENTARY II - The Representation of the Alberta Cowboy in

Peter Kelly's *A Cowboy's Convictions* and Darold Black's *Cowboy*

There has been little discussion on the possible influence of Colin Low on Alberta film. Perhaps this is because his Alberta connection is overshadowed by his larger contribution to Canadian cinema. However, Low's articulation of the Alberta cowboy culture in the three films studied before may be paralleled by other documentaries on the subject. *A Cowboy's Convictions*, a Telescope production aired on television by the CBC, and *Cowboy* produced by the National Film Board, are two such films. In both their style and themes, these films demonstrate a certain continuity that contributes to the articulation of a cowboy culture unique to Canada and centered in Alberta.

In analyzing the depiction of Alberta's cowboy history and culture, it is important to look at the center of that culture, namely, the depiction of the cowboy figure itself. In analyzing Colin Low's documentaries of Alberta cowboys, we find the depiction of a figure consistent with the majority of non-fiction and historical accounts of the Canadian cowboy – specifically that life in the Canadian west was not the wild and violent one of America. Rather, it was a west of relative order and calm, in turn creating a cowboy who is self-reliant and law-abiding, observing the peaceful nature of the Canadian frontier.

Unlike the western United States, the Canadian West had law and order before it had settlers. When the Mounties arrived in 1874, the land was still the territory of the Indians and buffalo. By the time the first American cowboys came, the rule of law was well established, and the cowmen accepted this fact just as easily as they had adapted to the lawless American frontier. These men were willing to live under Canadian laws and to accept them. As a result, the Canadian frontier tended to be more orderly and law-abiding, so

that the lynching of horse thieves was unknown, gunfights were exceedingly rare, and serious range wars never occurred. The best Canada could do was to experience a certain amount of friction between homesteaders and ranchers.¹

Low does not articulate this notion explicitly or directly through the films, instead demonstrating it through his choice of cowboy signifiers. In *Corral* we are presented with somewhat of a mythic cowboy – the use of low angle framing to emphasize the cowboy’s grandness, the absence of narrative, whimsical score, and sweeping camera movements which romanticize his trade. Yet *Corral*’s cowboy and his world are ultimately characterized by toil on the open range, carried out peacefully and independently. In Low’s *Circle of the Sun* and *Standing Alone*, the Alberta cowboy is somewhat complicated with the narrator and protagonist, Pete Standing Alone. Standing Alone is a Native Canadian who relates to both the traditions of his Blood tribe and the cowboy culture he is a part of. Where *Corral*’s cowboy is shown herding and breaking wild horses, Standing Alone is shown performing many typical ranch duties, is a noted saddle maker, and is involved with the rodeo circuit. As with *Corral*, it is this lifestyle, not gunfights at the OK Corral, which tie our protagonist to the occupation of “cowboy.” Furthermore, an implicit reading of the film may lead one to consider the comparatively less violent relations between the settlers and Natives in Canada versus the United States. His peaceful nature, independent spirit, and a life of hard work on the open range primarily identify Low’s Alberta cowboy.

As with Low’s works, both *A Cowboy’s Convictions* and *Cowboy* document a cowboy lifestyle based on ranching. They present cowboy figures that are not aligned with a wild West so often depicted in tales of their American counterparts, instead reflecting their Canadian frontier of relative peace and order. *A Cowboy’s Convictions*

documents Dave Diebel, a cowboy who owns and runs a ranch in southwestern Alberta. The discrepancy between fictionalized and authentic cowboys is distinguished at the outset of the documentary. Presented on CBC in television-magazine format, the program opens with host / narrator Fletcher Markle posing to the viewer *"Maybe it's a bit of a switch to do a television show on a real cowboy, but we don't think many people have met one like this before."*

The documentary begins with a monologue delivered by Diebel, wearing a white cowboy hat. The camera is at medium frame with the angle at eye-level. This opening already indicates an unassuming representation, the medium framing too neutral to illustrate the kind of mythical aura that could have been achieved with a more lavish shot. This choice is in keeping with the television-magazine format, the medium frame "normalizing" the interview subject, projecting Diebel as neither powerful nor weak. There is a tradition in cinema that framing from a low-angle can be used to underscore the power of a scene, or a particular character. But it is problematic to accept any shot as having a standard meaning, as David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson point out in *Film Art*.

Sometimes we are tempted to assign absolute meanings to angles, distances, and other qualities of framing. It is tempting to believe that framing from a low angle automatically "says" that a character is powerful and that framing from a high angle presents him or her as dwarfed and defeated.... To rely on such formulas is to forget that meaning and effect always stem from the total film, from its operation as a system. The context of the film will determine the function of the framings.²

The effect of *A Cowboy's Convictions* results from the greater context, as the opening monologue of the film underscores a humble representation. Diebel speaks slowly, often pausing, and with a slight drawl. *"There are many things, you know, that a young feller'*

can learn, that knows nothing if he realizes he just knows nothing and that he's going to have to learn it! And one of the best ways of learning from people is to keep your mouth shut and let them do the telling." Diebel's philosophy of "keeping your mouth shut" evokes the "strong silent type" of the American cowboy. But the exact nature of Diebel's advice involves more than being silent. It also requires that one learns from others who are doing "the telling." This suggests a rapport with a community, typical of the orderly Alberta cowboy.

The conclusion of the monologue cuts to the title of the film. This is immediately followed by the first commercial, courtesy of the program's sponsor, General Motors. The commercial for a new Buick model, wedged into the attention grabbing first moments of the program, calls on the Hollywood Western genre. The commercial presents a family driving through an open range. The little boy sitting in the back seat is dressed up as a cowboy, complete with a toy gun. Indians on horseback, costumed in stereotypical headdress, war paint, and spears, begin to chase the family. The chase ensues, the little boy shooting at the attacking Indians. While this rendition of the old West is explicitly playing with the Western movie genre, it is ironically exploiting symbols opposite of the premise stated in *A Cowboy's Convictions*; namely the cowboy existence of Dave Diebel. Diebel himself inadvertently addresses the discrepancy of fictitious cowboy tales and real cowboy work in reflecting on his own course to becoming a cowboy. Early in the documentary he describes his motivations for coming to Alberta from Saskatchewan as a young man. Diebel recounts how he felt that "*there was something in the world, something that wasn't in Saskatchewan.*" He describes reading Zane Grey books as a boy, and how they shaped his dreams of working with wild horses

one day. Later in the documentary, he describes one of his first ranching jobs after arriving in Alberta thirty years earlier: fixing fences. He describes this job as one of *“the best things that ever coulda’ happened to me, because it got rid of this ‘wild horses mess’ of Zane Grey’s in an awful hurry! Fencing was as hard, if not harder, in these hills than it was in Saskatchewan!”* Throughout *A Cowboy’s Convictions*, there is footage of Diebel working on his ranch. He is often shown herding his cattle, but we also observe him performing physically demanding work, such as building a second house on the ranch for his son.

In *Cowboy* we are presented with cowboy Bill Michalsky, another rancher in the southwestern region of Alberta. The film opens with Michalsky preparing at dawn for his day’s work. We follow our cowboy through his duties, as he mends fences, chops wood, and herds and ropes cattle. Much of Michalsky’s voice-over narration is dedicated to describing the various duties and demands of ranching. This ranges from explaining what constitutes a ranching season, to the effects of dry summers (they force the cows further out as they search for water), and how to properly approach cattle when they have not seen you for months. Michalsky’s dedication to his work is addressed in the opening lines of his narration, spoken over a shot of him atop his horse in the mountains. *“The first time I come here – 1937. I was pretty much a kid then. I’ve always enjoyed horses, and working with them, and herding cattle. It’s hard to say why I took to it that way, but this is what I wanted to do.”* What remains consistent in both of these films is the presentation of a cowboy lifestyle primarily based on ranching, but more importantly, a lifestyle that is noticeably more peaceful and orderly than the myths of the American

west. Both Dave Diebel and Bill Michalsky carry out their activities without guns, the strongest representation of violence being a hunting expedition of Diebel's.

A literary work that has much in common with these film representations is *Buffalo Bud, Adventures of a Cowboy* by Alberta cowboy Bud Cotton. Although it follows his life chronologically, the book is more or less a series of short stories that highlight Bud Cotton's experiences in ranching. While his career stretched back to the turn of the century, his nickname derives from his unique distinction as one of the few buffalo drivers in an era where the animals were close to extinction. The editor's note prefacing the book provokes the reader to believe they are entering a world unto itself. "For the convenience of city slickers who may be unfamiliar with the lingo of Alberta cowboys, there is a glossary of terms at the back."³ Cotton's stories are colorful, and tell dramatic tales of trail rides and round ups, and cowboy friends with names like "Curly," "Red," and "Snowdrop." Like his cinematic counterparts, we form a very close relationship with Cotton, since the stories are written in personal reference. And a picture of Cotton as tough and self-reliant is based on the vast attention paid to his toiling on the range. Most of the book's dramatic tales are rooted in the arduous life on a frontier: encounters with rattlesnakes and wolves, harsh winters, and body-breaking rides on wild animals. But the fact that there are a number of other characters in the book, and that these characters are highlighted by their own colorful anecdotes, once again links the Alberta cowboy to a community.

In his wild kick, the pony must have dislodged the snake's resting place too, for there was tumbling and squirming right behind the horse's tail. He was a mighty indignant rattler as the three of us skidded for river bottom in a cloud of dust and crumbling clay. Curly came galloping over as we hit the bottom land. "What the hell are you trying to do, break your neck a' comin' off the ridge like

that?" Shakily I pointed to the rattler as it hissed angrily some yards away. "Must've been mighty close to spook that ol' Jay Flag horse over the bank," he admitted. He shot the big rattler. "Make a mighty fine belt," he said as he skinned the hide of the still squirming carcass and tied it behind his saddle.⁴

Despite the daunting lifestyle on the frontier, like Diebel and Michalsky, Buffalo Bud takes great pride in his work, speaking affectionately, and respectfully, of his animals and work.

"God's critters": that's the right name for the buffalo. Some folks call them ugly and ungainly brutes, but I always see them as a majestic animal, big and powerful, kings of the rangeland. In the days when our wildlife ran free unrestricted, they dominated the range. Even old grizzly thought twice and had to be mighty hungry if he tried for buffalo steak. Don't let me throw a scare into you about the buffalo, though. They are not vicious. You could ride the buffalo range for weeks and watch them as they roamed – hundreds of them, contentedly grazing or stringing along the old buffalo trails, head-to-tail, to a waterhole or new pasture. It was only when those pests on horseback came around trying to corral and interfere in their way of life that the buffalo got riled up and made life interesting, but miserable, for those same riders of the buffalodome.⁵

Cotton's perspectives demonstrate a certain accommodation towards the land, an attitude that surfaced in the films of Low, and in the commentaries of both Dave Diebel and Bill Michalsky. Ultimately, Cotton's consideration of the larger community, while also displaying a strength required to life on the harsh frontier, creates a cowboy that personifies both the ideals of collectivism and individualism.

