

'WILD' VS 'MILD' WEST:
A BINARY OR SYMBIOTIC UNIT
THE COMPLEXITY OF THE
MYTHIC WEST RE-IMAGINED
FROM A CANADIAN PERSPECTIVE

1870-1914

DANIELA ROSCHINSKI

2003

**'WILD' VS 'MILD' WEST: A BINARY OR SYMBIOTIC UNIT?
THE COMPLEXITY OF THE MYTHIC WEST RE-IMAGINED FROM A CANADIAN
PERSPECTIVE, 1870-1914**

A Thesis Submitted to the College of Graduate Studies and Research

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

In the Department of History

University of Saskatchewan

Saskatoon

By

Daniela Roschinski

Winter 2002

©Copyright Daniela Roschinski, 2002. All rights reserved



**College of Graduate Studies and Research
University of Saskatchewan**

Room 50 Murray Building, Telephone (306) 966-5751, Facsimile: (306) 966-5756

**Permission to use
Postgraduate Thesis**

THESIS TITLE 'Wild' vs. 'Mild' West: A Binary or Symbiotic Unit? The Complexity of the Mythic West Re-imagined from a Canadian Perspective, 1870-1914

NAME OF AUTHOR: Daniela Roschinski

DEPARTMENT OR COLLEGE History

DEGREE: Master of Arts

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a postgraduate degree from the University of Saskatchewan, I agree that the libraries of this University may make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for copying of this thesis in any manner, in whole or in part, for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor or professors who supervised my thesis work or, in their absence, by the department Head of the Department or the Dean of the College in which my thesis work was done. It is understood that any copy or publication or use of this thesis or parts thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of Saskatchewan in any use which may be made of any material in my thesis.

SIGNATURE _____

ADDRESS _____

DATE _____



**College of Graduate Studies and Research
University of Saskatchewan**

Room 50 Murray Building, Telephone (306) 966-5751, Facsimile: (306) 966-5756

**Certification of Master's
Thesis Work**

We the undersigned, certify that Daniela Roschinski

(Degrees)

candidate for the degree of Master of Arts

in the Department /College of History

has presented his/her thesis with the following title: 'Wild' vs. 'Mild' West: A Binary or Symbiotic Unit?
The Complexity of the Mythic West Re-imagined from a Canadian Perspective, 1870-1910

(as it appears on the title page on the front cover of thesis)

that the thesis is acceptable in form and content, and that a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by the thesis was demonstrated by the candidate through an oral examination held on 28-Mar-2003

External Examiner D. Kerr

Internal Examiners:

C. Kent

M. Cottrell

L. Kitzan

B. Waisser

Date: March 28, 2003

PERMISSION TO USE

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Postgraduate Degree from the University of Saskatchewan, I agree that the Libraries of this University may make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for copying of this thesis in any manner, in whole or in part, for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor or professors who supervised my thesis work or, in their absence, by the Head of the Department or the Dean of the College, in which my thesis work has been done. It is understood that any copying or publication or use of this thesis or parts thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of Saskatchewan in any scholarly use, which may be made of any material in my thesis. Requests for permission to copy or to make other use of material in this thesis in whole or in part should be addressed to:

Head of the Department of History
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 5A5

ABSTRACT

In popular imagination, the mythical West is widely associated with the American West. It is misleading to regard the prairie or mountain West in Canada as the mythical West. The mythical West is a constellation of images defined by the interrelation of American imagination, myth, and history. People have always imagined the mythical West, and it has appeared in many forms: images, writings, folk tales, songs, motion pictures, and television. The word ‘West’ creates expectations and ideas that are historically rooted in American culture. This fascination with the ‘West’ has also intrigued American historians, and they have focused their energies on explaining the origins and effects of the imagined ‘West.’

In 1870, Canadians became interested in settling their western region, and in order to sell this wondrous land, they created the image of the ‘mild’ West. This image was measured against the Wild West, which existed south of the forty-ninth parallel. Canadian expansionists, in particular, described a kind of West that was totally different from the ‘wild’ American West. The Canadian West, as a consequence, owed some of its creation as being mild to the American West to the degree that it was viewed as mild only in comparison to its ‘wild’ counterpart.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In collecting information and preparing the groundwork for this thesis, I incurred many debts of gratitude. First, I am particularly indebted to my supervisor, Professor William. A. Waiser, for the many ways in which he has supported my work. He pointed me into the right direction and always encouraged me when I was desperate and wanted to give up. Any shortcomings in the following pages are my own. A special thank you goes to Professor Christopher Kent and Professor Michael Cottrell for their support and patience waiting for the completion. I strongly express my gratitude to Professor Dr. Rüdiger Kunow for introducing me to the field of Canadian Studies and for his insightful reading of my initial research. He also taught me to believe in my abilities, and encouraged me to go to Canada.

I wish to acknowledge a Government of Canada Award from the Academic Relations Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Government of Canada. With this scholarship I was able to live and research in Saskatoon, Canada. Furthermore, I would like to thank the Graduate Committee for a scholarship supplement, which served as bridging to my funding. I am grateful to the excellent staff of the Saskatchewan Archives Board for their help in tracking down elusive references. I should also like to acknowledge the assistance of the staff of the Department of History and particularly wish to thank Linda Dietz for her generous help with all those questions concerning registration and administration.

I am endlessly grateful to my admirable friend, Marie Balthazar, and her wonderful family for taking me into their home and their hearts. I wish to thank her for accepting me the way I am and for teaching me the importance of life. She kept my spirits

up and the seat of my pants on the chair researching and writing during my stay in Canada. I also offer my deeply affectionate thanks to Marley, Kate, Mike and Jessica Waiser for their time and encouragement. It was my honour spending all those precious hours at their home. I should particularly like to thank Jess for all the endless phone calls and conversations discussing the topic, and for believing in me. A warm thank you is extended to all my friends for their support. I particularly wish to thank Katja Michalak for the intellectual support she provided during the difficult time of completing this work, and for bearing a very moody person. Lastly, I would like to thank my mother, Rosemarie, and my family for everything, which cannot be expressed in words.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PERMISSION TO USE	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
1. Introduction: The Mythical West: A Dream Deceived	1
2. Chapter One: “New Worlds to Conquer”: A Challenging Task	25
3. Chapter Two: “Canada’s Century”: Making a Myth	48
4. Chapter Three: The Wild American West: A Paradise Postponed	86
5. Conclusion: The ‘True’ Mythical West: A New Dream to Follow	101
BIBLIOGRAPHY	103

Introduction

The Mythical West: A Dream Deceived

In dreams we never deceive ourselves, nor are deceived . . . In dreams we see ourselves naked and acting out our true characters . . . Our truest life is when we are in dreams awake.¹

In due course 200 very dissatisfied and wild eyed Crees, with 450 horses, were rounded up and started northwards, with a strong force of United States cavalry in attendance. They were met at the Boundary Line by three Mounted Policemen, one corporal and two troopers.

The American commanding officer looked at them with a surprising air.

"Where is your escort for these Indians?" he asked.

"We're here," answered the corporal.

"Yes, yes, I see. But where is your regiment?"

"I guess it's here all right," said the corporal. "The other fellow's looking after the breakfast things."

"But are there only four of you then?"

"That's so, Colonel, but you see we wear the Queen's scarlet."²

This imaginative narrative from A. L. Haydon's Riders of the Plains (1971) strikingly captures the transition from the 'wild' American West to the 'mild' Canadian West. At the forty-ninth parallel, along a geographical and psychological boundary, the wild and uncivilized American West clashes with the peaceful and orderly Canadian West. A strong force is needed on the American side to subdue the 'White Man's Indian,' while on the Canadian side, the authority assumes the natives' respect for the 'Queen's scarlet'—the symbol of peace, order, and civilization. The history of white-Indian relations is seen as fundamentally different in the Canadian and American West in the late nineteenth century:

¹ David Thoreau, A Week quoted in Leslie Fiedler, "Canada and the Invention of the Western: A Meditation of the Other Side of the Border" in Dick Harrison (ed), Crossing Frontiers. Papers in American and Canadian Western Literature (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1979), 98.

² A. L. Haydon, Riders of the Plains: A Record of the Royal North-West Mounted Police of Canada, 1873-1910 (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1971), 85.

South of the border they waged genocidal war against their Native population. In Canada, we sent the Mounted Police to befriend and protect the Indians. Canadians have always believed that we treat our First Nations much more justly than the Americans. It is part of our national self-image. We “know” that the absence of a Wild West in Canada was no accident of history; it was the result of our moral superiority and the superiority of British justice as exemplified in the Mounted Police.³

This example is part of the central myths of the two frontiers. Both Wests underwent imaginative conquests, which resulted in different creations—a ‘mild’ and a ‘wild’ West. They both have occupied imaginary landscapes, and yet, in the popular imagination, the mythical West has most widely been associated with the American West, whereas the Canadian West moved to a mythical and cultural margin.

One reason for this marginalization was the existence of popular fiction.⁴ Loosely defined in the categories of romance and adventure, this genre marginalized the Canadian West to a quieter northern extension of the ‘Wild West’ in the public’s mind. Stories of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West, Billy the Kid and other adventures were told; they were the evidences of a past, which mostly related to the environment of the American West. These stories became a tradition that has been handed down ever since. As decades passed, this tradition turned into a myth, and after more than a century, it eventually became a legend that still exists today. Popular fiction of the Canadian prairies, however, did not survive as a tradition that would continue to exist generation after generation. The lack of a written tradition had an immense impact on the region’s identity, because a narrative, according to Edward Said, is the aesthetic form in which a culture exists

³ Daniel Francis, National Dreams, Myth, Memory and Canadian History (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1997), 34.

autonomously from the economic, social, and political realms. In his book Culture and Imperialism (1993), Said argues that a culture, to some extent, encloses its values and ideas in its narrative; consequently, a culture's identity lies in the written word.

As a cultural form, however, the narrative of a nation also plays a crucial role in the creation of myths, and in keeping them alive in the nation's state of mind. The content of a narrative is most likely not to be forgotten, since it constantly reappears in a culture. The awareness that the origin and the effectiveness of myth lies in the memory of a culture links myth to narrative. The novelist, in this sense, has "the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging."⁵ People use narratives, which are expressions of cultures, to assert their identity and the existence of their history—as Said declared: "nations are narrations."⁶

Unlike Americans, Canadians did not associate their West with an experience through which Europeans matured along the line of wilderness and civilization, but rather with a place wherein British justice and tradition could be easily established. This attitude meant that the stories written about the Canadian West inherently lacked the dramatic appeal of the American frontier. Their narrative fiction was dominated by an identification of "the human order of empire with the natural order and ultimately a divine order."⁷ Yet, the romantic vision in Canadian prairie fiction was incongruent with

⁴ Stories of the Canadian West mostly lack the dramatic appeal of the American frontier. Canada imported its fiction causing a confusion of values and cultural identity. American popular fiction of the West, therefore, supplanted the domestic fiction in Canada.

⁵ Edward W. Said, Culture and Imperialism (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), xiii.

⁶ Said, Culture and Imperialism, xiii. "The main battle in imperialism is over land, but when it came to who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future—these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative."

the harsh reality. In the 1920s, prairie romanticism was replaced by prairie realism. Works by Frederick Philip Grove are one example. Canadians were suspicious of western heroes in their own fiction, and believed western fiction to be the fiction of the American West. Their heroes were featurally different. The hero most depicted and often idealized in Canadian literature and film is the Mountie. To Canadians, the Mountie belonged to a national force that gained fame by travelling west and making the land safe for settlement. This glamorous policeman did not fit into the realistic picture, and by the time Hollywood had discovered the Mountie, the distinctively Canadian view of the Mountie was giving way to the Hollywood Mountie. He became the property of the entertainment industry to be distinguished from the American hero: the U.S. Marshal. These two different characters certainly expressed the binarism of a ‘mild’ versus a ‘wild’ West.⁸

The exploration and settlement of the American West is synonymously linked to ‘adventure’ and ‘heroism.’ The concept of the region is epitomized in a labyrinth of phrases and images—Manifest Destiny, closed frontier, Indian attacks, the Garden of the World, the Great American Desert, the Lone Ranger, cowboys, saloons, shoot-outs, outlaws, violence, the vastness of the land, James Fenimore Cooper’s Natty Bumppo, wagon trains crawling west, etc. The confrontation with the unknown is a western phenomenon, which helped to create a series of images.