While there is often a stress in the representations of the American west on the violent conflict between Natives and cowboys, this is not emphasized in these illustrations of the Canadian west. Of course, there were violent confrontations between ranchers, settlers and Natives in the Canadian west, and this historical fact is directly addressed in *Circle of the Sun* and *Standing Alone*. However, in discussing the historical

conflict between the Native and European cultures, the *Standing Alone* films portray the conquering European as the villain. And while this may be attributed to the fact that our protagonist in Low's films is of Native heritage, the topic also arises in *A Cowboy's Convictions*, a film centered on a non-Native cowboy, Dave Diebel. In the film, Diebel discusses the poor living state of the Blood reserve, which is neighboring his ranch. He asserts that government handouts are to blame for the poor conditions, since it has kept the Natives from motivating themselves. There are shots of shacks and torn-up teepees on the reserve, somber music overlapping the sequence. Diebel discusses the cycle of poverty and its effects, stating that the young native children are born "*smart as a whip. If they were raised under conditions they should be raised under there wouldn't be any differences at all.*" Although Diebel's observations were well intended, his endorsement of assimilation is not considered a viable option by most First Nations' people. But there is evidence that Diebel's perspective was not unusual at the time of the film. In fact, only a few years after *A Cowboy's Convictions* the government attempted to sever their federal responsibility to Natives in the 1969 "White Papers,"

The government hoped to abolish what it saw as the false separation between First Nations and the rest of Canadian society. What the government had not fully understood was the value First Nations placed on their special status within confederation and on their treaty rights.⁶

Even though Diebel's perspective may not be in unison with the official position of First Nations, he does offer a sympathetic one, pointing out the role of the Europeans in the current desperate conditions of the Native population: "*Indians were once a proud people – and we've made beggars of them.*" Of course, noting the atrocious and damaging effects to Native culture by Europeans is hardly unique to Dave Diebel, or an

admission only Canadians will make. Filmed in the mid-1960s, *A Cowboy's Convictions* would obviously be influenced by civil rights movements occurring across North America. In Canada, movements for Native rights began to gain momentum in the post-World War II era, as the late 1940s,

marked the beginning of a new era for First Nations in Canada. Aboriginal leaders emerged, forcefully expressing their people's desire to gain their rightful position of equality with other Canadians, and at the same time, maintain their cultural heritage. In British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario, First Nations formed provincially based organizations to protect and advance their interests.⁷

Albeit Diebel's assessment of the Native situation is problematic, and Low's exploration of the disastrous effects on Native culture by colonizers is not radically unique to a Canadian perspective, these documentaries do contribute to expressing a less antagonistic Canadian western myth than its American counterpart. Although they may openly acknowledge the historical conflict, their relatively sympathetic view, and their refusal to represent the Natives as aggressors, infer a frontier that was encompassing.

Such a representation takes us back to the topic of environmental determinism on the Canadian frontier culture. These films certainly render a historical perspective of Canadian west more orderly than the American, exemplified by the lack of violence. In the American western, violent conflict is a key convention. But despite this absence, there is still homage paid to the ruggedness of life in the frontier.

Over the years, the American cowboy has been vilified by movies, television, and novels to the point where the image and reality have little in common. In the middle part of the century, he was presented as a hero of the downtrodden, often strumming a guitar and wearing a white hat to distinguish him from the bad guys. In the revisionist years of the last two decades, he is sometimes depicted as a degenerate and psychopathic killer. Of course, none of these images are accurate. The Canadian cowboy was, to all intents and purposes, a hard working man with special skills. He was deft with a rope, handy with a branding

iron, and had an intimate knowledge of cattle, horses and his surroundings.⁸

The documentaries that have been discussed thus far coincide with this statement, largely stressing the tie of cowboy identity to their work. But it is difficult to distinguish the influence of frontier existence when there seems to be so many varying perspectives on the relevance of the situation, and the form that influence took, on the Canadian west. A common ground of historical essays and accounts of the Canadian frontier seems to be the notion that there exists a false perception of the old west. Ironically, the form of the disillusionment itself has been debated.

While L.G. Thomas describes that the “‘wild and woolly West’ so beloved of dime novelists... was generally peaceful, orderly, well-defined, and highly structured,”⁹ Edward M. Elofson contends that these exact claims have been “pushed too far,” and “disseminated to the general public.”¹⁰ Elofson makes a strong argument limiting the interpretations of the Canadian west as distinctly lawful, admitting that while it was far less violent than the American west, that does not mean it was unaffected by the fundamental conditions of a frontier existence.

The point is, however, that on almost any cattle frontier where the pastures were huge and unfenced and where the population was made up predominately of single males, losses from theft were likely to be large. The existence of the Mounties and the determination with which they patrolled the open range does not necessarily point to a high success rate in enforcing laws emanating from Ottawa. Much has been said about the refined social behaviour of the ranching elite. However, it should not be forgotten that the New World constantly competes with the Old in setting cultural norms.¹¹

Pierre Berton, in his discussion of the Canadian frontier, points out the relevance of an *interpretation* that is distinctly Canadian.

In spite of what Hollywood has tried to tell us, our frontier resembles no other. The American historian Frederick Jackson Turner may have

been right when he argued, in a widely discussed theory, that his country's democracy sprang out of the frontier experience, developing from a constant series of adaptations to new environments. It is not true of Canada.... Thus did the nation acquire its indestructible frontier myth. It is based, of course, on historic truth, much of it admirable.... The Musical Ride is our Wild West Show, beautifully groomed and disciplined in the Canadian manner: no whooping Indians nor sharp-shooting Annie Oakleys, only the calm, measured movements of the men in scarlet, cantering symbolically across the coulée-riven prairie, never turning a hair of their close-cropped heads when disaster threatens or evil stands unmasked, bringing law, order, and stability to the unruly frontier. But this is not the whole truth. The Mounted Police are living testimony to a firm Canadian conviction, nurtured on the frontier, that Father Knows Best.¹²

These statements reflect varying historical perspectives of the Canadian frontier, and are directly relevant to Alberta's cowboy culture. And as these descriptions demonstrate, the Alberta cowboy in cinema is a *representation*. The question is not necessarily whether these documentaries *accurately* portray the Alberta cowboy, but how they relate to *other historical accounts*. In an article on the ranching heyday in Alberta, historian Seilagh S. Jameson explicitly states that her project is to demystify the supposedly undeserved romantic tellings of the Canadian west.

Probably every country and every era has a romantic period in its history; in southern Alberta the early ranching years must qualify as its golden days.... An examination of Alberta's early ranching industry discloses many dissimilarities from its prototype south of the border. It is these misconceptions which I particularly wish to stress while showing that the era of the big ranches does not merit the appellation "romantic."¹³

As the non-fictional accounts in books and journals of Alberta's cowboy culture hope to grasp a truth, the documentary film assumes an ability to grasp a certain reality as well. Do these documentary films of the Alberta cowboy attempt a similar form of unmasking?

Films documenting the life of the Alberta cowboy, both in those by Colin Low and others, contribute to expressing a Canadian western myth less explosive than that of

the American counterpart. However, the more humble and simplistic essence these films convey is perhaps just as romantic in its own right. These films illustrate qualities of independence, of dedication, a respect of the Canadian terrain in the ability to work within and accommodate its overwhelming nature. Particularly in *Corral*, and in *Circle of the Sun* and *Standing Alone* (despite their discussion of community and family), the independent and resourceful nature of the protagonists is brought forth with an emphasis placed on their ability to work within the awesome landscape. Included in all the documentaries at hand are a number of long shots that position the lone cowboy figure within the land. This not only reveals the vast terrain, but also accents the miniscule relation of the cowboy to it. Though this does continue to underline the more humble presentation of the cowboy, the maverick abilities and attitudes that seem to emerge lend to a representation that is somewhat exalted.

As a television documentary, the film quality of *A Cowboy's Convictions* is not on par with the NFB films, particularly *Corral*, a piece noted for its beautiful cinematography. But the film still contains many spectacular shots of Diebel working on his ranch and riding his horse across the landscape. Diebel's narration is frequently accompanied by a peaceful musical score that underlines the quiet and unassuming quality of his reflections. In one instance, a low-angle shot of Diebel on his horse is accompanied by his voice-over delivering his perspective of whether the ranching life may be considered a simplistic existence: "*People say ranching, its just a simple life. I don't think so – maybe it is. But if these people did it for a year they wouldn't think it was so simple.*" Diebel continues on to describe the tough work of cattle driving, concluding that, "*There's really nothing romantic about it.*" The intention of the

narrative is to erode a dreamy notion that cowboy work is uncomplicated. However, considering the accompanying images, the effect is not necessarily de-mystifying. As the narrative is spoken over a mix of low-angle shots of Diebel (emphasizing a grandiose quality), and beautiful shots of him driving cattle across a sparkling river with his figure silhouetted against the rocky mountains, the film is building at least a sense of respect, if not a “romantic” sense. Even if the film is attempting to tear down certain myths of the cowboy existence, there remains a building of reverence. Much of this respect is geared towards the idea of cowboys on the Canadian frontier as fiercely independent, and their ability to work within the daunting terrain is a way in which this quality is illustrated. This self-reliance is brought forth more directly in the themes of *Cowboy* and *A Cowboy's Convictions*, as our protagonists discuss this aspect of their work and lifestyle. As *Cowboy's* Bill Michalsky drives his cattle, he explains why he appreciates that his stock is able to roam so far on the range, “*There's probably no one cherishes freedom more than I.*” As *Cowboy* draws to a close, the final scene is of Michalsky driving his cattle at night, a silhouette of him atop his horse with his cattle surrounding him. Their figures are small, juxtaposed against the dark night sky, an enormous moon above them. Michalsky concludes the film: “*You know what I like about working there – lots of elbow room, like I told you, eh?* (laughs) *Yes sir!*” Such emphasis in both films draws the subject of frontier life, and the accommodations the cowboys must make to it, to the forefront.

Both films generally bring forth the independent nature of the cowboys through their work on the frontier, and in *A Cowboy's Convictions*, the relation of these qualities is merged with the conservative political reputation of Alberta. This link is made

midway through the documentary when the focus shifts from the description of Diebel's work and personal history to his reflections on the world at large. The host of the program declares "*Maybe it's natural that a man used to doing it himself, also is accustomed to thinking for himself.*" The narration delivered by Diebel in the following sequence firmly champions self-reliance. "*I don't like this 'give business,' and much worst than the 'give business,' I don't like the accepting part of it on the part of people.*" Unlike many of the earlier sequences, Diebel delivers his monologue with close framing, which now excludes the scenery behind him. No longer is Diebel narrating over shots of riding in the mountains, or working with his cattle in the foothills. The focus is now on Diebel, and the terrain behind him is blurred. The effect is a moment where the Alberta cowboy is demystified. The independent spirit quixotically caught in beautiful shots of the cowboys and their terrain is transferred here to a more tangible representation.

Diebel continues:

With us, in the raising of our family, now it has been an honor and a privilege to raise that family and I'm thankful that we had the opportunity to do it. But personally, I don't want the government to do it for me, and I didn't want them to do it for me, and I didn't want them to hand me any bonuses for doing it. I like to think of us, or the Canadian people as a whole, as being a rather strong and rugged people, and still has retained some of that pioneer spirit.

While this illustrates Diebel's priorities of self-reliance and independence, the kind of individualism he advocates is different than an American version. Diebel refers to the self-sufficiency of the Canadian "people," repeatedly using the term "us" and "we," reflecting how he remains integrated into a community. This combination of idealized individualism with concern for the collective is evident in the radically conservative

political movements in Alberta. And Diebel's commentary soon leads into a more blatant politically conservative outlook, with the individualist still saying "we,"

*I don't like to see it all go down the drain and we all run and fall
all over ourselves for Medicare or anything else that's going to be
handed to us for nothing, because there is no such thing.... Are we
going to depend on the government for every living, breathing,
walking moment of our life? Or are we going to do something on our
own?*

With this sequence, the television-magazine format shows through, as the romanticization of the cowboy is briefly brought down to a more contemporary expression.

The reputation of Alberta as a "conservative bastion" was well established by the time of *A Cowboy's Convictions*. The 1960s were a decade that ushered in a number of more liberal ideas and perspectives, and the decade witnessed the expansion of socialized healthcare throughout Canada. However, despite the movement of national politics at that time towards more social concerns, Alberta was still led by its very right-wing Premier, Ernest Manning, and leader of the Social Credit Party. And the nature of this movement is also reflected in a "loner cowboy" with the parentage of an orderly society.

During the 1960s, Manning became one of the country's leading proponents of free enterprise and a critic of the federal government's drift toward a welfare state.... His opposition to Liberal national policies on Medicare and bilingualism reflected a paradoxical right-wing political culture that combined a fervent belief in individualism and self-reliance with intense pressures for social and cultural conformity.¹⁴

Although this sequence may bring the cowboy philosophy of hard work and independence to a modern, political stance, the inclusion of it in a representation that is generally very romantic brings out the "promised land" history of Alberta. This has led Alberta to retain pioneer ideals. "But fortune has endowed Alberta with enough prosperity to allow it to perpetuate a romantic vision seen, as it were, through wild-rose-

coloured glasses.”¹⁵ Many Albertans were never even born, or raised, in the province. While ranching lost its economic prominence decades ago, the province still strongly carries symbols of their cowboy heritage.

For most of us, the frontier lies far enough in the past and far enough from our own experience to be romantic. The bank calendars, the Service poems, the Hollywood films, the boys' books, the Jeffrey's drawings have all emphasized the adventure and the glamour. We see the frontier in terms of scenery – the plumed mountains piled like sugar in the sky; the toothpaste glaciers squeezing down to mint-green waters; the tinsel cataracts garlanding the scarps; the Tom Thomson lakes, ragged in the wind; the Emily Carr rain forests, eerily viridian. We forget that all this tourist brochure magic once represented an appalling series of obstacles to those who first encountered them. We tend to overlook the pain of exploration. The country was opened up at a dreadful cost. Most frontier adventures are also chronicles of human misery, and those that follow are no exception.¹⁶

A tranquil atmosphere of the two films is brought forth with long takes and scenic shots of the landscape, accompanied by warm and simple music scores. And despite both *A Cowboy's Convictions* and *Cowboy* explicitly referring to the tough work of life on the frontier, the films have a nostalgic tone that romanticizes the cowboy by highlighting remnants of the frontier existence.

As with Low's films, there is the feeling of witnessing a world apart from our own that calls back to a time before the hustle of the modern world. Yet there is also a sense of recognition, a certain validation that this cowboy culture *does* exist in Alberta. Perhaps because it was made twenty years earlier, at the onset of the turbulent 1960s, *A Cowboy's Convictions* appears less concerned with nostalgia, mostly inferring the theme through style and general presentation. There are moments in the film where Diebel becomes much like any other average, contemporary person. This is demonstrated when he reflects on politics, where a modern link is illustrated between the ethos of Alberta's

cowboy heritage, and the province's tradition of conservative politics. However, *Cowboy* makes a more direct statement about its capturing of a vanishing figure. The film opens with the peaceful music, accompanied by a title card: "In the foothills of the rocky mountains, a traditional way of life is disappearing. Bill Michalsky, sixty-three, is one of the last high-country cowboys." The film also maintains an overall more serene feeling than *A Cowboy's Convictions*. *A Cowboy's Convictions* is a less poetic film, being more appropriate to its television-magazine forum with a wordier and more direct representation of the cowboy. In *Cowboy*, there is a less imposing narration that is not as structured and is free of a second narrator (as seen with the program host of *A Cowboy's Convictions*). Essentially, the more poetic nature of *Cowboy* emphasizes a sense of nostalgia, much like the NFB cowboy film made decades earlier, *Corral*. *A Cowboy's Convictions* and *Cowboy* do not take the frontier circumstances to the extent that Warren M. Elofson does with their representations void of violence and disruption. But ultimately, the emphasis placed on the Alberta cowboy's independence and self-reliance does cultivate a sense of esteem for the figure. Both Dave Diebel and Bill Michalsky qualify historian Sheilagh S. Jameson's simple declaration of Alberta's cowboys: "They were a special breed who stood tall in stature and in status. They were extremely independent, no doubt because of the freedom of the life they led and the wide space that surrounded them."¹⁷

With *A Cowboy's Convictions* and *Cowboy*, we see a continuation of themes, a cohesive image in the representation of the Alberta cowboy culture accompanying both the films of Colin Low and the greater non-fiction accounts of the cowboy ethos. Western historian Hugh A. Dempsey refers to a "modern romantic image of the cowboy"

as being “the epitome of honesty, freedom, and hard work.”¹⁸ The presentation of Dave Diebel in *A Cowboy's Convictions* and Bill Michalsky in *Cowboy*, represent such qualities. Both men embody the gentleness and respect of law essential to maintaining an orderly community, but also have the skills necessary to negate a frontier terrain. Although a consistency exists between the films of Low, Kelly, and Black, their mutual medium of documentary plays a factor in their harmony. In Chapter 4 the cinematic representation will be expanded, as the rendering of the Alberta cowboy by feature fiction films is examined.

Notes

- ¹ Hugh A. Dempsey, *The Golden Age of the Canadian Cowboy: An Illustrated History* (Saskatoon & Calgary: Fifth House Publishers, 1995), 2.
- ² David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 4th edition (New York: McGraw Hill, Inc., 1993), 211-212.
- ³ E.J. (Bud) Cotton with Ethel Mitchell, *Buffalo Bud, Adventures of a Cowboy* (Vancouver: Hancock House Publishers Ltd., 1981), 6.
- ⁴ Cotton, 39-40.
- ⁵ Cotton, 78.
- ⁶ Published under the authority of the Honourable Ronald A. Irwin, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, *First Nations In Canada* (Ottawa, 1997), 85.
- ⁷ *First Nations in Canada*, 83.
- ⁸ Dempsey, 1.
- ⁹ Lewis G. Thomas & Patrick Dunae ed., *Rancher's Legacy: Alberta Essays by Lewis G. Thomas* (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1982), vii.
- ¹⁰ Warren M. Elofson, *Cowboys, Gentlemen & Cattle Thieves: Ranching on the Western Frontier* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), xiv.
- ¹¹ Elofson, 154.
- ¹² Pierre Berton, *The Wild Frontier* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1978), 10-12.
- ¹³ Sheilagh S. Jameson, "Era of the Big Ranches," *The Best From Alberta History*, ed. Hugh Dempsey (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1981), 53.
- ¹⁴ Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, *Alberta, A New History* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1990), 316.
- ¹⁵ David Carpenter, ed., *Wild Rose Country: Stories From Alberta* (Canada: Oberon Press, 1977), 10.
- ¹⁶ Berton, *The Wild Frontier*, 13.
- ¹⁷ Jameson, 64.
- ¹⁸ Dempsey, 33.

Chapter 4

Feature Films of the Alberta Cowboy –

Anne Wheeler's *Cowboys Don't Cry* and Francis Damberger's *Road to Saddle River*

Many scholars of the Canadian cowboy have said that the Canadian western myth is one confused with that of the American west. This confusion has been blamed on the inundation of American Western novels and Hollywood Western films. Historian Hugh Dempsey describes the image of the Canadian cowboy as “a fascinating mix between Canadian conservatism and Hollywood ballyhoo.”¹ Though he asserts that there is tribute to qualities of “hard work and resilience,” there remains a strong influence from American films.

Yet the historical picture is inevitably affected by American stereotypes created by movies, television, advertising, and western novels. Over the years, Canada has been flooded with stories of the fight at the OK corral, range wars, bounty hunters, and shoot outs on Main Street. A number of Hollywood movies about the American West were filmed in western Canada as early as the 1920s and the Calgary Stampede was the locale for more than one “shoot’ em up” western. As a result, Canadians expect lawmen in western movies to be sheriffs, not Mounties, and the center of action is always Deadwood or Abilene, not Calgary or Moose Jaw.²

Dempsey’s observation is gloomy, concluding that “while the media-driven cowboy image has tumbled across the border into Canada, it is that of an alien American cowboy, not a Canadian one.”³ Pierre Berton shares his pessimism, as he carefully describes a lawless Canadian frontier depicted in Hollywood since the silent era that he believes had a devastating effect on our self-image.

The idea of a lawless frontier wasn’t confined to the three motion pictures that I’ve just described [*The Cariboo Trail* (Edwin L. Martin, 1950), *Canadian Pacific* (Edwin L. Marin, 1949), *The Far*

Country (Anthony Mann, 1954)]. These were the end-products of a long process in the Americanization of the Canadian image, which began in the early days of the silent movies and continued until this kind of picture became obsolete.⁴

But in *Coyote Country: Fictions of the Canadian West*, scholar Arnold E. Davidson takes a more positive perspective of this American Western influence, pointing out that because Canadians lack their own frontier myth, Canadian western writers had the freedom to counter and subvert the conventions of the American western myth. And even though he does primarily address the Western novel, Davidson includes Hollywood cinema as contributing to a very standardized myth.