Architects of popular culture like Zane Grey, James Fenimore Cooper, Owen Wister or Frederick Remington reinforced the images of the mythical West. In their

⁷ Dick Harrison, “Popular Fiction of the Canadian Prairies: Autopsy on a Small Corpus,” Journal of Popular Culture, vol. 14, no. 2, 1980, 329.

⁸ Harrison, “Popular Fiction,” 329. The reading habit of Canadians shifted from east to west. It depended on the extent to which Canadians perceived themselves to be cosmopolitan. Western Canadians were rather cosmopolitan than national, realistic than romantic. They read Robert Service, Zane Grey, L. M. Montgomery, Gene Stratton Porter and Nellie McClung.

works they created images that were fully absorbed by the public. Hence, what has to be critically noted is that these images were determined by whatever their creators, writers and artists, considered to be worth mentioning. Some images were oversimplified because they lacked negative characteristics, and were complete only in duality with a negative counterpart. The portrayal of the cowboy, for example, was heroic and one-sided. Liked by the general public his vigilant activities were embellished. Popular culturalists hardly applied any negative features to these characters and their behaviour. Jim Hoy rightly stated that "the idealized, romanticized image of the cowboy has become a symbol of justice and right, a hero who both represents and defends the American way."⁹ Natives, on the other hand, were portrayed as 'wild savages,' and any confrontation with them resulted in bloodshed and violence. The image continuously repeated generation after generation transformed into a stereotype anchored in the people's consciousness. The stereotype is "a form of splitting and multiple belief" and requires for successful signification "a continual and repetitive chain of other stereotypes."¹⁰ As strong elements in a culture, stereotypes have a destructive side, and yet, only a few dare to take up the challenge of revision.¹¹ The western hero, for example,

⁹ Jim Hoy, "Wither Cowboy Poetry," Great Plains Quarterly, vol. 19, no. 4, Fall 1999, 291.

¹⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, the location of culture (London, New York: Routledge, 1994), 77.

¹¹ In 1991, the National Gallery of American Art mounted an exhibition titled "America as West." The gallery, as a part of the Smithsonian Institution, is maintained in part by the federal government. According to the exhibit, the conquest of the West and its subsequent incorporation into the United States had been transformed into a heroic narrative that disguised, romanticized, or simply eliminated the many-sided truth about the actual process of conquest, as well as the destruction of both Native Americans and the environment. Images of natives in nineteenth-century American paintings—noble, proud, reflective—were set against a running text on the same wall that described the natives' de-gradations at the hand of the white man. It was viewed as de-constructive by many members of Congress, whether they had seen the exhibition or not; they found it unpatriotic and un-American and unacceptable, especially for a federal institution, to exhibit. This shows clearly that some have no intention in revising the stereotypes that exist. Bhabha, the location of culture, 314. The same issue arose when Patricia Nelson Limerick published her book Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West (New York, London: W. W. Norton

acquired signification in the courageous confrontation with the ‘wild savage.’ In this dual composition indigenous people, however, severely suffered from misrepresentation.

The perception of the mythical West as a land of adventure and confrontation made a deep impression on the mind of those people who never actually laid eyes on the region. In November 1901, Hugh Emerson wrote in the Century Magazine:

For the West has been a seductive beckoner to the dreamer and the idealist. Hard realities at home, toil for low wages, long hours, no future; over there opportunity lies golden, all the streams bottoms are rich with treasure, all the land is fertile and free, in every town there is a chance of quick wealth. And so they fly to escape realities, and to find only rougher, harder realities.¹²

The very existence of a society is symbolized in its myths. Myths are central and necessary aspects to the way people live. Communities tell stories about themselves, about who they are, how they came to be, and what they are stirring to be. Myths are patterns of images that either relate to the past or the future. The awareness that the past and the future become relevant to those living in the present, the here and now, leads to the conclusion that the myth of the past, like that of the future, also exists in the present. Some academics, like Paul Ricoeur, argue that the present is the subject of these myths. Hence, the present exists as a tension between the way things have always been, and the way things ought to be. “Myth [...] is all about the dialectic of past and future: it is a narrative whose beginning and ending continually inform the middle.”¹³ For Paul Ricoeur, myths are forms of balance in a society.

& Company, 1987). Her work initiated New Western History, which rejects the Turner’s frontier thesis and its centrality in Western History.

¹² Hugh Emerson, “The Settlement of the Frontier: A Study in Transportation,” Century Magazine, November 1901, 91-107. Quoted in Gerald D. Nash, Creating the West. Historical Interpretations 1890-1990 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), 217.

The understanding of myth and its significant role in national development is closely related to the debate over the respectability and the ‘real truthfulness’ of myth. Western civilization inherited the concept as it developed between the eighth and fourth century B.C., myth (*mythos*) originally meant speech or word, and was separated from the reasoned discourse of *logos*. The former signified fantasy, the latter rational argument.

This concept belongs, by reason of its origin and history, to a tradition of thought peculiar to Western civilization in which myth is defined in terms of what is not myth, being opposed to reality (myth is fiction) and, secondly, to what is rational (myth is absurd). If the development of the study of myth in modern times is to be understood it must be considered in the context of this line of thought and tradition.¹⁴

For historians, like Thucydides and Heraclites, who acclaimed clarity and the presentation of facts as markers of good history, myth belonged with its fabulous content to the poetic genres, and not to the truthful discourses. “It is not worthwhile to consider seriously the subtleties of mythologists. Let us turn rather to those who reason by means of demonstration.”¹⁵ The privileging of *logos* over *mythos* was apparently associated with the increasing emphasis on the written text and with the political process of speech. Yet, the opposition between *mythos* and *logos* was not made in earlier Greek history when

¹³ Lawrence Coupe, Myth (London, New York: Routledge, 1997), 97. Paul Ricoeur always insisted on the principle of ‘hope,’ and the point about his ‘possible worlds’ is that they are always ‘possible.’ What seems to be more interesting, and what makes it easier to understand the dialectic of past and future, is his way of seeing myth synonymously with a ‘social imagination,’ which functions by a dialectic of ideology = past and utopia = future. Ideology is a kind of imagination that functions as preservation and conversation, utopia “is always the glance from nowhere.” Without ideology, people would have no sense of society or tradition, and without utopia, people would tend to simply apply eternal truth to the given society and tradition; never dare to challenge or reform them. “Utopia prevents ideology becoming a dreadful system, whereas ideology prevents utopia becoming an empty fantasy.” Paul Ricoeur, Lectures on Ideology and Utopia edited by G. H. Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 266. Caught in between the two poles there is no escape from this dialectical conviction.

¹⁴ Jean-Pierre Vernant, Myth and Society in Ancient Greece (London: Methuen, 1982), 186. Quoted in Coupe, Myth, 9.

there was still a tradition of oral poetry. It was believed that mythic narrative had the capacity to captivate and impress people with stories of adventure and heroism from a different time and a different mode of living. Its most dramatic appeal was its capacity to convince people. “The purpose of *logos* was to establish the truth based on a logical, critical and detached intelligence alone...the power to impress and convince was reduced to *mythos*, the stuff of the fabulous, the marvelous.”¹⁶

The debate over the potency of the absurd source versus the logical, the affective versus the intellectual, the contextual versus the universal, is still unsettled today. The pursuit of ‘real truth,’ the ‘really real,’ as Plato described it, appears to be a problematic undertaking. People live by the stories, which are passed from one generation to the next, and believe in their truthfulness, as historians believe in the accuracy of the information in those histories they inherited from previous generations of historians. The representations of the past in historical writing express an intrinsic truth of existence. But is this not true for myths as well? Elmer Kelton, for example, grew up on his parents’ ranch, near Crane, Texas. His whole world was centred on cattle, horses and cowboys. His family had moved westward many generations ago, and their focus was west:

We hear a lot about the western myth, the cowboy myth. Growing up where I did, when I did, I recognized no such myth. To me a myth meant something not quite real. My father was real, and my grandfather. The life they lived was real, because I shared it with them, even though the version I knew was more modern, easier and more comfortable than the one with which they had grown up.¹⁷

¹⁵ Aristotle, Metaphysics, III, 1000a, 11-20. Quoted in Joanna Overing, “The Role of Myth: An Anthropological Perspective, or: ‘The Reality of the Really Made-Up’” in Geoffrey Hoskin, George Schoepflin (eds), Myths & Nationhood (New York: Routledge, 1997), 2.

¹⁶ Overing, “The Role of Myth,” 3.

¹⁷ Elmer Kelton, “The Myth of the Mythical West,” Western American Literature, vol. 26, no. 1, 1991, 5.

Everyone has his/her own way of looking at reality. It becomes difficult to reconcile the eagerness for the ‘really real’ with the fact that most of everyday reality is expressed through the ‘really made-up.’ Myth is argued to be “the reality of the really made-up”¹⁸ through which a culture exists. Anthropologist M. Taussig, for instance, asks in Mimesis and Alterity (1993), “Why is it that what seems most important in life is made up and is neither more nor less a social construction?” He argues that myths are phantom realities, created and constructed by other people.¹⁹ Their myth is a “reality lived.”²⁰ If this phantom reality has any relevance for other individuals it lies in the eye of the beholder who measures and interprets the content according to his/her notion of reality and who, then, decides whether or not he/she adapts this phantom reality.

The function of myth is not necessarily to deliver historically authentic truth (in so far as it exists at all) but to provide a symbolic truth for individuals of a culture to enable them to recognize that they all share the same thought-world. Myth is a disguise for the real truth. As a cultural notion, myth is perpetually re-created in the present, and the mythical discourse is “the locus of a management of meanings by which a culture is generated and maintained, transmitted and received, applied, exhibited, remembered, scrutinized and experimented with.”²¹ In this sense, a nation is a group of people who share the same illusions and ideas encoded in their national myths. All nations are “imagined communities,” and the members “of even the smallest nation will never know

¹⁸ Overing, “The Role of Myth,” 3.

¹⁹ M. Taussig, Mimesis and Alterity (London: Routledge, 1993), xv-xvi.

²⁰ B. Malinowski, Myth in Primitive Psychology (New York, 1926). Quoted in Overing, “The Role of Myth,” 5.

most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them. Yet in their minds of each live the images of their communion.”²²

A nation relies, particularly, on its national myths if it lacks other commonalities such as common religion, language or ethnicity. This is the case in the story of Canada. Canadians depend on the habit of ‘consensual imagination’ in order to express who they are. Certain events and institutions, which embody cultural values, are selected and elevated to the status of myth. In Canadian history such a myth would be the Mountie. The story of the Mountie who made the West safe for settlement has been romanticized and turned into a national myth that has also become ‘true.’ The Mountie, Canada’s proudest national symbol, holds all the fine values Canadians want to be identified with. He is the face Canadians turn to the world. The narratives of a nation produce the images that a nation uses to define itself. After all, *nations are narrations.*²³

The American West as a landscape of imagination has always had a fascination for people around the world, whereas the Canadian West has hardly been recognized as such. Although the mythical West is widely associated with the American West, the Canadian West played a far more important role in the creation of a mythic ‘Wild West’ than has been recognized. Both Americans and Canadians had a romanticized view of their Wests—the American one was virile and the Canadian one pastoral. Each nation had its own distinctive perception of the West as myth, which led to a dichotomy between a ‘mild’ and a ‘wild’ West.

²¹ George Schoepflin, “The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths,” in Hoskin, Schoepflin (eds), *Myths & Nationhood*, 28. Discourse is regarded as socially constructed communication, which leads to the creation of narrative fiction, and which, then, can embody and locate myth.

²² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 6.

What is striking, though, is that the idea of the West as the ‘Garden of Eden’ is not merely a creation of Europeans or Americans but that it is deeply rooted in the culture of Western civilization. The idea of a western paradise was already prevalent in Greek civilization. As Loren Baritz suggests:

The promise of the West would be known as men tasted the fruits of their yearnings and hopes, as the brave fools who sailed in ignorance became wise in their victory. If men were brave enough, strong enough, and perhaps good enough, they would be able to climb the mountain or cross the seas or placate or vanquish the creatures that stood just east of Elysium. And, once there, the condition of men would be profoundly altered, for there nature’s bounty was endless; happiness was certain, and death was banished forever.²⁴

The composition of a mythical West was not the inspiration of one individual, but a perception shaped by many minds. One strand—the quest for a land of peace, laughter, and eternal life—was constantly present in the history of mankind. The exact location of this land was often placed in a westerly location. Another strand was the concept of a nation’s destiny, and “the notion that the sword must be taken westward.” From Troy to Greece, Rome and England, “westward the course of empire takes its way.”²⁵

Themes of eternity and happiness were part in the western myth. The emphasis varied according to the purpose of those who made use of the idea of the West, whether as a concept, a place or a direction. The Italian discoverer Christopher Columbus, who was determined to reach India by sailing west, was searching for the garden planted eastward in Eden. He argued that the garden in the east must be approached from the west. The east, for him, was a location, while the west was a direction. By the nineteenth

²³ Francis, National Dreams, 29-51.

²⁴ Loren Baritz, “The Idea of the West,” American Historical Review, vol. 66, April 1961, 618.

century, the transcendentalist and writer Henry David Thoreau, who personified the American mythology of the West, associated the West with freedom:

East I go only by force, but westward I go free. I must walk toward Oregon, and not toward Europe. And that way the nation is moving, and I may say that mankind progresses from east to west. To the east lies history, while westward is the apocalypse, the future and adventure.²⁶

The fact that Canadians and Americans were striving westward was a cultural necessity and an inevitable (at least explainable) advancement of Western civilization. In the early nineteenth century, Thomas Jefferson, president of the United States from 1801 to 1809, acquired the Louisiana territory on behalf of the United States. He then dispatched the Lewis and Clark Expedition to assure the suitability of the West for settlement. He envisioned the West as the ‘Garden of the World’ and as the ‘Passage to India.’ The West was viewed by imagination. People saw what they wanted to see. The nineteenth century additionally had a passion for the far away, the exotic and the sublime—it was a kind of romanticism to which the far West quite naturally lent itself.²⁷ The West lured people by offering individualism, freedom, adventure, simplicity, opportunity and gold. It was inevitably a story of confrontation and violence.

As a form of escape from the harsh reality, Americans projected their dreams and ideas onto the region. Those who dreamed of a better life often enshrined the West in their imagination even if they had never made the trek west. Few came to discover what there was to see in the real West. They rather came with ideas about what they hoped to

²⁵ Baritz, “The Idea of the West,” 618.

²⁶ Henry David Thoreau, Excursions (Boston, 1894), 266. Quoted in Baritz, “The Idea of the West,” 639.

²⁷ William Goetzmann, Exploration & Empire: The Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American West (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1966), 199-202.

find. In this sense, they contemplated the West of imagination, the West of myth. The West of reality and the West of myth, consequently, existed alongside one another. The mythical West “represented an ideal world without the disorder, the ambiguity, the uncertainty, and the limitations of the world of our experience. [...] a type [...] not the experience of reality.”²⁸

Another important aspect is that the myth of the American West is centred on the frontier thesis, which has an undeniable charm of simplicity. In 1893, historian Frederick Jackson Turner argued in his essay “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893) that the frontier is “the outer edge of the wave—the meeting point between savagery and civilization, and the line of most effective and rapid Americanization.” The struggle with wilderness turned Europeans into Americans. It was a process that became the central story in American history: “The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advances of American settlement westward explain American development.”²⁹

The American West was a symbol of freedom, a region of adventure and heroism where the untouched world of nature was a source of strength, truth, and virtue. “The vital wilderness of the West resisted the dead tameness of civilization.”³⁰ The vision of the pioneer was to flee from the responsibility of civilization to become free, savage, and natural in the boundless prairies of the great West. The pioneers left behind an older and settled society, and moved across the lands in search for a new and better life. The West

²⁸ Nash, Creating the West, 206.

²⁹ Frederick Jackson Turner, The Significance of the Frontier in American History edited by Harold P. Simonson (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1963), 28-29.

³⁰ Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (New York: Vintage Books, 1950), 85.

is "that fabled land where the American character becomes self-reliant, democratic and endlessly eager for the new; where millions of dejected immigrants gather from around the world to be rejuvenated as American, sounding together a manly, wild barbaric yawp of freedom."³¹ The American West touched the popular imagination as a setting for romance and adventure. It was also associated with violence.

The cowboy and the outlaw were the most famous embodiments of the western myth. The cowboy, who possessed the finest western virtues, followed the code of courage and manliness. He led a life that was full of novelty, danger, and adventure. The Easterner observed with great scepticism the 'new species' that was growing up in the lawless West:

"Ah," said the Easterner, "here is a new species of the genus homo. I must observe him carefully and note all his manners and customs and peculiarities. There is something romantic about him. He lives on horseback, as do the Bedouins, he fights on horseback, as did the knights of chivalry; he goes armed with a strange new weapon which he uses ambidextrously and precisely; he swears like a trooper, drinks like a fish, wears clothes like an actor, and fights like a devil. He is gracious to ladies, reserved toward strangers, generous to his friends, and brutal to his enemies. He is a cowboy, a typical Westerner."³²

The myth of the American West embodied an essential ethos—rugged individualism, exploitation, and adventure. Moreover, it embodied the core of the American Dream. Generations of settlers and cowboys sought a greater measure of human happiness in a land of unrivaled wealth and opportunity.

Early historians were often a part of the American West they were writing about. Their views of the West were crucial factors in shaping the public perception of the

³¹ Donald Worster, "New West, True West: Interpreting the Region's History," Western Historical Quarterly, vol. 18, April 1987, 141.

American West. Millions of new settlers were partly motivated by these views and moved west. They began to embrace the West as an idea, an experience more than as a specific place. These ideas helped to create the myth of the West. The generation that wrote during the period from 1890 to 1920 was overcome by a sense of loss and a feeling of nostalgia for the disappearance of a West they had cherished. This generation had grown up in the West under frontier conditions and had experienced the delusions of the mythical West anchored in their minds. But the harsh reality they had to face was anything but what they thought or dreamt it to be. In their effort to hold on to youthful memories they wrote about a mythical West frozen in time.³³

In the mid-twentieth century, Henry Nash Smith's Virgin Land (1950) changed the understanding of the western myth and its role in history. Smith centred his work on the Turnerian frontier thesis, arguing that the thesis owed more to the myth of the West than to actual facts of the nineteenth century. He proved that the western myth had a great influence in shaping the ideas and actions of explorers, authors, artists, and policy-makers. Myths about the frontier and the West are as essential as facts in understanding Western American history. Facts and myths form together a meaningful dialectic substituting each other: "the West of fact and the West of imagination shape and reshape each other."³⁴ Analyzing the American West in its symbols and myths, Nash gave the frontier thesis much credit for the creation of the mythical West. The western myth became inseparably linked to Turner's ideas. Virgin Land greatly influenced subsequent histories. Historians followed the path Nash set and concentrated their works on the

³² Walter Prescott Webb, The Great Plains (Boston: Grim and Company, 1931), 67.

³³ Nash, Virgin Land, 198.

significance of the frontier as the central story of Western American history. They focused less upon the historically significant than upon the romantically colourful—vigilantes, natives and pioneers, and the adventure of conquering one new land after another. They studied the historical and creative accounts that, most often, depicted a white, male Anglo-Saxon West.

Since the western myth is mainly perceived and endured through the aesthetic works of literature, art and film; the historical study of it is closely tied to these disciplines. Western literature is one genre that has been examined extensively for its role in shaping popular ideas about the West. In The Fatal Environment (1985), Richard Slotkin made an attempt at tracing through literature the patterns of frontier mythology and its consequences for Western history. Art is another vehicle that triggered the development of the western myth in the public's mind. In The West of the Imagination (1986), William H. Goetzmann and his son William N. Goetzmann treated the nineteenth and twentieth-century imaginings of the American West. Though the authors devoted special attention to the visions of artists, illustrators and photographers, they also demonstrated how explorers, scientists, writers and filmmakers helped to create a region of the mind—the West of the imagination. Visual influences on myths about the American West were enormous.

In the 1980s, Western American history was stigmatized as romantic, antiquarian and irrelevant to the whole picture of American history. Western historians were criticized for being outdated and mocked for perpetuating the explanations of the origins and effects of the imagined West. In 1987, the publication of Patricia Nelson Limerick's

³⁴ Kevin Starr, Inventing the Dream: California through the Progressive Era (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), vii.

The Legacy of Conquest caused historians to re-examine the western past from a different perspective. Limerick approached Western history from a different angle, synthesizing diverse issues, which were on the edges of the realm of the ‘Old Western History.’ Her work examined sub-fields including environmental, ethnic, community and women’s history as well as social, economic and political history. She encouraged historians to rethink Western American history by forgetting the frontier and its disputable end in 1890. According to her work, the West is a place rather than a process, a meeting point of many ethnic and racial groups, which are all tied together by the theme of conquest. For Limerick, the West’s ‘legacy of conquest’ should be appreciated as a history with continuing significance.

Limerick broke away from old perceptions of the West. She rejected the frontier concept arguing that the frontier was useless as a guide for the present and the future, and that it excluded minority groups. In this context, the term ‘frontier’ is no longer applicable. New terms such as ‘invasion,’ ‘conquest,’ ‘colonization,’ ‘exploitation,’ ‘development,’ and ‘expansion’ seem to be more adequate in expressing what really happened in the American West. She called for an intellectual revolution to reveal the diversity and complexity. The West’s ‘legacy of conquest’ is a territorial form of economic growth, and the West as a region was economically important for the American elite in the East, which meant the exploitation of minority groups in the West.

There is no doubt that Western American history has to be revitalized in some aspects in order to become more multi-faceted. But there is no need to reject Turner’s frontier theory in order to comprehend the West as a region. Limerick discarded the notion of discontinuity. But in looking back at a negative experience and facing the future

with optimism, she herself created a gap between the past and present. She created an almost perfect mirror image of Turner's concept. She argued that the term 'frontier' should be read as conquest for economic growth. But to regard the frontier as a synonym for modernization seems to be meaningless. In modern usage, the word 'frontier' comes closer to a cultural frontier rather than an advancing line of modernization. Another aspect that favours the frontier concept is that the overall image of the West is drawn from the nineteenth-century frontier. In this sense, the frontier has a national character and is regarded as a vehicle of self-definition. Over time, the western myth has become a national myth that continues to transcend history. It, therefore, has a far deeper meaning than it is recognized by New Western Historians. The national myth is rooted in the western experience. In a profound sense, what New Western Historians seek to do is revisit and alter this myth. Reconstructing the nineteenth-century West as a time of racism and failures, they distorted the values that Americans sought. The sense of romance that characterized the western expansion has been all but forgotten as New Western Historians, in the course of political correctness, attempted to alter history. With the new portrayal of history, the values of individualism that made the American West so popular are lost. New Western Historians interpreted the facts in terms of present-day values, missing the overall significance of the myth of the West.³⁵

Looking north of the forty-ninth parallel, the idea of the West was not entirely American. Canadians likewise pursued the idea of the West as a 'Garden of Eden.' They also created their own western myth that strongly differed from the American one. Canadians' emphasis on a mild and pastoral West distanced it from the American 'Wild

³⁵ Richard Slotkin who traced the frontier myth through American history argued that the myth of the American West turned into a national myth that would explain American exceptionalism—an American

West.' Since the myth was not always based on historical facts, the transition from reality to myth was unclear. The myth of the Canadian West constantly changed over three centuries. The image shifted from that of a wasteland, to a romantic wilderness, and to a utopia.

The myth of the Canadian West as a 'Garden of Eden,' mild and pastoral, was built upon and shaped by the earlier images of the region. Beyond the actual landscape existed a landscape of the mind created by images outside the western region. The Canadian view of the West was formed before people even saw the region. As a *terra incognita* and *utopia*, the Canadian West was regarded as a place where it was still possible to create a perfect society. This new land was contrasted with the old society: "The West was young, not old; free not restrained by tradition; egalitarian, not class-bound; virile, not weak; and pastoral, not urbanized."³⁶

The Promised Land—the 'land of opportunity' where everyone could succeed as long as one was hardworking, determined and committed—was described in positive terms. Immigration pamphlets that were published in the most extensive propaganda campaign during the 1890s extolled the virtues of the West in superlative terms. There was the belief that the cold climate created virility and fecundity, and that these traits would produce qualities that would make northern people superior. Many people read their dreams into the pamphlets and believed that the West these pamphlets depicted was

culture revealed in its distinctive mythic patterns.