Throughout most of the twentieth century the Western was a Hollywood staple and as such was highly standardized.... This movie rendering of the American West has long been recycled.... That quadruply inscribed – in fiction, movies, radio, and television – “West that wasn’t” gives me my starting point. If this “West” wasn’t the American West that it purported to be, even less was it the Canadian West. Western Canada, it must be emphasized, has a history substantially different from the American Western.⁵

Such observations note the existence of American western myth shadowing Canada. In referring to the “West that wasn’t” Davidson points out the discrepancy between the actual Canadian west from the American *Western* illustrations. In the process, he identifies the role of Hollywood in creating the “West that wasn’t” for both nations. Therefore, acknowledging the influence of Hollywood cinema is necessary in discussing the Alberta cowboy in cinema. And to understand the presence of American western films on Canada, the reasons behind the flood of Hollywood images in Canadian culture must be explained.

As we have seen in the two previous chapters, there are a number of documentaries that explore the lifestyle of the Alberta cowboy. Traditionally in English-

Canadian cinema, non-fiction films have received greater attention than feature films. A number of possible explanations have been cited for this. The geographical and cultural proximity of Canada to the United States makes Hollywood films very accessible to Canadians. English Canada does not have the same language barriers, distance, and more pronounced cultural discrepancies to the United States as other nations. As a result, the massive output of Hollywood has historically overshadowed the English-Canadian film industry. However, since the output of American documentaries is comparatively less conspicuous than its Hollywood films, Canada was able to be more competitive in that form.

While there has been film activity in Canada since the beginning of cinema, the inception of the National Film Board in 1939 is extremely important. The highly structured system of the NFB signaled more solid production and exhibition of Canadian film. Considering the first head of the board was John Grierson, a leading proponent of the documentary form, it is fitting that the orientation towards documentary was absolute in those early years. Grierson explicitly endorsed the direction of Canada's film industry towards documentary filmmaking. This is made obvious in his report on film policy, submitted to the Canadian government in 1938. Although he did believe that Canada could be more competitive in the documentary field than in feature filmmaking, he also touted this route as a sort of higher road, believing documentaries to be a more distinguished use of the film medium.⁶ In spite of the fact that feature filmmaking has existed in Canada throughout the nation's cinematic history, a sharp increase in production and exposure began in the 1960s. This is due in part to the release of some innovative feature films, but also from a growing discussion of Canadian identity. Film

Scholars Louis Giannetti and Jim Leach point to France's New Wave cinema as an inspiration to many filmmakers around the world, including Canada, to establish their own national cinemas.

Several Canadian filmmakers rose to the challenge, and the early 1960s saw the production of a number of films made in difficult circumstances on shoestring budgets.... There were some promising signs. A major breakthrough occurred in 1964 when two films, made under remarkably similar circumstances in Toronto and Montreal, were released.⁷

These two fiction films were *Nobody Waved Goodbye* (Don Owen, 1964) and *Le Chat dans le sac* (Gilles Groulx, 1964), examples of a "Canadian direct cinema" movement that was highly influenced by Canada's documentary tradition.

Although none of the direct cinema films was a huge box-office success, together they aroused enough public interest – at a time when the Montreal Expo of 1967 provoked reflection on a Canadian cultural identity – to encourage the federal government to enact legislation in support of a national cinema. The Canadian Film Development Corporation was established in 1968 with a mandate "to foster and promote the development of a feature film industry in Canada."⁸

However, despite the relatively more steady existence of an English-Canadian feature film industry since the 1960s, there still remains only a few films each year that receive any substantial publicity, and it seems that most English-Canadians still remain largely unacquainted with their cinema. Considering this context, the production and circulation of Alberta films is difficult, and leads to few features being made.

Like their documentary counterparts, those features that undertake the Alberta cowboy as topic illustrate a particular figure. Two such films are *Cowboys Don't Cry* and *Road to Saddle River*. While there are similarities between *Cowboys Don't Cry* and *Road to Saddle River*, the two films approach the topic in divergent ways. *Cowboys*

Don't Cry, the story of a troubled relationship between an Alberta-born rodeo star and his son, is a tale told from inside of the cowboy culture through the father and son who are both Alberta cowboys. *Road to Saddle River* is the story of an eastern-European immigrant living in Ontario who is inspired to travel west because of his obsession with a Roy Rogers-type movie cowboy, making his perspective one of an outsider. Though it has been said that Canadians adopt the popular myths of the American west, both these films serve as evidence that the Alberta cowboy described by historical scholars and documentary filmmakers has also been authenticated by our own movies. And even if these films are not as visible as Hollywood westerns, together with their non-fiction counterparts they offer a distinct picture of the Alberta cowboy.

In the documentaries discussed in the previous chapters, there was a sense that the films were consciously attempting to de-mythologize certain imaginings of the Alberta cowboy. This was at times stated outright, such as in *A Cowboy's Convictions*, when the host announces at the outset of the film that “*Maybe it's a bit of switch to do a television show on a real cowboy.*” The attentions paid in that film to detailing ranching activities was also a blatant attempt to “document,” not glamorize, the cowboy. Despite the documentaries attempt to de-fictionalize, they do not necessarily erase a romantic painting of the cowboy. While the cowboys documented in the various films may be perceived as less grandiose than the American cowboy, they are marked by a nature that is peaceful, independent, and hardworking. *Corral* is the best example of this romanticization, through the very poetic style of the film in the sweeping camera shots and melodic score. One difference of the feature films from the documentaries is the almost total lack of romanticism in *Cowboys Don't Cry* or *Road to Saddle River*. This

discrepancy is puzzling considering these are the fiction films. It would seem that the realm of fiction would offer more flexibility, more room for swelling the Alberta cowboy myth. However, if one takes into account certain conventions of the greater English-Canadian cinema, this de-glorification is fitting.

There is a tendency in English-Canadian cinema for the male protagonists to be very flawed, and this slant appears in the lead males of *Cowboys Don't Cry* and *Road to Saddle River*. To understand the forces behind the flawed characterization, we must recall the nature of the cowboy heroes in the documentaries. Primarily, that their heroic status was *not* based in conflict. In fact, the qualities for which they were exalted inherently counter the notion of conflict. The documentary cowboys are honourable for their quiet and orderly demeanor. And even their independent and self-reliant nature is based on a cooperative spirit with a community. The dramatic feature requires conflict. In the American western, this conflict is most obvious in the combat between the hero and an antagonist. But the polarization of the American cowboy is further emphasized by his "loner status," a figure who remains outside of society, and separate from the community. An example of the diverging natures is the "Cowboy vs. Indian" structure that is so standard to the American western, but which the Alberta cowboy refuses to follow. Because the documentaries do not require drama, and therefore do not require conflict, they are able to reflect favorably on this very nature of order and cooperation. But in the need to create drama, the protagonists of *Cowboys Don't Cry* and *Road to Saddle River* are complicated in a way that makes them somewhat deviant of the Alberta cowboy represented in the documentaries. However, as the films unfold, and the drama resolves itself, their images become closer to that of the documentary cowboys.

Cowboys Don't Cry begins with a family from Alberta traveling the rodeo circuit in the United States. The father, Josh Morgan (Ron White), is a successful rodeo competitor, and while he is not evil in any way, is certainly portrayed as a tough man. He seems particularly harsh in contrast to his more gentle-natured son, Shane (Zachary Ansley), who is frightened of joining the rodeo. Early in the film Josh accidentally kills his wife, Lucy (Rebecca Jenkins), when he is driving drunk. This sets up the film to follow the troubled relationship between father and son. Guilt over the accident plagues Josh, and a dependence on alcohol deepens as his successful rodeo career turns downwards. Josh and Shane eventually move to a ranch in southern Alberta inherited by Shane after the death of his maternal grandfather. The strife between father and son continues, and Josh's irresponsible ways brings them to the brink of losing their ranch. Their proximity to financial ruin is resolved when Josh takes work as a rodeo clown, an occupation he previously refused.

Similar to documentaries and historical writings of the Alberta cowboy, with *Cowboys Don't Cry*, Anne Wheeler removes a larger-than-life conception of her cowboy. In fact, *Cowboys Don't Cry* is actually rather brutal in its portrait, with almost a total absence of heroic traits in our cowboy protagonist. The male lead of *Cowboys Don't Cry* is a loser. However, this choice is not an exclusive or arbitrary one. It has been noted as a convention of English-Canadian cinema that male protagonists are extremely fallible. Robert Fothergill contemplates this tendency in English-Canadian fiction cinema.

What, then, is the version of *la condition canadienne* reflected on to us by our feature films? It is the depiction, through many different scenarios, of the radical inadequacy of the male protagonist – his moral failure, especially, and most visibly, in his relationship with women.⁹

Fothergill asserts that the weak male characters of Canadian cinema fall into three variations: a coward, a bully, or a clown. “The unprepossessing English Canadian male appears on the screen in several guises, which I have labeled Coward, Bully, and Clown.”¹⁰ The character of Josh Morgan in Wheeler’s film shares some of the qualities that marked the cowboys in the documentaries as heroic, such as their independent and gruff nature. Yet they are instead turned into a negative quality, causing much of the conflict in the film. Even if the film places enough emphasis on father and son for both to be considered a lead character, the viewer sympathizes with the son, Shane. Josh Morgan’s independence comes off as selfish and immature, leading him to disregard the feelings and safety of his wife and son. The strongest example of this in the narrative is when Josh drives drunk, despite the pleading of his wife, leading to her death in a vehicle accident. Josh Morgan’s rough and tough nature translates to being a bully, as he railroads his sensitive son, disregarding Shane’s interests and needs. Though not a violent man, Josh Morgan does not embody the quiet and peaceful nature emphasized in the documentaries either. He is a drunk and a thug. The brutal traits of the character call upon Fothergill’s Bully.

In its third screen manifestation, as Bully, the threatened and insubstantial male ego is shown attempting to assert its dominance through displays of brutal inconsideration and sullen rage. In addition to the hollow nastiness of his general disposition, the Bully specializes in the sexual degradation of his womenfolk. It’s the ugliest of the three faces, and the scenarios usually work to punish the characters who display it.¹¹

Josh Morgan is certainly inconsiderate and bad tempered. While Josh and his wife appear to be very much in love, and his actions towards her are not as extreme as Fothergill’s description, there are indications of his dominance. Fothergill describes how

those characters displaying the face of Bully suffer punishing consequences for it. Amongst his examples of this, Fothergill points to *Face-Off* (George McCowan, 1971), the story of a selfish Hockey player who is loved by a “truthful, dreamy, liberated, authentic” woman. It is only after the death of the girl in a car accident that our protagonist realizes what he has “thrown away.”¹² It is Josh Morgan’s bullying that leads to his wife’s death, a character that had already gained sympathy from the viewers. When she attempts to get Josh out of the driver’s seat, he slams the door. Josh ignores her pleadings that he be careful. In contrast to the portrayal of the English-Canadian male, Fothergill contends that the female protagonists are imagined as “virtually immaculate.”¹³ In her short screen time, Lucy Morgan is portrayed as kind and loving. She is an ideal wife and mother, lending support and understanding to both her husband and son. When she is given a horse by her husband, she names the animal “Angel” and tells Josh “*I want to break her my way,*” as though her method would be gentler than her husband’s. With the tragedy, the viewer’s identification grows even stronger with the son, and Shane’s suffering throughout the film is because of his father. Essentially, Josh’s rough and tumble nature is not appealing in the film.