³⁶ R. Douglas Francis, "From Wasteland to Utopia: Changing Images of the Canadian West in the 19th Century," *Great Plains Quarterly*, vol. 7, Summer 1987, 192. "The pastoral myth in its most common form is associated with childhood, or with some earlier social condition—pioneer life the small town, the *habitant* rooted to his land—that can be identified with childhood. The nostalgia for a world of peace and protection, with a spontaneous response to the nature around it, with a leisure and composure not to be found to-day, is particularly strong in Canada." Northrop Frye, *The Bush Garden* (Toronto: New Press, 1971), 238-239.

the real West. The ideal became the real. It was the ‘last best West’ and a ‘home for millions.’ Nicholas Flood Davin, editor of the Regina Leader, captured the utopian image of the Canadian West:

All the fabled mutations of wand and enchantment sink into insignificance before the change, which this free world works on the serfs of Europe. Toil, combined with freedom and equality—and you have a more marvelous as well as nobler force than the fabled secret of the philosopher’s stone. What they are weaving here for humanity Time will show; there is magic in the web of it; something better anyway than the tear-drenched, bloodstained tapestry of the old world’s past.³⁷

Western Canadian historians have also written about the myth of the Canadian West. But their discussion of western myths tends to be more analytical than glorifying. In discussing the questions of how and why these myths arose, historians tend to argue that the myth of the Canadian West was necessary to explain the uniqueness of the region for each period. The myth constantly changed over time according to the public’s demand and need. For each period the setting and social environment differed. These differences were reflected in the myths that uniquely mirrored the age.

Historians, artists and novelists have struggled to find images of the West, which are uniquely Western Canadian and that distinguish the Canadian West from the American one. Outstanding works as Gerald Friesen’s The Canadian Prairies (1987), R. Douglas Francis’ Images of the West (1989) and Doug Owram’s Promise of Eden (1980) are a few examples that focus on the uniqueness of the Canadian West by emphasizing the divergence between the two Wests.

Francis examines the changing images of the West over three centuries of exploration and settlement by focusing on fur traders’ journals, reports of scientific

expeditions, travelogues, government immigration propaganda, booster literature of towns and cities, as well as art, literature, poetry and song lyrics. Each particular era in the historical evolution of the region had its dominant image of the West. The first image of the West as a cold, desolate and inhospitable western wasteland prevailed for two centuries, from 1650 to 1850. The image of the West as a romantic horizon, a romantic untamed home, arose in the mid-nineteenth century. The utopian image of the West as the land of opportunity emerged through immigration propaganda, booster literature and literary depictions of the region. Out of the settlement period emerged the image of the West as a mild and pastoral region.³⁸

Owram concentrates on the expansionist movement and on how it reshaped the western image of the region as an inhospitable wilderness. His examination is based on historical, scientific, journalistic and promotional writings. He delineates the changing perceptions of the West as propagandists, scientists, nationalists, and government officials praised the region in a fashion reflecting their own needs and desires. The images were increasingly removed from reality and contributed to western regional discontent. Canadians reacted to their perceptions of the West as well as to the reality itself. Whereas the Canadian West remained constant in history, the perception of it grew and changed.³⁹

Both Wests are viewed as lands of romance and adventure, and yet, the romance of the Canadian West is seen in terms of a civilized society rather than in the rawness of

³⁷ Nicholas Flood Davin (ed), Homes for Millions: The Great Canadian North-West; Its Resources Fully Described (Ottawa: B. Chamberlain, 1891), 6.

³⁸ R. Douglas Francis, Images of the West, Changing Perceptions of the Prairies, 1690-1960 (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Book, 1989).

the frontier. The creation of the Canadian West as a peaceful and orderly place is closely linked to the American West, because without the latter the Canadian West would not exist.

In my master thesis I intend to concentrate on the origins of the idea of the mythical ‘West,’ and the images and myths associated with it from a Canadian perspective. I want to show that the Canadian West is in part the mythical West. In this respect, it is necessary to examine the historical literature of the settlement period from 1870 to 1914. In particular, I will focus on Canadian expectations for their western frontier in 1870, on how Canada portrayed the American West in comparison to the Canadian West, and whether the Canadian West, in this context, was as peaceful and orderly as it has often been portrayed.

In my first chapter, I will focus on the imaginative conquest the Canadian West underwent in the nineteenth century. I will look closely at the fur trade view of the West that existed before 1870 as well as the expansionist view that challenged it at the beginning of the settlement era. I will examine the settlement of the Canadian West and the expectations Canadians had for their West at the beginning of the settlement era in 1870, and why Canadians in 1870 wanted to differentiate their West from the American one.

My second chapter will examine the Canadian historical literature for the period from 1870 to 1914, and explain how Canada attempted to differentiate its West from the American one. I will do this by reviewing the promotion materials, the government and newspaper reports, and the tremendous amount of travel accounts that were published to

³⁹ Doug Owram, Promise of Eden. The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West 1856-1900 (Toronto, London: University of Toronto Press, 1980).

attract immigrants to the Canadian frontier. The Canadian West was promoted as an utopia, a ‘Garden of Eden’ excellent for agricultural explo(it)ration. It endured an ‘imaginative conquest’—as the American West did—creating the concept of a ‘mild and peaceful’ West. I will further examine if the portrayal of the Canadian West as mild and pastoral is accurate and if the concept of the ‘mild’ West is based on reality or was/is the Canadian West rather a ‘place of imagination?’

The third chapter will concentrate on the Canadian portrayal of the American West during the settlement era focusing on the historical literature at that time, and on how Canadians perceived the region. Was the American West, from a Canadian perspective, a sensation, a place to imitate, or a garden of evil, a place to reject? An avantgardistic aspect is the idea of the Wests as a symbiotic unit. Did the Wests co-exist in order to create a ‘wild’ and a ‘mild’ mythic West? Did the American West owe some of its creation as being wild to the Canadian West in the sense that it was only viewed as ‘wild’ in comparison to its ‘mild’ counterpart and vice versa? Both Wests are attached to each other to become the imaginary West of the late nineteenth century.

Both Wests had constantly been places of imagination in the nineteenth century, and it has argued that the American West became more global and fluid in the twentieth century. The West as a place is disembodied from its cultural, historical, and geographical meanings and transformed into a dynamic West. The transformation does not characterize the West as a geographically bound place that exists by itself but it rather sees the West as a process. The twentieth-century American West is de-localized and correlated to a spatial form of infinity—‘the geography of nowhere.’ The mobility of the American West compensates for the limits of time, the boundaries of places, and the

frontiers between people---crossing all borders. This displacement of the American West results in a shifting from a regional into a more global state losing its particularity as a place. Did this displacement affect the Canadian West and if yes, to what extent? Is the Canadian West still a locale—a home place of imagination?

Chapter One

"New Worlds to Conquer."¹ A Challenging Task

Whitemud, a generation past its pioneering stage, demonstrates all over again how much amenity and the refined intelligence is lost when civilized men are transplanted to a wilderness. It raises the question, unthinkable to pioneers but common enough among their expatriate sons, whether any Whitemud can hope to develop to a state of civilization as high as that which some of its founders abandoned.

Wallace Stegner, Wolf Willow (1955)

. . . up against the sky, was the line of mountains—blue, purple, and gold, according as the light fell upon them. The sun had taken his plunge, but he had left behind him his robe of saffron and gold. We stood long without a word or movement, filling our hearts with the silence and the beauty, till the gold in the west began to grow dim. High above all the night was stretching her star-pierced, blue canopy, and drawing slowly upon the east over the prairie and over the sleeping hills the soft folds of a purple haze. The great silence of the dying day had fallen upon the world and held us fast.
Ralph Connor, The Sky Pilot (1899)

The western landscape is one without boundaries quite often. So you have the experience within a kind of chaos, yet you have to order it somehow to survive.

Robert Kroetsch, Badlands (1972)

When the north-west region of Canada was opened up for settlement in the mid-nineteenth century, it underwent an imaginative conquest. The image of the West as a cold, forbidding wilderness, which dominated the fur trade era, gave way to the expansionists' idea of an agricultural 'Garden of Eden.' But conquering the West was a challenging task and did not come about easily. Fur traders defended their claim to the region by altering the reality of the North-West.² Due to a lack of interest in the region, Canadians saw the North-West as it was portrayed. Yet in 1870 the circumstances changed and Canadians began to take a new keen interest in their West. Their

¹ George Brown, "Editorial," Globe, December 10, 1856.

² "Rupert's Land and the North-Western Territory were transferred to Canada in 1870. They were then designated the North-West Territories. The spelling was changed to the Northwest Territories in

expectations for the western region strongly differed from the view of this vast territory before the settlement era began. The trackless wilderness, as Canadians once believed, now held economic opportunities, and the expansion of Canada into the North-West Territories meant the stepping stone to nationhood for the British colony. The opening of the West was seen as a chance to increase Canada's base of trade, business, and economics, and it was conceived to be a benefit for the entire nation. In 1855, the Toronto expansionist, Alexander Morris, published the pamphlet Canada and her Resources in which he stated: "The time has come when the claims of humanity and the interests of the British Empire require that all the portions of this vast empire which are adapted for settlement should be laid open to the industrious immigrant."³ Canadian expansionists, therefore, had to take up the challenge to change the image of the North-West.

This imaginative conquest confirmed the notion of the North-West as a 'region of the mind.' The environment of the North-West did not change over the years, but yet the region was perceived differently by fur traders and expansionists. Each perception depended on the expectations people individually had.⁴ As the German dramatist and writer Johann Wolfgang Goethe once remarked, "the West is here or nowhere:"

No matter where on the physical globe that "here" may be, for it exists really in our heads, in the altered consciousness not just of New Men in a New World, but of all men anywhere once that

1906." Editor's Note, The Polar Record, vol. 15, no. 5, 1970, 145. Quoted in William A. Waiser, "Macoun and the Great North-West," M.A. Thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1976, 1.

³ Alexander Morris, Canada and her resources : an essay, to which, upon a reference from the Paris exhibition committee of Canada was awarded, by his Excellency Sir Edmund Walker Head, bart., governor general of British North America (Montreal : John Lovell), 1855.

⁴ Douglas F. Francis, "From Wasteland to Utopia: Changing Images of the Canadian West in the Nineteenth Century," Great Plains Quarterly, vol. 7, Summer 1987, 178-194.

New World has been opened up to the imagination and those New Men have begun to celebrate themselves in song and story.⁵

The expectations people had projected onto the North-West turned into experiences they finally made. Observations of land and climate were not objectively considered and man's reaction to geographical settings was not mainly determined by what he saw but by what he expected and wanted to find.

Before the West was opened up in 1870, the public's perception of this vast territory was determined by the fur trade view of the West. The Hudson's Bay Company, which had been granted Rupert's Land in a royal charter by King Charles II May 2, 1670, pursued an extensive fur trade. The company held a monopoly over this vast territory and its resources until 1870, when the North-West was transferred to Canada. Because agricultural settlement in the North-West would interfere with the fur trade, company officials knew quite well how to keep fur trading the only economic activity in the region. In order to prevent settlers from coming west and tilling those lands where fur traders pursued their business, the North-West was presented as a fur trading country to the outside world. Fur traders and missionaries created a negative image portraying the North-West as a 'barren,' 'cold,' 'desolate' and 'inhospitable' wasteland unsuitable for any kind of settlement.⁶

Henry Kelsey, who worked for the Hudson's Bay Company travelled, west in 1690. He may have been the first European to see the western lands, and the first to introduce those terms that would delineate the Canadian West. Travelling from York

⁵ Leslie Fiedler, "Canada and the Invention of the Western: A Meditation of the Other Side of the Border" in Dick Harrison (ed), Crossing Frontiers. Papers in American and Canadian Western Literature (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1979), 91.

Factory on the Bay into the western interior, Kelsey encountered the southern grasslands, which he called a ‘plain:’ “This plain affords nothing but Beasts & grass/ And over it in three days time we past/ getting unto y^e woods on the other side.”⁷ He also used the term ‘desert’ to epitomize the lonely empty space, and described the region as a ‘barren ground’ due to the absence of trees.⁸ Other fur traders and explorers echoed these descriptive terms in later reports on the North-West. Alexander Mackenzie and David Thompson, for example, joined in the pessimistic view of the North-West. Both worked for the North-West Company, a Montreal-based company that competed with the Hudson’s Bay Company over the control of the fur trade in the North-West until the amalgamation of these two companies in 1821. This rivalry over land and furs increased the number of explorations into the western interior. New territory had to be found and made accessible—it became a race against time for profit, power, and prestige. Both Mackenzie and Thompson believed in the North-West’s fur trade potential and soberly denied the possibility of settlement to keep fur-trading the dominant business in the North-West.⁹ In 1789, Mackenzie travelling down the Mackenzie River, a river he dejectedly nicknamed “River of Disappointment,” concluded:

The proportion of it [the North-West] that is fit for cultivation is very small, and is still less in the interior parts; it is also very difficult of access; and whilst any land remains uncultivated to the south of it, there will be no temptation to settle it. Besides, its

⁶ Doug Owram, Promise of Eden. The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900 (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 29.

⁷ A.G. Doughty, C. Martin (eds), The Kelsey Papers (1690, Ottawa: Public Archives of Canada and the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, 1929), 4.

⁸ Douglas R. Francis, Images of the West. Responses to the Canadian Prairies (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1989), 3.

⁹ Owram, Promise of Eden, 7-37.

climate is not in general sufficiently genial to bring the fruits of the earth to maturity.¹⁰

Thompson gave a similar description of the North-West. In his narratives of his western expeditions, Thompson, likewise, emphasized the agricultural insufficiency of the land:

The whole of this country may be pastoral, but except in a few places, cannot become agricultural. Even the fine Turtle Hill, gentle rising, for several miles, with its Springs and Brooks of fine Water has very little wood fit for the Farmer. The principal is Aspen, which soon decays, with small Oaks and Ash. The grass of these plains is so often on fire, by accident or design, and the bark of the Trees so often scorched, that their growth is contracted, or they become dry, and the whole of the great Plains are subject to these fires during the Summer and Autumn before the Snow lies on the ground. These great Plains appear to be given by Providence to the Red Men for ever, as the wilds and sands of Africa are given to the Arabians.¹¹

The majority of the reports by fur traders and explorers described the North-West in the same manner. These descriptions strongly influenced those people who intended to settle in the West, and those who never actually laid eyes onto the region. It was consequently concluded that the region was ill-suited for agriculture. Prospects for any kind of settlement were diminished. The negative image reinforced the equation that developed in the minds of Europeans: "barenness equals infertility equals uselessness for agriculture."¹²

Although there was an exception to the image, it did not challenge the fur trade image of the North-West as a wasteland. In 1811, the Red River Settlement was initiated by Thomas Douglas, the 5th Earl of Selkirk. The settlement survived and grew on the

¹⁰ W. Kaye Lamb (ed), The Journals and Letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1970), 411.

¹¹ Richard Glover (ed), David Thompson's Narrative, 1784-1812 (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1962), 222.

banks of the Red River. It was reckoned as an exception to the general rule of life typical of the North-West.¹³ The Red River Settlement was portrayed as “a sort of haven of rest ... free from the cares of residence among wild beasts and wild men ... a comfortable retreat for such of the retired officers and servants as prefer spending the evening of their life with their native families in this oasis in the desert.”¹⁴ The community was unique and exceptional, and was often referred to as ‘an oasis in the wilderness.’ The isolated existence of Red River Settlement, therefore, tended to reinforce the image of the North-West as a wilderness rather than to dispel it.¹⁵

Fur traders who portrayed the North-West as a wasteland with little or no potential for settlement or agriculture falsified the image for economic reasons. Working for the fur trading companies, they mainly observed the region in terms of fur trade and concentrated more on the northerly region where fur trading was more profitable. Holding an absolute monopoly over the vast region in Western Canada, the Hudson’s Bay Company’s agenda was to keep competitors and those away from the North-West who would claim access to the lands. By portraying the unsuitability of the North-West for agricultural purposes, farmers and settlers were discouraged from inhabiting the area. Because of the probability that advancing settlement westward would decrease the fur trade potential, the company tried to preserve the existing *status quo*. For a long time,

¹² Wreford Walson, “The Role of Illusion in North-American Geography: A Note on the Geography of North American Settlement,” The Canadian Geographer, vol. 13, Spring 1969, 16.

¹³ Owram, Promise of Eden, 14-15.

¹⁴ Sir George Simpson, Narrative of a Journey Round the World During the Years 1841 and 1842 (London: H. Colburn, 1847), 15-16.

¹⁵ Owram, Promise of Eden, 16.

then, the North-West was regarded as a fur trade hinterland under the aegis of the Hudson's Bay Company.¹⁶

While the economic interest of trade mainly concentrated on the northerly region of the North-West, a similar pessimistic image was also applied to the southerly grassland region. It was an image of the West as a deserted wasteland, equally unbefitting for agricultural settlement as the northern wilderness. This negative image of the southern prairies as an arid and inhospitable land was strongly influenced by the American view of the plain region west of the Mississippi in the early 1800s.¹⁷

When American explorers and fur traders began surveying the vast region west of the Mississippi River, they were struck by the arid landscape. Since Americans held equivalent beliefs about the conditions for agriculture as Canadians did, they formed the concept of the 'Great American Desert' in order to apply it to the vast plains region that extended from the Gulf of Mexico to the Parkland belt. Travelers and explorers confirmed the notion of the 'Great American Desert.' The illusion became a reality in the minds of many. In 1819, Edwin James, chronicler of the Stephen Long Trans-Mississippi Expedition, noted: "in regard to this extensive section of country, we do not hesitate in giving the opinion that it is almost wholly unfit for cultivation and, of course, uninhabitable by a people depending on agriculture for their subsistence."¹⁸

¹⁶ Donald Swainson, "Canada Annexes the West: Colonial Status Confirmed" in Douglas R. Francis, Howard Palmer (eds), The Prairie West. Historical Readings (Edmonton: Pica Pica Press, 1985), 125-136.

¹⁷ Owram, Promise of Eden, 13-14.

¹⁸ Quoted in John Warkentin, "The Desert Goes North" in Brian Blouet, M. Lawson (eds), Images of the Plains: The Role of Human Nature in Settlement (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), 149-63.

Canadians did not disagree with the idea of the American desert, but rather adopted the picture of the American Great Plains to portray the Canadian southern grasslands. They accepted the fact that the barren plains were unsuitable for agriculture without confirming the true capabilities of the land. Sir John Richardson who made a journey through Rupert's Land from 1848 to 1849, wrote in his journal:

In the interior of the prairie, however, water is scarce, and there is such a total want of wood, that for days together the traveler can find no other fuel than the dung of buffalo. Near the mountains the soil is coarsely sandy, strewn with boulders, and sterile; further eastward the sand is finer, and the boulders disappear, but they recur in numbers on the lower border of the prairie.¹⁹

The southern prairies were seen as an arid and wasteful desert lacking trees and water essential for agriculture.²⁰

Then, in 1870, when the North-West was turned over to Canada, the image of the West as an uncivilized wilderness was challenged by Canadian expansionists who intended to settle these vast lands. They regarded the North-West as a paradise suitable for agriculture, and not as a *terra incognita* as it was seen in the fur trade era. Though Canadian expansionists viewed the North-West in terms of other expectations than fur traders did, they sought to fulfil them as eagerly.

There was a great need to determine an alternative potential of the North-West. Individuals in Eastern Canada began to raise questions about the agricultural potential of the region, and made optimistic estimates about the value of the land and the prevailing climate. In this instance, Canadian expansionists were greatly encouraged by the reports of two scientific expeditions in 1857. The John Palliser Expedition explored the western

¹⁹ Sir John Richardson, Arctic Searching Expedition (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, 1851), 1-60. Quoted in Owram, Promise of Eden, 14.

interior from Lake Superior to the Rocky Mountains for the British government from 1857 to 1860, while the Canadian expedition led by Henry Youle Hind and Simon Dawson investigated the area from Lake Superior to Red River and the southern parts of present-day Manitoba. Both expeditions were charged by their governments with the task of exploring, studying, and mapping the region, but most importantly, with the task of determining whether the Canadian West was fit for agriculture. These scientific expeditions expected to find desert-like conditions in the prairie region north of the forty-ninth parallel. Palliser and Hind had read the American scientific literature on the Great Plains, and their awareness of the popular idea of the 'Great American Desert' strongly influenced their thinking.²¹ Consequently, the reports they brought back were rather ambiguous toward agricultural settlement.

Palliser and Hind, nevertheless, reshaped the nineteenth-century vision of the North-West by creating the idea of both good and bad land in the West. They did away with the previous generalizations about the tractless wilderness and reassembled the North-West into areas of suitable soil corresponding to their agricultural potential. They claimed that while a semi-arid area was ill-suited for civilization, a northerly fertile belt could maintain agriculture. They defined a fertile belt stretching from the Red River northwest to the forks of the Saskatchewan River and from west to the Rocky Mountains. Below that belt they reported a vast area of arid grassland, which was thought to be an extension of the 'Great American Desert' more commonly known as the 'Palliser's Triangle. This triangle was judged as unfit for agriculture. Palliser linked the region directly to the desert of the south:

²⁰ Francis, Images of the West, 9.

The fertile savannahs and valuable woodlands of the Atlantic United States are succeeded . . . on the West by a more or less arid desert, occupying a region on both sides of the Rocky Mountains, which presents a barrier to the continuous growth of settlement between the Mississippi Valley and States on the Pacific coast. This central desert extends . . . into British territory, forming a triangle.²²

'Palliser's Triangle' confirmed the overall negative perception of the North-West in the public's mind. It doomed whole areas, including the upper Qu'Appelle Valley, the South Saskatchewan, and the prairies between them and the border as an enormous wasteland; this picture remained unchallenged. The Canadian West became associated with the great desert-like region, which belonged to its American neighbour. The American heritage of the 'Great American Desert'—and with it the failure of observing and adjusting to a new environment—turned into the legacy of the Canadian West.

Like Palliser, Hind believed that the 'Great American Desert' extended to the prairies and maintained that the region was sterile. He described the region as "not, in its present condition, fitted for the permanent habitation of civilized man."²³ Hind, however, concentrated more on the existence of the fertile belt, and thereby made a more positive assessment of the region's agricultural potential than Palliser did. In his report Narrative of the Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition of 1857 (1860), he provided a map of the fertile belt along the North Saskatchewan valley that included a much larger fertile area than had been previously accepted. Hind's concept of the fertile belt encouraged settlement within that comparatively narrow strip, but discouraged interest in the

²¹ Francis, Images of the West, 5-8.

²² Quoted in Irene Spry, Introduction to the Papers of the Palliser Expedition, 1857-1860 (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1968), 9.

²³ Henry Youle Hind, North-West Territory. Report on the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Exploring Expedition (Toronto: John Lovell, 1859), 31.

agricultural potential of the grassland region it bordered. Canadian expansionists latched onto Hind's concept. While the British government received the published report in 1863 with little interest, Canadian expansionists found the discussion of the fertile belt enticing as it bolstered their desire to annex the region. The possibility of an agrarian Eden fuelled the expansionist goal of a new nation stretching from sea to sea, whereas the existence of a semi-arid region remained a cautionary note.

Two factors contributed to altering the perception of the North-West—romanticism and nationalism. In pursuing their goal, Canadian expansionists profited from the existence of the romantic image of the West. Writers and artists who were influenced by the Age of European Romanticism perceived the North-West as a pristine wilderness, undiscovered, untouched, and unspoiled by civilization. William F. Butler, a British major and intelligence officer in the Red River Expedition of 1870, described the Canadian West in his book The Great Lone Land (1872). He was a romantic who saw the West not as a harsh and threatening wilderness but as a pristine wilderness, which was full of beauty and unconstrained by society. Romantics, like Butler, travelled west to seek what many others consistently rejected. They longed for the isolation, the closeness to nature, the solitude and the freedom, attributes that had been deprecated. The romantic image of the North-West as a pure wilderness was more positive. The wilderness was represented as a place of romance and adventure, where a primitive life in the West had a certain fascination.²⁴ Butler described it as follows:

The great ocean itself does not present infinite variety than does this prairie-ocean of which we speak. In winter, a dazzling surface of purest snow; in early summer, a vast expanse of grass and pale pink roses; in autumn too often a wild sea of raging fire.

²⁴ Dick Harrison, Unnamed Country. The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1977), 6.