Unlike the documentaries of the ranchers, Wheeler’s cowboy is marked by his occupation as a rodeo competitor. Moreover, the strong relationship of the cowboy to the landscape is less emphasized than in the documentaries. The character of Josh Morgan appears detached from his Alberta roots, resisting his wife’s desire to return to Alberta, even being difficult when his father-in-law pleads with him to allow her to be buried in Alberta. When his son inherits his maternal grandfather’s ranch, Josh is more interested in the possible resale value. Initially, Josh is completely opposed to even going to the

ranch at all. Only after Shane's pleading, "*Dad, look at us, we're a couple of bums! Someone's offering us a ranch here – a ranch! It might be worth a lot of money!*" does he become keen on the idea. However, Josh's lack of interest does not necessarily serve as the viewpoint of the film. In the first section of *Cowboys Don't Cry*, where the Morgan family is traveling the rodeo circuit through the United States, there is often ambiguity of where they are geographically. Many scenes are filmed inside, often in small places, such as their motor home. And yet there is strong emphasis placed on the fact that the family is from Alberta, discussions of "going back" surfacing in this first section.

When Josh and Shane do return to Alberta, a number of scenic shots of the southern Alberta landscape usher in their arrival. Father and son spend the remainder of the film living in Alberta, and the son grows an immediate and strong attachment to the ranch. This is somewhat of a compensation for his father's disregard, and the viewer's sympathy with Shane renders the land very significant. The rolling foothills and mountain backdrop so exploited in the documentaries returns, making a strong distinction of the specific territory of southern Alberta as the heart of Canada's cowboy country. But it is also unfair to discount the relevance of Josh Morgan's rodeo participation to the discourse of the Alberta cowboy. The sport of rodeo throughout cowboy history is important, particularly when the "old west" of Canada and the United States is long over. "The most enduring and positive depiction of the cowboy through the years has come through rodeo."¹⁴ In fact, one of the few positive or admirable traits of Josh Morgan is his skill at the sport. His achievements in the rodeo resonate of the skillful work performed by the ranchers in the documentaries. However, Josh's rodeo exploits end

early in the film, as guilt over his wife hinders him from his once glorious feats. In addition to the character's one source of grandeur being eliminated, the film ultimately resolves itself with Josh becoming a rodeo clown, a literal manifestation of Fothergill's Clown. "Like the Coward, but with a greater jauntiness of surface manner, the Clown shies away from the responsibility of a self-determining adult."¹⁵

Upon learning that he is likely to lose the ranch, and being fired from his construction job, Josh turns to alcohol once again. He returns drunk from the bar, and informs his son that they are returning to the rodeo circuit. A violent argument erupts between father and son, and Shane accuses Josh of killing his mother. Josh immediately leaves the ranch, telling his son "*You've been wanting to say that for a long time, haven't you?*" After a number of days, Shane decides to go search for his father. He tracks him down at a rodeo where Josh is now working as rodeo clown, and doing well at it, despite getting badly injured. In the opening scene of the film the rodeo announcer's introduction of Josh the bull rider is emphasized by its praising nature, full of accolades on both his professional and family accomplishments. "*Josh Morgan! A 34 year old devoted family man and two-time world champion bull rider!*" Also in the opening sequence are a number of shots of the rodeo clowns, a foreshadowing of the film's conclusion. The opening emphasizes the silliness and less significant role of the rodeo clowns, showing them sweeping off the barrels in the ring, and jumping in them to amuse the audience while the announcer shouts "*right back in the cookie jar!*" However, in the closing scenes of the film, when Josh has become a rodeo clown, more attention is paid to the importance of the clown in a rodeo. After a bull ride, the rodeo announcer tells the audience that it is time for the rodeo clowns to "*do their job*" getting "*the bull out of*

harm's way!" Unlike the announcer's words in the opening sequence, which drew attention to the clowns' comic performing, with these words attention is drawn to their serious chores. Josh is badly injured while trying to control a very volatile bull, demonstrating the more dangerous facets of the job. In the final scene of the film Shane visits Josh in the hospital, telling his father *"I can't believe it was you out there, you were terrific!"* The closing scene has Josh admitting to his own inadequacies, confessing to his son that he was terrified while in the ring, and most importantly, he finally admits to his part in Lucy's death. Not only does Josh become a very successful rodeo clown, by taking the job he resolves the conflict with his son. The financial security that comes with his new work means they are able to keep the ranch. And he has now achieved a certain humbleness that brings the character a degree of maturity. Ultimately, the film finds its resolution with Josh Morgan literally becoming a clown. As a rodeo clown, he is the antithesis of his former rodeo star status. He is only able to resolve the tribulations by becoming the opposite of what was once his character's focal worth. And in a sense, Josh becomes an Alberta cowboy: mature, humble, and hardworking. He now resembles the character seen in the documentaries, as opposed to the "American" cowboy he used to be.

Fothergill correlates the screen manifestations of English-Canadian cinema to a younger brother type of relationship Canada has to the United States.

One way to describe the impediments to satisfactory self-realization by the protagonists of English Canadian films is in terms of the psychological history of a younger brother.... Aware of his more powerful brother as a feature in the landscape, in a way that has never been reciprocated, the younger brother has grown up with a painfully confined sense of his own capacity for self-realization.¹⁶

The influence of the neighboring the United States is unavoidable in discussing the Canadian psyche, and the very close tie of the Canadian west to its American counterpart is unavoidable in recounting the history of the Canadian frontier.

Even if the differences of the Canadian west from the American are not directly distinguished in the film, there are indications of diverging character. Perhaps this divergence is symbolized with Josh's days as a rodeo star being played out while the film is set in the United States. Although returning to Canada is not what propels Josh's career downwards, by the time he reaches Canada, and for the remainder of the film, we see a character completely inadequate. While there are negative traits to Josh Morgan in the opening sequences as well, his character is not as pathetic as he is after his wife's death. Josh Morgan attempts to embody a more American style cowboy with his penchant for the more glamorous life of a championship bull rider, even choosing to carry out this career south of the border. As a bull rider, he carries out a lifestyle that is more associated with the American cowboy. Aside from the exaltations of being a championship bull rider, the career enables him to wander the American west. He even debates this with his wife, as he resists her desire to buy a ranch and put down roots. This is somewhat reminiscent of the American western hero who exists outside of a community. Even though Josh is "wandering," he is also part of a community - the rodeo circuit. When the Morgan family camps at a rodeo event, other families and participants surround them. There is a friendliness and comradery that counters the often hostile and divided towns of the American western. In the termination of his career and his return to Alberta, he must learn to confront and admit to his own shortcomings and limitations. To succeed in his new life in Alberta, he must be patient, responsible, and hardworking. He

is forced to find a job for the first time in his life, and he must take the ranch seriously. In the end, while he is able to return to the rodeo life he was so successful with, he must take the less glamorous work of the rodeo clown.

At Lucy Morgan's funeral in Montana, the difference in the dress between her father and her husband and his friends also indicates a discrepancy. Josh and the other men are dressed in pristine cowboy gear. They sport leather coats over crisp jeans and shirts, with imposing cowboy hats and boots. Meanwhile, Lucy's father is dressed more ruggedly, and notably less "cowboyish." This is most noticeable with his missing cowboy hat. But with his checkered jacket, worn clothing, and weathered face, he stands out against the other cowboys at the funeral. The viewer knows that this man is a rancher from earlier references in the film. His brief appearance stands out because of the emotional potency of the scene. He blames Josh for Lucy's death, telling him "*I should have killed you when I had the chance.*" This scene is an example of how the film contrasts the Canadian side of the border from the American. Lucy's father symbolizes the more humble Alberta cowboy while the other cowboys, including Josh, represent more pretentious figures. There is also a sense that Lucy's father embodies a more *authentic* cowboy, with his practical dress and hardy demeanor coming into conflict with the more inflated character of the rodeo cowboys. It is relevant that while the film does not illustrate the same cowboy qualities as the documentaries in the character of Josh Morgan, the narrative does gravitate towards the more peaceful and hardworking cowboy image. And more importantly, Josh Morgan's failure to adopt these traits is detrimental and the source of conflict.

There are indirect, but more positive, associations made with the Canadian side of the western border. Lucy Morgan, who is a very likable and sympathetic character in the film, is associated with Alberta. In one of the earliest scenes of the film Lucy is asking her husband that they return to Alberta to visit her father's ranch. When her father shows up at the funeral, he pleads with Josh to let him take Lucy's remains back to Alberta. "*I want to take her back where she was born – don't let her be buried here!*" Later in the film, Shane visits his mother's grave in Alberta. Whereas Lucy's funeral in Montana was held in a cemetery full of trees and bushes, her burial spot in Alberta is a small cemetery nestled in the foothills. The scenery surrounding Shane in this scene is awesome – the rolling foothills against the backdrop of the mountains foster a sense of appropriateness to her burial spot. But the most symbolic moment of the scene is when Shane pulls wild roses that are growing on his mother's grave and places them on her tombstone. One of the most frequently used symbols for Alberta, the placement of these wild roses on Lucy's tombstone links this admired character to Alberta. Editor David Carpenter titled a collection of Alberta stories *Wild Rose Country: Stories from Alberta*. His introduction often refers to Alberta's wild roses, using the flower to symbolize the Alberta psyche. It is as though the wild rose represents both the untamed nature of their frontier roots, and the fulfilled promises of that frontier in the success the province has had.

But fortune has endowed Alberta with enough prosperity to allow it to perpetuate a romantic vision seen, as it were, through wild-rose-coloured glasses. To the fundamentalist it announces the imagery of the Promised Land . To the expectant capitalist it seeks expression in treasure-hunt narratives. To the tourist or outdoorsman it finds its romantic backdrop in the northern forests or the Rockies.... Such are the historical paradoxes of a province whose economy and social structure have been accelerated at an unusually rapid rate from a pastoral to an urbanized condition."¹⁷

Essentially, while Josh Morgan does not initially embody what scholars and documentary filmmakers have typically described as the Alberta cowboy, the film views this as a redeemable weakness. In the end, by refusing to continue a rough and tough lifestyle, he seems to discontinue a cowboy lifestyle that is more American in its style. In turn, at the close of the film, we are left with a cowboy who somehow seems more appropriate. In adapting a more humble manner, he becomes more fitting to the vision of an Alberta cowboy. This brings closure to the conflict in the film and is essential to understanding the motivation behind the characterization of Josh Morgan. While Josh Morgan's failure to live up to the romantic qualities of a peaceful and dedicated Alberta cowboy lead to the strife of the film, this conflict is exactly what is required to make the film dramatic. And Josh Morgan is undoubtedly the most interesting character of the film. His divergence from the qualities that were romanticized in the documentaries is what makes him a colorful character. And though the closure of the film required Josh to let go of his flashy demeanor, the conflict that it brought throughout the film is what drew the viewer in.

As with *Cowboys Don't Cry*, *Road to Saddle River* does not attempt to glorify the cowboy figure. However, there is much more of a self-conscious attempt at this than in *Cowboys Don't Cry*, for *Road to Saddle River* is a film that takes as its theme a revisioning, or even mocking, of the western myth. The abstract of the film on the NFB website declares: "This rumbling, rollicking, comic adventure takes the Western myth and rides it for all its worth!"¹⁸ A film that reflects the perspective of outsiders arriving to Alberta, it plays humorously with many notions of the west. *Road to Saddle River* opens with a vignette that continues throughout, a side-play that occasionally drops in on

our main story. It features two characters, a white man dressed in black cowboy gear, and a Native man in traditional Indian clothes. However, their dress is distinctively Hollywood in style, resembling costumes familiar to Classic Hollywood westerns. There are never words exchanged between the two, just the enactment of various “battles.” But the battles are comical – such as stealing saddles, or playing games of “Indian wrestling.” The cowboy in black from these vignettes also appears in visions to our main protagonist. This is just one way that the film plays with the western myth, and makes reference to the role of movie cowboys in the mythmaking process. The main protagonist in the film, Cowboy Kid (Paul Jarrett), is an eastern European immigrant living in Canada. Cowboy Kid is obsessed with a fictional cowboy named “Rango,”¹⁹ and we are first introduced to the protagonist as he dresses for work while reciting “Rango’s Cowboy Commandments” from a poster on the wall. Cowboy Kid’s fixation on Rango is obvious. Besides reciting the “Rango Commandments,” he reads a Rango comic book while working at his uncle’s butcher shop. Throughout the film the protagonist emulates typical cowboy phrases and actions. The examples are numerous, but they include his constant repetition of the word “Yo,” or informing his aunt and uncle at dinner that “*I ain’t got no hankerin’ for grub.*”

While watching a Rango movie at the cinema, Cowboy Kid observes his hero describing a place called “Saddle River.” Believing this mythic place to be real, Cowboy Kid hitchhikes west in search of it, and more importantly, the cowboy myth it symbolizes. The film takes on the classic tradition of *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939), as Cowboy Kid picks up an ensemble of companions on his journey to Saddle River. Like Dorothy, Cowboy Kid picks up three companions. The first of these is Sam (Paul Coeur), an out-of-work businessman whose wife just left him, with whom Cowboy

Kid hitches his ride out west. Once in Alberta, a new companion joins Sam and Cowboy Kid, a German tourist named Dieter (Eric Allan Kramer). Norman Manyheads (Sam Bob), an Alberta Aboriginal, rounds out the group. As Dorothy's companions are inspired to join her by the promises of the Emerald City, Cowboy Kid repeats to each of his companions Rango's description of Saddle River. *"There is a place called Saddle River. Where the grass is green, the river is clear, and blue sky as far as the eye can see."*

Although Cowboy Kid's journey is initially described as the more general "out west," the film makes a very clear distinction of Alberta as cowboy country. It is not obviously defined where they start their journey, but in estimating the time it appears to take, and brief shots of the terrain when they begin driving, one can assume that they are in Ontario. Sam picks up Cowboy Kid on a busy highway, and we soon see their little Honda civic sail past a transcanada highway marker. They are headed west. While there is no blatant label for their journey across Saskatchewan, it is signified by shots of the endlessly flat wheat fields. When they stop for gas, big grain elevators are noticeable in the background. Sam has a comical conversation with a local man that seems to symbolize Saskatchewan. Sporting typical farmer gear, leaning against a pick-up truck, the man drones about the weather to Sam. Sam's obvious irritation at the repetitive and slow nature of the man's conversation illustrates the reputation of an obnoxious Ontario, and a lackluster Saskatchewan. In spite of the fact that the cowboy culture of Canada extends into both Saskatchewan and B.C., the film distinguishes southern Alberta as the home of our protagonist's cowboy dreams. The first shot of Sam and Cowboy Kid in Alberta takes place in the rolling foothills. This is particularly significant because the

previous shots, in Saskatchewan, emphasize the flatness of that province. Instead of choosing to film the portions of Alberta that are more similar to the terrain of Saskatchewan, Damberger chooses a landscape that is distinct and more identifiable as Alberta. More importantly, this first shot of their car driving along the Alberta highway is accompanied by the cowboy from the cowboy-Indian vignette entering the screen. Riding in from screen left, and positioned on a hill above the highway, the figure dominates the screen, welcoming us to cowboy country.

The following shot has Sam and Cowboy Kid pulled over, both looking up at a roadside billboard. The large advertisement features a photograph of three men, dressed in cowboy gear. Underneath the photograph is the slogan “If it ain’t Alberta, it ain’t beef – Alberta Cattle Commission.” Sam and Cowboy Kid then wander over to get a better look at the landscape. Cowboy Kid sees the cowboy in black from the vignettes in the distance. However, we quickly assume this is a vision of Cowboy Kid’s, because the image suddenly appears and disappears, with only he showing any reaction. This vision is accompanied by quiet whistling noises, reminiscent of a western film score. The placement of Cowboy Kid on the outer side of a barbwire fence, and his vision of a cowboy in the landscape, points out a proximity he is feeling to the world of his cowboy hero. Although there have been certain geographical indicators previously in their journey, their arrival into Alberta is comparatively much stronger and more distinct. In addition to the recognizable landscape, the billboard at the side of the road offers the first concrete identification in the film with the title of Alberta Cattle Commission. There is an instant description of this as cowboy country with the immediate cowboy presence. While Saddle River may be their ultimate aim, this world they have entered is a

destination as well. As Oz is familiar to Dorothy's dreams of what is over the rainbow, this southern area of Alberta becomes the definition of the "out west" our protagonists have been heading towards. In a comical end to this first Alberta scene, a car pulls up behind Cowboy Kid, two young men emerging. They approach Cowboy Kid, commenting on the spectacular view, telling him "*this is God's country.*" It soon becomes apparent that they are missionaries trying to convert him. And while it is not specified what denomination they belong to, those familiar with the Mormon religion would recognize them as such. All young Mormon men must dedicate two years to missionary work, and they always travel in pairs while doing so. But it is better explained by the fact that Sam and Cowboy Kid are in southern Alberta, a cradle for the Church of Latter Day Saints. The parting event in this "welcome to Alberta" sequence sets up a film that is constantly playing with Alberta culture.

Of course, there is more relevance in this film to the cowboy culture aside from identifying Alberta as the bastion. The film is somewhat different from both *Cowboys Don't Cry* and the documentaries in that our protagonist this time is not a real cowboy. However, through his perspective, as an outsider with a fixation on cowboys, we are offered a revealing picture of the Alberta cowboy. *Road to Saddle River* describes a cowboy figure that also acknowledges the confusion of Canadians described by Hugh Dempsey and Pierre Berton. It is safe to assume that Cowboy Kid's movie hero is a Hollywood invention, since Canada has not been one to churn out such cowboy films. Much of the film's humor is from Cowboy Kid's bewilderment over the unexpected reality he uncovers about life on the range. While this is obviously used for comic effect, the discrepancy between our protagonist's vision and what he encounters makes for a

distinct view of the Alberta cowboy. Cowboy Kid's expectations may be summed up by his opening words, when he is reciting "Rango's Cowboy Commandments."

*Cowboy never betrays trust
Cowboy always tells the truth
Cowboy is not prejudice
Cowboy is kind to children, old folk, and animals
Cowboy is clean about his person in think, work, and deed
Cowboy is patriot*

In the Rango film that inspires Cowboy Kid to seek Saddle River, we see a character that is glamorous. In a scene reminiscent of *Shane* (George Stevens, 1953) he is gently, but firmly, telling a stricken young boy that he is leaving for a place called "Saddle River." This movie-style cowboy is openly mocked in the cowboy-Indian vignettes of the film – where a cowboy all decked out in black and an Indian in traditional dress comically reenact battle.

However, the first time we are introduced to a "real" Alberta cowboy in the film, the characterization is surprisingly mundane. After driving through a barbwire fence, Sam and Cowboy Kid are awakened in the morning by a herd of cows surrounding their vehicle. Once they are safely out of their car, Sam tries to explain to the cowboys why they drove through the fence. The cowboys they encounter do not say much. Though their high spot atop horses, and their obvious unhappiness over the fence, give them a somewhat powerful appearance, they are represented in a relatively bland manner. Their expressions display some confusion and aggravation over the situation, but they are not sneering with anger, nor sporting huge warm smiles. They are not extremely handsome, nor do they have dramatically weathered faces. They take Sam and Cowboy Kid back to their ranch, and while they tow their car, they expect payment for the fence, putting our protagonists to work. Once again, emphasis is placed on the hard work of a cowboy. In

this sequence, the cowboys remain nameless, while attention is drawn to the branding, roping, and castrating of the animals. There is even an educational aspect to the action, as Sam inquires about the methods and terms involved with castrating a bull. Throughout the scene, Cowboy Kid is obviously horrified. In one of the funniest details of the film, Cowboy Kid is repulsed by meat, first evident with his disgust while working at his uncle's butcher shop. He appears nauseous whenever he eats meat, memories of his uncle's butcher shop flashing across. Cowboy Kid is not only aghast, but also completely inept, at the tasks he carries out with the cowboys. "*Cowboy is kind to children, old folk, and animals.*" Not only does witnessing the castration and branding of animals contradict Rango, the violent discrepancy between our protagonist's visions of what a cowboy is, and the reality of the tasks involved, demonstrates the ignorance of outsiders.