No ocean of water in the world can tie with its gorgeous sunsets; no solitude can equal the loneliness of a night-shadowed prairie; one feels the stillness, and hears the silence, the wail of the prowling wolf makes the voice of solitude audible, the stars look down through infinite silence upon a silence almost as intense ... The prairies had nothing terrible in their aspect, nothing oppressive in their loneliness. One saw here the world as it had taken shape and form from the hands of the Creator.²⁵

Individuals, such as the Earl of Southesk, Viscount Milton, W.B. Cheadle, and William F. Butler, and romantic writers, such as Ralph Connor, J.E. Collins, George Monro Grant, and Robert M. Ballantyne, were looking for adventure and romance in the undiscovered lands of the great West. This West, located beyond the margin of empire, turned into a source of inspiration and a place of imagination. Writers pointed out the silence, the loneliness, and the beauty of the West that was, yet, untamed and unspoiled. The glowing illustrations of harmonious wild lands appeared akin to what had been imagined to be the 'Garden of Eden.' Within the realms of the Edenic garden, as the West was imagined, man could leave behind past mistakes in order to make a new beginning in a land conditioned for the pursuit of excellence.²⁶

The romantic image of the Canadian West also arose from expectations and ideas people had before they went west. These expectations and ideas were triggered by outside images, in particular by those of the American West as revealed in early nineteenth-century American literature. Novels by James Fenimore Cooper—The Pioneers (1823), The Last of the Mohicans (1826) and The Prairie (1827)—had a great impact on early writers of the Canadian West. William F. Butler, for example, wrote in his autobiography

²⁵ Sir William Francis Butler, The Great Lone Land (London: Marston, Low, & Searle, 1872), 199-200.

²⁶ Francis, Images of the West, 38-39.

"in boyhood I had read the novels of James Fenimore Cooper with an interest never to be known again in reading."²⁷

Butler travelled in the American West near the Platte River in 1867 and noted that "the mystic word 'prairie' at last had a veritable reality. Since early boyhood that word has meant everything that was possible in the breathing, seeing and grasping of freedom."²⁸ With these preconceived images in his mind, he then voyaged to the Canadian West in search of the romantic West of James Fenimore Cooper and others. The images of the early nineteenth-century American West had once again been applied to the Canadian West, and the associations of dream and reality had been reversed. "The reality of the wilderness had become a dream."²⁹ In this instance, the Canadian West was not necessarily a reality to begin with, but more a reflection of an idea of the American West that had already been a dream decades before: "Midst the smoke and hum of cities, midst the prayer of churches, in streets or salon, it needs but little cause to recall again to the wanderer the image of the immense meadows where, far away at the portals of the setting sun, lies the Great Lone Land."³⁰

The romantic wilderness had also a splendid charm for many writers—such as Robert M. Ballantyne, the most famous romantic novelist of the Canadian West. Having been undoubtedly affected by the American wilderness tales of Cooper, these authors wrote about the wonders and adventures of the wilderness. They often depicted the experiences of those who had led a life in the 'Great Lone Land' as free and wild as the

²⁷ Quoted in Francis, Images of the West, 39.

²⁸ Butler, The Great Lone Land, 351.

²⁹ Quoted in Francis, Images of the West, 39.

³⁰ Butler, The Great Lone Land, 351.

land itself. From these fictitious accounts of the Canadian West evolved the image of the West as a home of great adventure. Whatever knowledge Canadians and the world had of this unknown territory, they partially perceived it through the popular novels of the West—for example, R.M. Ballantyne's Snowflakes and Sunbeams, or the Young Fur Traders (1863), The Pioneers (1872), Picturesque Canada (1882).³¹

The writers who had journeyed west seeking adventure and freedom from civilization were aware of the fact that the same civilization they were escaping from was rapidly marching westward. The opening up of the region to settlement and the building of the railway were discernibly imminent and inexorable. The genuinely romantic West they had reflected on, with its infinite beauty, its sublime silence, and its splendid peacefulness, faded away with the arrival of settlers and the completion of the railway in 1885. The pristine wilderness, the 'Garden of Eden,' in a romantic sense, was defaced, conquered, and civilized. Its inhabitants returned to their own artificial creation: civilization.³² With the demise of the romantic West, illusions of the West—as a pure and untamed wilderness—no longer existed. The picture of the Canadian West changed and with it, the image it had rested upon. Although the romantic image of the Canadian West had challenged the image of the West as a wasteland, another image would challenge and complete the transformation.³³

In the mid-1850s, a growing nationalism, especially among the population of Eastern Canada, modified the pessimistic image of the West as a wasteland into an

³¹ Harrison, Unnamed Country, 9, 21-26.

³² Francis, Images of the West, 39-51.

³³ Thomas Rawlings, The Confederation of the British North American Provinces including British Columbia and the Hudson's Bay Territory (London: S. Low and Marston, 1865), 98-99.

optimistic image of the West as a mean to Canada's greatness. Nationalists envisaged the western region as a populated agricultural and commercial hinterland—the 'bread basket' of an expanding nation. Nationalism was a powerful concept in the nineteenth century. "It inspired exploration of unknown regions of the world; it dictated international trade patterns; and it caused wars."³⁴

Before Confederation in 1867, nationalism on Canadian soil did not exist. The territories that would eventually unite into Confederation—Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario—existed alongside each other. Having their own histories and traditions, these territories united in 1867 due to economical, strategic and political reasons and less of a feeling of nationalism. Nationalism still had to grow in this young and yet unstable nation. Canadian nationalists believed that the West was the catalyst that would ignite a national pride, and unite Canadians; the West was the only territory where a common feeling of nationalism could be forged. Against this scenario, the Canadian West suddenly gained an economic, political and national importance.³⁵

Canada needed the West to fulfill the promise of its motto, a nation that would stretch "from sea unto sea" . . . it needed the West to achieve its destiny as a great nation, proud to stand amongst other nations that may be greater in power but not in size and potential. The West would be the keystone in the arch of a great Canadian nation.³⁶

The Canadian West's physical and economic potential could lead Canada to national and imperial power. An image of national greatness and grandeur arose. The Canadian West

³⁴ Francis, Images of the West, 73.

³⁵ P. B. Waite, The Life and Times of Confederation, 1864-1867. Politics, Newspapers, and the Union of British North America (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1962), 305-310.

³⁶ Francis, Images of the West, 74.

changed from a wasteland on the margin of civilization to an agricultural hinterland of the nation.³⁷

For decades, the Hudson's Bay Company had ruled the North-West with an iron grip.³⁸ It had also continually perpetuated an image of the North-West as a region of barren and desert lands to make the world believe that the West was unfit for civilization. But, as it was proclaimed in the Toronto Globe on April 15, 1859, the North-West "stretching in an unbroken line across the American Continent from the Pacific to the Atlantic" did not "seem to be theirs." As the company continued "to maintain upon the borders an unbroken wilderness—to prevent the spread of our population westward—to exclude our people from a profitable trade to which they, of all men, are entitled," Canadians believed it to be their duty "to make these things the question peculiarly Canadian, and to impose upon the rulers of Canada the duty of waging a bold and uncompromising warfare against the cause of all the difficulty." The North-West had slowly moved into the sphere of Canadian interest. Canadians became now aware of the North-West's existence, its importance, and its possibilities.

By the mid-1850s, Upper Canada had run out of unsettled land in its western peninsula; the last unsettled land, as the Toronto Globe announced on September 14, 1855, had been sold. All the good agricultural land in Canada West was cultivated, and unless new suitable land could be found in the West, farmers and settlers would opt for

³⁷ Francis, Images of the West, 73-75.

³⁸ "The power of the Hudson's Bay Company over hundreds of thousands of miles of North American continent is unlimited. Into these remote regions few ever penetrate but the servants of the Company. There is hardly a possibility of obtaining any evidence what ever, which does not come in some way through their hand, and which is not more or less tainted by the transmission. The iron rule, which the Company holds over its servants and agents, and the subtle policy, which has ever characterized its government, has kept those regions almost beyond the knowledge of the civilized world." James Edward

the available lands in the American Mid-West as an alternative. Upper Canada needed to expand its borders to gain more suitable land for prospective settlers in order not to lose them to its southern neighbour. The North-West provided this opportunity. Naturally, the North-West received greater attention from Upper Canadians: ". . . dismissed as a frozen wilderness, it was reappraised; it now became the object of the annexationist dreams of a confident, prosperous people."³⁹ Expansionists—such as George Brown, editor of the influential Toronto Globe and leader of the Reform Party in the United Assembly of the Canadas after 1859, and Allan Macdonnell, the most committed among early expansionists—strongly believed in the agricultural potential of the Canadian West. On December 4, 1856, Brown declared:

Canadians now saw that the comparatively small fragment of this continent which they occupied would soon be both too narrow and too short for them, too small a field on which to exercise and develop their new born energies. It was the most notable work for the Canadians of the present day to undertake to bring within the pale of civilization the larger half of the North American continent, a country containing 270 millions of acres.

Optimistic fragments of Palliser's and Hind's observations were emphasized, leaving aside the discouraging views.⁴⁰ They firmly promoted its acquisition and its settlement. And on October 31, 1856 the Globe voiced the prophecy that "fifty million of people would inhabit that immense territory, which the Hudson's Bay Company now claim and control."

Fitzgerald, An Examination of the Charter and Proceedings of the Hudson's Bay Company (London: Trelawney Saunders, 1849), 237.

³⁹ Waiser, "Macoun and the Great North-West," 13.

⁴⁰ John Warkentin, "Steppe, Desert and Empire" in A.W. Rasporich, H.C. Klassen (eds), Prairie Perspectives 2. Selected Papers of the Western Canadian Studies Conferences, 1970, 1971 (Toronto, Montreal: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada Limited, 1973), 102-136.

The image of the region was frequently projected in editorials in the Globe throughout the 1850s and 1860s, and in the ‘Huron’ letters, a long series of letters signed ‘Huron’ sent to the editor of the Globe from August 1856 to November 1856. It was later revealed that Allan Macdonnell had been the author of these letters. On August 28, 1856, for example, ‘Huron’ wrote: “I desire to see Canada for the Canadians and not exclusively for a selfish community of traders, utter strangers to our country; whose only anxiety is to draw all the wealth they can from it, without contributing to its advantages.”

On December 10, 1856 George Brown wrote in an editorial:

The eagerness with which the Canadian public has taken up the question of extending their sovereign claims over the territories of the Hudson’s Bay Company, is sufficient to show that the full time has arrived for acting in the matter. So long as there was a wide extent of country lying between the Company’s forts and the Canadian settlements, there was little desire to go far beyond, and to plunge into the wilderness in search of new territory. Now, however, that almost every acre south of Lake Huron is sold, and the head waters of the Ottawa River have been reached by the Government Surveyor, Canadians are looking about for new worlds to conquer.

Brown assumed, as many others did, that it was Canada’s “birthright” to acquire and possess the Northwest. “The question, which presents itself to us in Canada relates to the best method of taking possession of the vast and fertile territory, which is our birthright, and which no power on earth can prevent us occupying.”⁴¹

In this respect, Canada’s birthright was based on the fact that the region, the new world Canadians intended to conquer, was going to be colonized. The integration of the North-West into Confederation was not seen in terms of an equal status to the other provinces but rather in terms of a relationship of the imperial government with a colony enjoying limited self-government. Once the land was settled and made accessible through

a railway, trade amongst British North Americans and with the Orient could become a reality. The West would provide resources and a population to buy the manufactured goods from the East.⁴² Canadians were also looking for the ‘Passage to India,’ which was imagined to be a “source of the advance of mankind.” A trade route to the Pacific was favourably considered, because it was “Destiny’s offer” to gain strength and imperial power by constituting a trade route to Asia—preferably to China and Japan. Allan Macdonnell keenly endorsed this idea in 1851:

The commerce of India in every age has been the source of the opulence and power of every nation that has possessed it; by a silent and almost imperceptible operation, India has been through centuries the secret but active source of the advance of mankind, and while lying apparently inert in her voluptuous clime, has changed the maritime balances of Europe, with the visit of every people that has sought the riches of her shores. Her trade imparted in the direction of its coasts, region after region before unknown. Like the Genii in the fable, it still offers the casket and the scepter to those who unintimidated by the terrors that surround it, are bold enough to adventure to its embrace. In turn Phoenicia, Cartage, Greece, Rome, Venice, Pisa, Genoa, Portugal, Holland, and lastly England, has won and wore this ocean diadem; Destiny now offers it to us.⁴³

This idea could be realized only by means of a railway to the Pacific. Macdonnell argued that the Canadian portion of the North American continent lay directly in the way of the commerce passing between Europe and Asia; the nation was in desperate need of a rapid line of communication “by which the commerce of the world would undergo an entire change.”⁴⁴

⁴¹ Globe, December 10, 1856.

⁴² Swainson, “Canada Annexes the West,” 130-136.

⁴³ Allan Macdonnell, A Railroad from Lake Superior to the Pacific: the shortest, cheapest and safest Communication. For Europe with all Asia (Toronto: Hugh Scobie, 1851), 6-7.

Expansionists, in particular, believed that the building of a transcontinental railway that would link the Atlantic with the Pacific was inevitable. It would create an effective barrier to a possible American encroachment into the still empty Canadian West. The hegemonic presence of Americans on the North American continent grew unbearable; they had already built a railway to the Pacific for prospects of trade and were busy extending it. Under these circumstances “Canada could not race the United States in western development by competing against a railway with a cart-road! The railway must come, and the Dominion must aid in securing it.”⁴⁵

The image of the Northwest as an agricultural and commercial hinterland became popular throughout the 1850s and 1860s. Brown wrote in the Globe on August 28, 1856: “Let the merchants of Toronto consider that if the city is ever to be made really great—if it is ever to rise above the rank of a fifth-rate American town—it must be by the development of the great British territory lying to the north and west.” Furthermore, he reminded his fellow Canadians on January 22, 1863:

If Canada acquires this territory it will rise in a few years from a position of a small and weak province to be the greatest colony any country has ever possessed, able to take its place among the empires of the earth. The wealth of 400,000 square miles of territory will flow through our waters and be gathered by our merchants, manufacturers and agriculturalists. Our sons will occupy the chief places of this vast territory, we will form its institutions, its rulers, teach its schools, fill its stores, run its mills, navigate its streams. Every article of European manufacture, every pound of tropical produce will pass through our stores. Our seminaries of learning will be filled by its people. Our cities will be the centres of its business and education, its

⁴⁴ Allan Macdonnell, The North-West Transportation, Navigation, and Railway Company: Its Objects (Toronto: Lovell and Gibson, 1858), 2.

⁴⁵ Globe, June 11, 1869. The federal government had apparently not proposed to do more than complete a “common road” from the head of Lake Superior and thence by wagon trails and waterways to Fort Garry on the Red River. J.M.S. Careless, Brown of The Globe. Vol. 2. Statesman of Confederation, 1860-1880 (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1963), 212.

health and refinement. It will afford fields of enterprise for our youth. It is a bright prospect and its realization would be worthy of some sacrifice.

The Canadian expansionist movement came into prominence for another reason.

Many feared the growing power of the United States. As long as the great western plains remained empty, American designs on territories north of the forty-ninth parallel were a definite threat. It was common knowledge that Americans had their own expansionist ambitions in the West. The United States had acquired Alaska in 1867 and would eventually push for the possession of the North-West territory in between; it was a nation with infinite room for expansion and a great interest in possessing the territory. American expansionists, for example, had continually tried to convince the American government to enter the North-West and incorporate the region into the American West as part of the nation's 'Manifest Destiny.'⁴⁶

To maintain its independence on the North American continent, Canada had to take possession of the North-West to hinder Americans from moving north. It was feared that Canada, "cooped up between lake, river and the frozen North," would lose its importance if the region would become 'Americanized.' On January 24, 1864, Brown warned his fellow Canadians of this possibility:

Once let the railway, and the whole country, cut off from any but a roundabout and costly communication with Canada, will speedily become Americanized. We believe that the movement, which has now been instituted for the purpose of facilitating communication between Red River and the State of Minnesota is nothing more or less than the handing over of the vast North-

⁴⁶ The concept of 'Manifest Destiny' was part of American culture and history—a belief that the United States was destined by God to control the entire North American continent. William H. Goetzmann, Exploration and Empire. The Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American West (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1966) 231-303.

West Territory, not only commercially but politically, to the United States.⁴⁷

Many reasons—commercial, agricultural and national—were provided to urge the acquisition and settlement of the North-West; it was the first step in establishing a transcontinental nation. The ‘conquest’ of the North-West was a wholly Canadian version of ‘Manifest Destiny’—“who can doubt of the reality and vision, which rise distinctly and clearly before us, as the Great Britannic Empire of the North stands out in all its grandeur.”⁴⁸ Or as future Canadian Prime Minister John Alexander Macdonald so mundanely remarked on March 24, 1865: “I would be quite willing, personally . . . to leave that whole country a wilderness for the next half-century, but I fear if Englishmen do not go there, Yankees will . . .”⁴⁹

By the 1890s, the lands of the American West were almost entirely claimed and settled. ‘Unoccupied’ land was hardly available anymore. Americans had reached the Pacific coast and could not go further west; the American frontier was coming to an end. New western states were incorporated into the union pushing the process of state-making to completion. The American West was on the verge of civilization. American settlers were already settling and tilling the lands. The American government, furthermore, had removed the Indian problem, though violently and for a high price. While the settling of the American West was completed, the opening of the Canadian West was still in its

⁴⁷ These suspicions were reasonable. In 1866, the Hudson’s Bay Company expressed a possibility of negotiating the sale of the North-West Territory with the Americans. “Rumours are afloat of an intention on the part of the Americans to make an offer for our lands and to form a company to promote their colonization. It is not stated what they intend to offer us, but it may be presumed they would not think of offering less than the sum our own government is prepared to guarantee. It must be admitted that there would be great political danger were the Americans to acquire these lands, and thus insert a wedge between Canada and British Columbia.” The Hudson’s Bay Company, “A Million.” Shall We Take It? Address to Shareholders (London: Baily and Co., 1866), 4-5.

⁴⁸ Globe, December 26, 1856.

beginnings. Almost half a century lay between both settlement periods giving Canadians the opportunity to observe how Americans had conquered their West. They did not intend to imitate the American West, but filtered and used the negative images of the American West in order to differentiate their West from the American one. On this matter, J. A. Macdonald announced on February 6, 1856:

We can now take advantage of the experience of the United States of the last 78 years . . . We are happily situated in having had the opportunity of watching its operation, seeing its working from its infancy till now. . . . and I am strongly of the belief that we have in a great measure, avoided . . . the defects which time and events have shown to exist. They commenced at the wrong end.

When the Rupert's Land Act was passed in 1870, jurisdiction over the North-West was transferred from the Hudson's Bay Company to Canada. The government immediately embarked on a policy to attract settlers. The acquisition of the North-West in 1869-70 and the integration of the region into the nation through a transcontinental railway set the stage for a new image of the Canadian West. Maturing on the romantic image of the West as an 'Garden of Eden,' and on the image of the West as an epitome of national greatness, an image of the West as a 'utopia'—'the last, best West,' where it was still possible to create a perfect society—evolved. It became a means of promoting settlement and immigration in the following period from 1870 to 1914. Consequently, a "new historical chapter"⁵⁰ was introduced.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Waite, The Life and Times of Confederation, 307.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Waiser, "Macoun and the Great North-West," 1.

Chapter Two

“Canada’s Century:¹ Making a Myth

To show how it really was is not to produce a photographic copy of an objective reality but to make a leap of creative imagination.²

When the Canadian government acquired the North-West in 1870, it had an explicit vision of the kind of frontier it intended to establish. Canadian expansionists believed that the Canadian West was predestined to be orderly, peaceful, and structured. They wanted to create a ‘mild’ West, a kind of West that was not only different but also better than the American one. The American West had been settled almost half a century earlier than the Canadian one, giving Canadians the opportunity to follow critically the development of the American frontier. But Canadian expansionists did not approve of what they observed. They strongly rejected the ‘wild’ and lawless frontier, and decided to do better. The idea of a ‘mild’ West, where the best features of British civilisation would take up root and flourish, was then deliberately developed to differentiate the Canadian frontier from the American one. It was an idea that had to be turned into reality.

The realisation of this idea began with the portrayal of the Canadian West in promotional literature of the settlement period beginning in 1870. The Canadian West was portrayed as an agricultural Eden, ideal for large-scale agricultural settlement. This literature compared the region with the lawless American West in order to emphasise and support the idea of a ‘mild’ Canadian West. A wide variety of pamphlets captured and

¹ Canadians most often referred to the twentieth century as “Canada’s Century.” This popular idea lay behind the characteristic immigration propaganda of the settlement period from 1870 to 1914. Many Canadians believed that “the vast, empty spaces of the land would welcome millions of settlers [who] would exploit the untold resources of the country, providing a standard of living envied by the remainder of the world.” R. C. Brown, R. Cook, Canada, 1896-1921, Centenary Series XIV (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974), 4.

communicated this idea, and awakened the public's enthusiasm and interest for the region. A series of pamphlets focused on the idea of a 'mild' Canadian West and presented imaginary pictures of the West. The region was shown to abound with fertility and promoted as a utopia, a Garden of Eden, where everyone could succeed. Settlers would not have to endure any hardship but would enjoy almost instant prosperity. The promotional literature infused with the image of a 'mild' West lured thousands of immigrants to the prairies. Immigration literature helped to shape western Canada's cultural image in the eyes of the nation and the world.

Another important step in making a peaceful, orderly Canadian West was to put into reality what was so splendidly described in promotional literature. The government sought to create their 'mild' West by adopting a series of national policies to be in place before the majority of settlers arrived. These policies—including free homesteads, the mounted police force, Indian treaties and reserves, a transcontinental railway, settlement and immigration—were closely intertwined and complementary. The establishment of peace and order would effectively ensure an immediate and rapid settlement of the West, inevitably leading the region and the Dominion to prosperity.

The concept of a 'mild' West, however, had little basis in reality. Settlers had to face a number of challenges and many of them became disillusioned. The idea of a peaceful and orderly West was strongly anchored in the minds and could not be dismissed. The Canadian frontier continued to be identified as being 'mild.' Despite the fact that the West was anything but the dream of expansionists, the image remained unaltered and unchallenged in the public's imagination. The imaginary West soon became

² Mark A. Weinstein, "The Creative Imagination in Fiction and History," *Genre*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1976, 263-277.

accepted as the real Canadian West. Here, Willie Nelson's words, though he was a native of Texas, applied to the Canadian West as well: "But be careful what you're dreamin'-soon your dreams will be dreamin' you."

Before the settling of the West could begin, a number of things had to occur. Ottawa designed its development policies to create a peaceful and orderly West. The realization of order and peace began when the Dominion government initiated a precise and uniform plan to survey the vast and immense lands of the Prairie Provinces. The survey was planned on the basis of the existence of the fertile belt. This survey system measured the fertile lands in checkerboard fashion subdividing the prairies into a few river lots and thousands of farm-sized quarter sections of one hundred and sixty acres. The parcelling out of the vast and arable area made the land ready for incoming homesteaders.³ The surveyed land was systematically distributed to newly arriving settlers. The idea behind surveying the land was to prevent possible disputes over titles and ownership and to enhance the notion of an ordered land. This policy represented one difference with Canada's southern neighbour. In the American West, disputes over land titles had been a great problem. On the American frontier the settler sought out a large tract of land that he found appealing. Settlers, themselves, surveyed their grants, which often resulted in conflicts or even violence over confusing boundary lines and land titles.

³ The Dominion Land Survey did not move forward in a westward but rather in a north-western direction. In the 1870s, the survey advanced from Manitoba to the Assiniboine valley, Fort Pelly, Prince Albert and Edmonton. The progress maps of the Department of the Interior showed the movement to the north and west. The lines of the survey almost exactly traced Hind's Fertile Belt. His interpretation of the West was widely accepted, whereas Palliser's Triangle, extending from the one hundredth to the one hundred and fourteenth meridian, had been modified. Its base and height were diminished as a result of the work of Dominion land surveyors and others. Doug Owram, Promise of Eden. The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West 1856-1900 (Toronto, London: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 114-115.