Symbols of the Alberta cowboy culture are made humorous again in a scene where our protagonists encounter a Japanese businessman who is planning a golf course in cattle country. Ironically, it is not the actual investor they encounter, for he is too scared to emerge from his limousine due to a pathological fear of open spaces. His assistant excitedly explains their plans, although he admits the difficulty in getting "*these people to sell their land.*" However, he does not see this as a serious hindrance, telling them "*like the cowboys say, bullshit walks, and money talks.*" He explains their plans to make the golf course in the shape of a wagon wheel, as a "*nice touch.*" Aside from being another example of an outsider's misunderstandings, the scene also makes a statement about a "new west" in Alberta. The Calgary Stampede was instituted as homage to a glorious time passed when it was begun in 1912. There is no doubt that the prominent position the cattle industry still holds in Alberta is one more symbolic than actual, its

preeminence displaced a hundred years ago. So while this film explores misunderstandings of the Alberta cowboy culture through the skewed perspective of outsiders, there is a larger statement about the tendency to hold onto a passing era. Even if Cowboy Kid's outsider background as both an easterner and an immigrant emphasizes the discrepancy between his expectations and reality, his adoption of symbolic gestures and images may be something Albertans do as well. Although the film offers evidence of a cowboy culture existing in Alberta, the narrative's commentary on colored perceptions may be an indication of Alberta's own misconceptions. In another situation in the film, located at a rodeo our protagonists attend, is a tent advertising "Wild West Photos." This "Wild West Photo" places the subject in front of a painted landscape and next to a live buffalo with a fake arrow through its head. Earlier in the film Norman took the other characters to a Buffalo Jump and explained the drastic effects on the Native peoples when the Europeans over-hunted the buffalo. Norman is horrified by the "Wild West Photos" and later kidnaps the buffalo. The ignorance, irony, and pure existence of the novelty tent are identical to the businessman's comment on the wagon wheel golf course as a *"nice touch."* That the film is directly acknowledging such an ignorance is reflective of Arnold E. Davidson's contention that Canadian western fiction has the freedom to play with conventions of the American western by virtue of distance from our own frontier experience. Davidson cites Jon Tuska's assertion that the stereotypical portrayal of Natives in Hollywood westerns is an example of how the American myth is constructed to serve a white patriarchy.

The Hollywood Western, Tuska concludes, has pandered "for so long" to "illusions and comforting fantasies" about an imaginary West, it has made so many films "mired in ... rigid, formulary convention" and replete with "stereotypical characters" that any attempt "to tell (in a

movie) of the actual history of the American West” would seem “depressing and subversive: in a word, unAmerican.”²⁰

The drama and humor of *Road to Saddle River* is in the conflict between the Hollywood version of the west, and the “real” Canadian west.

While the first group of ranchers Cowboy Kid encounters is relatively bland in their representations, there is an important cowboy character that appears for the last half of the film. In a dream, the cowboy in black tells our protagonist that he must learn to ride a bucking horse. Norman, the only Albertan amongst the group, takes our protagonist to an old cowboy named Louis (Michael Hogan) to learn how to ride a bucking horse. In Louis, we again find a cowboy figure very different from Rango. But unlike the first group of bland cowboys, Louis is very much a character. While Louis is certainly not the heroic movie cowboy type, he is represented in a dramatic fashion with his grumpy and tough manner that warrants a commanding presence. Unlike the documentaries, which emphasize the more tranquil, peaceful, introspective style of the Alberta cowboy, or much of the historical writings which emphasize the more orderly and structured Canadian frontier, Louis is a more piquant version of the Alberta cowboy. Louis is an alcoholic whose constant rants are peppered with profanity. In the scene where his character is introduced, Louis is wearing longjohns and a cowboy hat, pointing a rifle at our protagonists. While his home is rural, it is a broken-down shack, and there is no indication of it as a working ranch. His cowboy tools consist of a barrel tied between two posts behind his house, for practice bronco riding, and a small corral. With his tough exterior and tie to rodeo, Louis is somewhat reminiscent of Josh Morgan from *Cowboys Don't Cry*. But unlike Josh Morgan's traces of cowardice, Louis is as tough as any American cowboy depicted in a Hollywood western. He is not the whistling cowboy

that our protagonist envisioned. *"Cowboy is clean about his person in think, work, and deed."* In our introduction to Louis, our protagonists are invited to have dinner with him. His table is piled high with steak, and he begins a grace thanking God for the beef they are about to eat. During this grace he reiterates the sign that first welcomed us to Alberta. *"And Lordy – we all know – if it ain't Alberta, it ain't beef! And I'll kill any corn-fed son of a bitch who says otherwise."* When Louis notices that Cowboy Kid isn't eating his meat, he barks at him *"You ain't one of them Goddamn vegetarians, are ya'?"* Louis's aggressiveness may scare Cowboy Kid, and his exterior is far rougher around the edges than Rango, but there is a fervor to the character that summons "Rango's Cowboy Commandments." Although he is not scrubbed in his appearance, he is forthright and honest. And while the character is obviously exaggerated for comic effect, there is a dramatic moment in this very humorous film that seems uncharacteristically poignant. The day before they go to the rodeo, there is scene of Louis alone at sunset. The sky is a burst of orange and yellow. We see only a black silhouette of Louis against the corral. There is no music, only Louis uttering the words,

*Oh when I die, take my saddle from the wall.
Place it on my pony, lead it from the stall.
Tie my bones up on his back, turn our faces west.
And we'll ride out on that prairie, that we love the best.*

This scene stands out, certainly because of its dramatic quality, but more importantly because it has a meditative quality that is absent in the rest of the film. This scene is more reminiscent of the documentaries, which seem to document the Alberta cowboy in an almost spiritual way. As a result, even if *Road to Saddle River* does play with the Alberta cowboy myth, there is not a complete resistance to romanticizing the figure.

In drawing conclusions about the depiction of the Alberta cowboy in these films, there are two characters who are not as obviously relevant but who deserve further consideration. This is Shane Morgan in *Cowboys Don't Cry* and Cowboy Kid from *Road to Saddle River*. Though both characters are main protagonists, they are not as easily identifiable as actual cowboy figures. With Cowboy Kid, aside from being an outsider, the entire film is based on his confusion and misunderstanding over the cowboy lifestyle he finds in Alberta. In addition, his misconceptions come from his idolization of a Hollywood cowboy. Cowboy Kid is disgusted by meat, unable to perform any ranching tasks, and drops out of a rodeo because he is too frightened. However, in the conclusion of *Road to Saddle River*, there is a sense that our protagonist has found a place as a cowboy. In one of the closing scenes Cowboy Kid, despite his fear, mounts a horse. Suddenly, the horse takes off, taking a terrified Cowboy Kid with it. But he soon brings things under control and becomes more comfortable, not unlike the cowboy in *Corral*. A smile appears, and he rides joyously into the sunset. In the closing shot of Cowboy Kid, he sits proudly on a horse, Norman next to him with the kidnapped buffalo, together overlooking a river. "Home on the Range" is playing. While there are no words spoken, there is a sense that they have found what they believe to be "Saddle River." Hence, while Cowboy Kid's perceptions may be skewed, he ultimately does find his place in the cowboy world. And he finds that place not by becoming a rancher or a rodeo star, but by mimicking Rango. In the Rango movie sequence, we saw a cowboy who sat atop a horse, whose manner was gentle and peaceful, setting out for Saddle River. Cowboy Kid has found the place described by Rango, thus fulfilling his own dreams of what a cowboy is.

Cowboy Kid, and Shane Morgan from *Cowboys Don't Cry*, share a sensitive nature. Even if they do not display the maverick qualities of the cowboys in the documentaries, their sensitivity, and the sympathy we feel for them, recalls the introspective quality of the documentary cowboys. In the western novel *Prairie Symphony* by Wilfrid Eggleston, protagonist Christopher Niles shares certain traits with both Shane and Cowboy Kid.

You wouldn't think of him as a typical rancher's son. Indeed, he was something of a misfit in the setting. He should have been sunburnt and sturdy; he should have been seated on a cayuse, dashing madly across the open range. And no cowboy would ever let them catch him planting a garden. That was a sissy job, to be left to the girls. Christopher was too delicate and sensitive, too thin and awkward and diffident, for a pioneer ranch.²¹

Although Shane Morgan is not as delicate as this (Shane relishes working on the ranch), he is a softer character compared to his father. He may not have a problem with working on the ranch, but his fears and refusals of rodeo sport make him an atypical "bull rider's son." Another passage in the novel reveals our character's repulsion at his ranch duties, identical to Cowboy's sentiments from *Road to Saddle River*.

Ranch life did not grow more attractive. True, there were glorious hours riding the range, when all his fretful ambitions could be forgotten. He loved the open spaces and the magnificent skies. But the uglier and crueller sides of ranch life now involved him more personally. So long as he was a child, he could look on, fascinated and horrified, slinking away when things became more than he could bear. But now he was required to take active part in the slaughterings and emasculations and brandings. He knew now how it felt to sear the skin and flesh of a shuddering calf with a cherry-red branding iron. He handed over knives and surgical instruments while the young colts, the bull calves and the young boars were castrated. He held struggling roosters while Roy or Arthur brought down the axe. When pig-killing time arrived he was instructed to stun the condemned animal with a .22 rifle shot neatly between the eyes, after which the animal's throat was cut and the blood drained away. His imagination was too vivid and his empathy too catholic for such a life. He could

grieve for months after seeing a favorite young stallion, full of fire and grace and spirit, reduced in one swift callous operation into a dull gelding, drawing a plow or a stoneboat a few weeks later.²²

Cowboy Kid came to Alberta seeking the things that Christopher loves to do, riding gloriously on the range under the “magnificent skies.” While Shane and Cowboy Kid do not have the same skills, or wisdom, that is demonstrated in the documentaries, there is a gentle quality to these characters that is in keeping with the descriptions of Alberta cowboys.

In the documentaries of Colin Low, Peter Kelly and Darold Black, we are presented with Alberta cowboys unlike the grandiose American cowboys. They are neither men of exquisite heroism nor brutal revisionist heroes. However, they are still made to shine in their own way, marked by a maverick nature that is peaceful and independent. It is their ability to work both within and with the tough elements of nature that affects their heroic status. This is not as clear in the realm of fiction, where the necessary element of drama leads to a complex picture of the Alberta cowboy in *Cowboys Don't Cry* and *Road to Saddle River*. Unable to structure the same conflicts of the American western, the filmmakers instead pit their cowboy figures against the ideals of the Alberta cowboy. Anne Wheeler delivers a cowboy that is not in keeping with that of the documentaries. Yet the negative consequences of Josh Morgan's character actually does reaffirm, as opposed to undermine, what has been understood as a typical Canadian cowboy. Francis Damberger offers a herd of symbols and associations about Alberta's cowboy heritage. Sharing the tendency of historical writings, *Road to Saddle River* directly questions what an Alberta cowboy is. Like the documentaries, the film unmask the glamorous notions of Hollywood, as Damberger humorously uses

extremities, such as the mundane character of one cowboy, to the zeal of another, to create the friction needed. But what these films do share with the other representations is a refusal to polarize the cowboy hero from civilization. And this is what ultimately distinguishes the Alberta cowboy - a figure who is independent in spirit, while respecting the order of society in action.

Notes

¹ Hugh A. Dempsey, *The Golden Age of the Canadian Cowboy: An Illustrated History* (Saskatoon & Calgary: Fifth House, 1995), 2.

² Dempsey, 2.

³ Dempsey, 2.

⁴ Berton, *Hollywood's Canada: The Americanization of our National Image* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1975), 215.

⁵ Arnold E. Davidson, *Coyote Country, Fictions of the Canadian West* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1994), 4-5.

⁶ John Grierson, "A Film Policy for Canada," *Documents in Canadian Film*, Douglas Fetherling ed., (Toronto: Broadview Press, 1988), 51.

⁷ Louis Giannetti and Jim Leach, *Understanding Movies*, Second Canadian Edition (Toronto: Prentice Hall, 2001) 342.

⁸ Giannetti and Leach, 346.

⁹ Robert Fothergill, "Coward, Bully, or Clown: The Dream-Life of a Younger Brother," *Canadian Film Reader*, Seth Feldman and Joyce Nelson eds. (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates Ltd., 1977), 235.

¹⁰ Fothergill, 236.

¹¹ Fothergill, 239.

¹² Fothergill, 239.

¹³ Fothergill, 239.

¹⁴ Dempsey, 3.

¹⁵ Fothergill, 237.

¹⁶ Fothergill, 243.

¹⁷ David Carpenter, ed., *Wild Rose Country: Stories From Alberta* (Canada: Oberon Press, 1977), 10.

¹⁸ "Road to Saddle River," *National Film Board Of Canada*, online, <http://cmm.nfb.ca/E/titleinfo/index.epl?id=33218&recherche=simple&coll=onf>.

¹⁹ "Cowboy Kid" and his movie-hero "Rango" are reminiscent of John Wayne's "Ringo Kid" in *Stagecoach* (John Ford, 1939)

²⁰ Davidson, 5.

²¹ Wilfrid Eggleston, *Prairie Symphony* (Ottawa: Boreales Press, 1978), 3.

²² Eggleston, 29-30.

Conclusions

The previous chapters have demonstrated that there is an Alberta cowboy culture, and that this culture is represented in Canadian cinema. The American western is so integrated into American culture that it is a blueprint for understanding the nature of America itself.

Is it possible to imagine America without the cowboy? No, that thought is inconceivable, as inconceivable as an America without George Washington. Like “the Father of Our Country,” the cowboy is part man, part myth, and a wholly indispensable symbol of the many assumptions, presumptions, and beliefs about ourselves and our world.¹

Canada has not paid as much attention to its own western myth, perhaps because they could not recognize themselves in the shadow cast by the American one. The influences of American culture on Canada are unavoidable when discussing our Canadian identity. This concern is particularly relevant to Canadian cinema, where the enormous impact of Hollywood cinema is an unavoidable factor. “One of the few things that all Canadians have in common, for example – whatever our class, colour or spoken language- are the images we share from Hollywood films and from American television.”² The lack of unity that often exists in Canadian culture is likely a reason why Canadian cinema has had a difficult time establishing a solid following or interest. As a result, scholars often try to read Canadian films with the intentions of finding, or establishing, a national character. In the process, the factors that divide Canada are acknowledged. But often, the individual pieces are overlooked. The explosive, combative, individualist, relentless, American cowboy *is* irreconcilable to a Canadian ethos. But the influences of a cowboy

culture on Alberta are also unavoidable. And this is not only in empty symbols either, for the Alberta cowboy has existed for over a century.

Ranching in its pure form was uneconomic, and it disappeared almost as suddenly as it started. However, it also provided the expertise for trailing the first herds to the frontier and helped the cattle industry endure long enough to gain a lasting foothold. Presumably, it is at least to some extent for those reasons that the cowboy has remained an icon in parts of southern Alberta and Saskatchewan where production has continued.³

But what is more relevant than recognizing its existence is the esteem held for it in Alberta. The veneration of their cowboy culture is most obviously acknowledged in the Calgary Stampede.

When it was designed in 1912, the “big four” cattlemen, George Lane, A.E. Cross, Patrick Burns, and the Honourable A.J. Maclean, believed that the working cowboy was already a “street curiosity,” and they very much wanted to acknowledge his contribution. Therefore they planned a “reunion of old-timers to show what the country had come to and what from,” by bringing together the “finest ropers and roughriders of the North American continent in competition.” The survival of this celebrated affair along with a multitude of smaller stampedes and rodeos, and, as well, the persistence of western styles in rural communities, indicates that the imprint of the frontier may never completely be erased. This is a consequence of an image created by and for the men who rode the open range in a short but eminently important period of western Canadian agricultural development.⁴

Maybe the western does not seem as integral to the Canadian identity as it is to the American one. But the preeminence of the cowboy figure in Alberta certainly makes it a blueprint of that region’s culture. And examining the representation of the cowboy in film is a way of reading the history and culture of Alberta.

In a study on the cowboy in American westerns, Ralph Lamar Turner and Robert J. Higgs open with a description of a typical movie-moment that embodies the American western. “The street empties as two men stand facing each other in the sweltering heat.

A war of words has erupted into a duel in the sun. Each man, beads of sweat forming above his eyes, gazes, transfixed, waiting for the slightest movement to begin the dance of death.”⁵ The tension of this moment symbolizes the American western, where the structure is always based on conflicts of opposites. These binary opposites do not exist in representations of the Alberta cowboy, where unique sets of traits embody our own figure. A peaceful, orderly nature and a hard-working, self-reliant spirit mark the cinematic representation of the Alberta cowboy. This character expresses the historical circumstances of the cowboy and reflects the tendencies of Alberta culture.

What is so distinctive in the Canadian cowboy is the resistance to conflict in the representation. While the Alberta cowboy does place emphasis on individualism, the form this individualism takes is different from that of the American hero. The Alberta cowboy is not in opposition to the community in the same way the American figure is. Individualism in the Alberta cowboy is based on self-reliance, a skill necessary to survival on the frontier. But the Alberta cowboy still acknowledges his place in the community and, therefore, his individualism is not one of self-interest. This integration into a community signals one of the defining differences of the Canadian west from its American counterpart – that the Canadian west was one of law and order. The extent of this peaceful, law-abiding frontier is debated amongst scholars. But what is inarguable is the *presence* of law and order on the Canadian frontier. Though the NWMP may have been less able to hold the situation than is often depicted, their presence on the frontier signals the government control that existed in the Canadian west. This presence of authority did lead to a more organized society, and the order required surfaces in the

Alberta cowboy. Throughout the films, the self-reliant nature of the cowboy is highlighted, but never in way that makes him an outsider to civilization.

The fusion of independent thought with collective concern is a fundamental part of Alberta politics. The unique and eccentric political history of Alberta is one of the most interesting elements of the province. Alberta has been a hotbed for radical politics, both radically left, and radically right. However, it is the radically right-wing parties that have led the province for most of its history. And one of the main characteristics of these movements, whether it be a farmers' cooperative, or a William Aberhart's unorthodox Social Credit, or the current third-decade reign of the decidedly right-wing Progressive Conservative, is an intense individualist orientation fused with social conformity and conservatism. Alberta's political character rises from a number of sources. But it is symbolized in the Alberta cowboy, who seems to embody these long-standing ideals. The parentage of this figure is the same as Alberta itself. The Alberta cowboy was formed by both British and American influences. It was a British and eastern elite that first established ranches in southern Alberta. But it was Americans who came to run them and pass on their cowboy trade. The combination of these two infused the Alberta cowboy with a respect for order and community and a self-reliance and independence that was essential to life on the open range. But there is also the influence of the many non-British and non-American immigrants who came to Alberta over the years. Even if they are not as prolific in the historical roots of the cowboy, it is their presence that determines Alberta's pioneer ideals. For the same reasons they were open and accepting to the new and radical politics of the UFA and Social Credit, the cowboy culture has been held up as a symbol of Alberta.

There are many subjects and questions that are relevant to the topic of Alberta cowboy films, but were not discussed due to the limits of this project. In a future, and more comprehensive study of this topic, I would include further discussions of western Canadian literature. George Bowering's *Caprice* (1987), and Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Englishman's Boy* (1996), are just a couple of the many interesting novels and poems that would offer a larger context from which to draw an understanding of the Canadian western myth.

The research of this thesis was often a frustrating endeavor. The difficulty of locating films was arduous, and it never failed to surprise me that there is not more work existing on the Canadian cowboy in film. I found myself scrounging through texts and articles on Canadian cinema, looking for a paragraph that might be applicable. I did find a few. But my more frequently felt frustrations are paralleled in the novel *Prairie Symphony* by Wilfrid Eggleston. The novel follows a young poet growing up on a ranch in southern Alberta, inspired by the land he works on everyday. Yet our protagonist's efforts to find works by other prairie authors for inspiration are often frustrated.

If he was to be a poet – and no other path to the heights had ever suggested itself – he must begin a long and strenuous apprenticeship. No guide was available. From what little he had been able to conjecture, a tyro poet must practice endlessly at his craft, must incorporate the classics into his being. He must become familiar with the work of other poets, especially the prairie poets – if there were any. He must learn far more about the land in which he lived, the land and the people, present and past.⁶

While our protagonist is unable to find much literature devoted to his beloved prairie, he is even further perplexed when his own works are constantly turned down by eastern publishers with condescending tones describing the subject matter as a “charming suite of nature lyrics.”⁷

A third time it went out and came back again. Christopher was puzzled and resentful. He knew it was competent verse. It was original. No southern Alberta writer, so far as he knew, had ever before captured the essence and spirit of the short-grass prairie. Why the indifference?⁸

What I find relevant in these passages is not the question of whether there are substantial amounts of western Canadian literature, but the sentiments it expresses. Locating titles of films was difficult. But ultimately, it is not the lack of existing films that is frustrating. Certainly, if there were many more Alberta cowboy films, more specialized attention would exist. What is really needed is the acknowledgment. A surge of interest in the 1960s in Canadian identity led to a stronger Canadian cinema. But while films about life on the prairies, or any other regions away from the urban centers of Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, may be relevant to the larger discussions of Canadian cinema, they also deserve specific attention of their own. Between 1998 and 2000, only one Canadian feature film made in Alberta was shown at the Toronto International Film Festival, Gary Burns's *Way Downtown* (2000). It is understandable that most films would emerge from film industry centers like Toronto. But to really understand Canadian culture through cinema, we must begin to examine films on their own terms and contexts. And analyzing cinematic representations of the Alberta cowboy serves a broader understanding of Canadian identity.

Notes

¹ Ralph Lamar Turner and Robert J. Higgs, *The Cowboy Way: The Western Leader in Film, 1945 – 1995* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), ix.

² Peter Harcourt, "The Canadian Nation – An Unfinished Text," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, Vol. 2 Nos. 2-3 (1993), 16.

³ Warren M. Elofson, *Cowboys, Gentlemen & Cattle Thieves: Ranching on the Western Frontier* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 157.

⁴ Elofson, 157 – 158. Elofson quotes L. V. Kelly, *The Range Men* (Toronto: W. Briggs, 1913), 216.

⁵ Turner and Higgs, ix.

⁶ Wilfrid Eggleston, *Prairie Symphony* (Ottawa: Boreales Press, 1978), 13

⁷ Eggleston, 63.

⁸ Eggleston, 63.

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