The first survey in the Canadian West was made on September 8, 1869. Lt. Col. John Sloughton Dennis, a provincial land surveyor from Ontario, headed westward from the Red River at Pembina marking out the first ten miles of the forty-ninth parallel, the Manitoba-United States borderline. The survey rushed forward so rapidly that 67,000 quarter sections were assessed within a few decades. The survey achievements in the year 1883 were ground breaking. In one year, the dominion land surveyors marked out over 170,000 farm units of one hundred and sixty acres each, and patterned the vast lands into townships, sections, quarter sections and ranges.⁴ By the end of 1919, they had staked out 1,160,000 quarter sections embracing a total of 178 million acres. The land system was a necessity for land ownership and order; any homestead could now exactly be located. Later disputes over homestead borderlines and ownership were made impossible.⁵

In addition to marking out the fertile lands of the West, survey groups also observed the region's geography, climate, and natural resources. The reports sent to Ottawa embellished the agricultural suitability of the region. Land surveyors found the land in the Canadian West to be better than on the American frontier. On occasion, professionals from other fields accompanied these surveys to obtain a more detailed examination of the North-West. John Macoun, the Dominion government botanist to the Geological and Natural History Survey of Canada, for example, was convinced that western conditions were ideal for agricultural settlement:

⁴ James G. MacGregor, Vision of an Ordered Land. The Story of the Dominion Land Survey (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1981), ix-xiii. "One thousand two hundred and twenty-one townships, or somewhat over 27 millions of acres were subdivided into sections and quarter sections, ready for occupancy by settlers, besides which about 11,300 miles of block and township lines, establishing the outside boundaries of thirteen hundred and sixty townships, were surveyed. The laying out of the land from the western boundary of the Province of Manitoba towards the Rocky Mountains has fairly kept pace with the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway." "Report of the Surveyor General," C.S.P., pt. 2, 1883, 3. Quoted in MacGregor, Vision of An Ordered Land, 74.

A domain of undreamed beauty and fertility, covering nearly a quarter of the North-American continent, and embracing within its vast expanse prairies wide and rich enough to yield the grain supply of the world . . . and stores of mineral wealth whose undeveloped capabilities the boldest imagination almost hesitates to grasp.⁶

In his book Manitoba and the Great Northwest (1882), Macoun dismissed the existence of Palliser's Triangle, and denounced Hind and Palliser as refugees from ivory towers whose field observations were scientifically insufficient and far removed from reality. Instead of pioneering the truth, both had given false impressions of Canada's North-West. According to Macoun's reports, this region was riper for settlement than any other portion of the western hemisphere. The lands were even more fertile and habitable than the lands of the American West; he had found a garden of promising land potential.⁷ He remarked that while "on the Souris Plain, both east and west of Turtle Mountain, the early explorers found short grass and little water and called it a desert. Practical men break up dry and apparently sandy soil and produce crops that astonish the world."⁸

Macoun's ground-breaking work was widely accepted. Expansionists had long wanted to dispel the negative image of the North-West as a barren and irreclaimable wasteland. Macoun offered them the opportunity to dismiss this image. His evaluation of

⁵ MacGregor, Vision of An Ordered Land, ix.

⁶ Frank A Carle, The British Northwest; Pen and Sun Sketches in the Canadian Wheat Lands (St. Paul: Pioneer Press, 1882), 1-2.

⁷ R. Douglas Francis, Images of the West. Responses to the Canadian Prairies (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1989), 112.

⁸ John Macoun, Manitoba and the Great North West (Guelph: World Pub. Co., 1882), 52. "I am quite safe in saying that 80% of the whole country is suited for the raising of grain and cattle and would not be the least surprised if future explorers had found a more favourable estimate. Only two points in the country explored were noted where it was probable the rainfall was too light for the successful raising of cereals." John Macoun, "General Remarks on the Land, Wood and Water of the North-West Territories from the 102nd to 115th Meridian and between the 51st and 53rd Parallels of Latitude," in Sandford Fleming,

western Canada's potential was significant. By emphasising the ideal nature of the region, he provided expansionists with the scientific justification they needed to push a policy of large-scale settlement and regional colonisation. The western interior was now an agricultural paradise—'Macoun's Eden'—where the prospects were not just inviting but rather all too inspiring:

A look over a field of growing grain is all that is necessary to tell the practical man that here is a land with untold wealth in its soil, and as the life giving breeze fans his cheek, he feels that here life means an unending pleasure. The blood courses through his veins as it did when he was a boy, and he is young again in spirit if not in years. The sensation is irresistible, and all men feel never to be forgotten pleasures as they gaze on the waving fields of grain and prairie grass.⁹

The land survey system and the scientific observation of the nature of the West were the first steps to be taken in the direction of an ordered and structured West. The second was soon to follow. As the Dominion land surveyors and scientists worked their way west, they closely associated with another pioneering group that was also journeying west: the Canadian Pacific Railway engineers and builders.

The railroad was another paramount factor in the creation of a 'mild' West. As land surveyors structured the Canadian West, a transcontinental transportation system made it accessible for settlers. The Canadian Pacific Railway reached Calgary in 1883 and was finally completed in 1885. Many people believed that if a railroad led the way, colonisation and civilisation would inevitably follow. The existence of a transcontinental railroad would ensure a rapid and constant influx of potential settlers to the North-West, a goal the Dominion government had been striving for ever since it had removed the iron

C.M.G., Engineer-in-Chief, Report and Documents in Reference to the Canadian Pacific Railway (Ottawa: Maclean, 1880), 87.

clad rule of the Hudson's Bay Company. Beside the fact that the railroad ought to open the North-West, Canadians had another reason for constructing it. On June 26, 1869, the Nor' Wester, for example, echoed that the railroad was "a necessity to this country, a necessity to the Dominion, and a necessity to the Empire." Integrating the region into the nation would demonstrate that Canadians were able to counter the American threat at its southern border. Americans were vehemently knocking on Canada's door to the North-West to annex the land. "The temptation that such fertility presented to the land-starved Americans implied that the entire expansive movement of population on the North American continent will be concentrated in the direction of our fertile valleys."¹⁰ The construction of a railway was essential if the North-West was to remain Canadian. Only the railway would ensure the firm connection of the North-West with the rest of Canada. Presented as "a modern wonderwork," railways changed the world; only the "trails of iron" were capable of spreading wealth and settlement.¹¹ Canadian expansionists argued that the North-West would only achieve its full potential through the existence of a railway. The future of the North-West depended on a transcontinental railway. The railway, as it was so enthusiastically proclaimed, "was the magical wand which is destined to people the North-West."¹² As the CPR was laid the far-away Great North-West, the vast and distant lands became available for settlers.

⁹ Macoun, Manitoba and the Great North West, 219.

¹⁰ Owram, Promise of Eden, 122.

¹¹ David Cruise and Alison Griffiths, Lords of the Line (Toronto: Viking Penguin, 1988), 1.

¹² Quoted in Owram, Promise of Eden, 123.

A third step had to be taken towards the creation of a ‘mild’ West. In order to further Canadianize the West, law and order had to be instituted.¹³ Establishing law and order in the Canadian West was important to Canadians because their idea of order differentiated their ‘mild’ West from the ‘wild’ American frontier. Definite ideas about the lawlessness in the American West had already existed, and Canadians constantly associated the American West with violence and disorder. There were 943 military engagements in the American West between 1866 and 1895, whereas there were only six or seven comparable clashes in the Canadian West. A lawless West as the American one was unthinkable and too costly to establish on the Canadian side of the border.¹⁴ By the 1870s, the United States was spending approximately 20 million dollars to subdue the natives—more than the total Canadian budget. Canada could not afford an American-style west and needed to peacefully settle its western frontier. Canadians learned from the American experience, and initiated a national police force.¹⁵

The North West Mounted Police was a frontier police force created by the federal government in 1873 to ensure that the West was “orderly and hierarchical, not a lawless frontier democracy but a place where powerful institutions and a responsible paternalistic upper class”¹⁶ controlled the administration of justice in an attempt to avoid the ‘excesses’ of the American West. The Mounties fostered the concept of a ‘mild’

¹³ R.G. Macbeth, The Romance of the CPR (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1924), 172-180.

¹⁴ Desmond Morton, “Cavalry or police: keeping the peace on two adjacent frontiers, 1870-1900,” Journal of Canadian Studies, vol. 12, no. 2, Spring 1977, 27-37.

¹⁵ R.C. MacLeod, “Canadianizing the West. The North-West Mounted Police as Agents of the National Policy, 1873-1905” in R. D. Francis, H. Palmer (eds), The Prairie West. Historical Readings (Edmonton: Pica Pica Press, 1992), 226-227.

¹⁶ MacLeod, “Canadianizing the West,” 197.

Canadian West.¹⁷ The NWMP was not established as a military but as a civil body “with as little gold lace, furs and fine feathers as possible, not a crack cavalry regiment, but an efficient police force for the rough and ready—particularly ready—enforcement of law and justice.”¹⁸ The Mounted Police was a perfect embodiment of the British ideals of justice, and because “Canadians believed in the ideal of the law, they had created an agency like the Mounted Police; because of the existence of the Mounted Police, they could believe in the effectiveness of the rule of law.”¹⁹ The Mounties reflected the values of the society they served. Daniel Francis noted in his book National Dreams (1997) that Canadians “know that the absence of a Wild West in Canada was no accident of history; it was the result of their moral superiority and the superiority of British justice as exemplified in the Mounted Police.”²⁰

This frontier police force became Canada’s proudest national symbol—the unassuming, completely incorruptible, patient, self-disciplined, and sober Mountie who

¹⁷ Macdonald gave the following instructions to the proposed commander Captain D.R. Cameron in 1869: “I have no doubt, come what will, there must be a military body, or at all events a body with military discipline at Fort Garry. It seems to me that the best Force would be *Mounted Riflemen*, trained to act as cavalry, but also instructed in the rifle exercise. They should also be instructed, as certain of the Line are, in the use of artillery. This body should not be expressly military, but should be styled *Police* and have the military bearing of the Irish Constabulary.” S.W.Horrell, “Sir John A Macdonald and the Mounted Police Force for the Northwest Territories, Canadian History Review, vol. III, June 1972, 178-200. Macdonald referred to the Royal Irish Constabulary as a model for cheap and effective law enforcement. The RIC came into existence during the Napoleonic Wars, to maintain order in Ireland during a time of internal turmoil. The force proved to be successful. By the 1870 several police forces in the British Empire were model on the RIC. R.C. MacLeod, The North-West Mounted Police and Law Enforcement 1873-1905 (Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 8.

¹⁸ John A. Macdonald urging Parliament in March 1873 to pass legislation for a mounted police force. Canada, Debates of the House of Commons, May 3, 1873.

¹⁹ Keith Walden, Visions of Order (Toronto: Butterworths, 1982), 126.

²⁰ Francis, National Dreams, and Myth, Memory and Canadian History (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1997), 34. Francis also mentions that “in Canada, we sent the Mounted Police to befriend and protect the Indians. Canadians have always believed that we treat our First Nations much more justly than the Americans. It is part of our national self-image.” This belief does not conform to the historical fact that the police force was suppressing the movements of aboriginal groups in the last quarter of the nineteenth

subdued the fiery spirit of the natives and pacified the West. The Mountie was idealised as a model Canadian never doomed to fail.²¹ The police force affirmed the importance of law and the subservience of the individual to the community. It expressed Canadians' sense of themselves as a civilised, orderly society:

The role of a Mountie is to maintain the peace in an area larger than several European kingdoms, and to show the rough Americans how law-abiding a frontier could be. Safety and Security, order and harmony—these are qualities that Canadians prize more highly than their neighbours.²²

The Mounted Police discouraged horse stealing, helped negotiate land treaties, patrolled railway construction camps, controlled the whiskey trade, acted as mediators in countless disputes between whites and Natives, and gave a sense of security. They generally imposed order and civilisation on the Canadian frontier. The old society of fur traders and trappers had been replaced by a new society in a peaceful and orderly way.²³

The primary task of the Mounted Police was to safeguard the West for Canada until the growth of population would firmly establish Canadian ownership. The force also ensured the integration of new immigrants. Every settler was visited regularly. The mounted police became the most important source of information about the outside world

century. After 1885, when the railway was completed, police dealings with First Nations began to shift from persuasion to coercion; Indians were then be pushed aside and forgotten.

²¹ "The Mountie was indisputable a hero. He possessed all the virtues and character traits that distinguish the archetype. He was well bred and often of noble birth, but he was in no sense an elitist. Mixing easily with his fellows and with humanity, he was comfortable with the authority, he wielded and never became tyrannical. His natural courtesy, modesty, sense of humour, and incorruptible morality ensured that he acted from a feeling of paternal canon for society, rather than self-interest. Only in a mythical figure could the fine balance between these valued but contradictory qualities have been maintained." Walden, Visions of Order, 55.

²² Pierre Berton, Klondike (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1958), xviii. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police have occupied a special place in Canadians' history and imagination; its story became one of the great heroic myths of Canadian history, fostered by radio and television series and movies.

on the prairies. These visitations gave the isolated settlers a sense of security and provided welcome relief from the loneliness of prairie life. "The police advised newcomers as to the most desirable locations, gave advice about crops and weather conditions, and even lent farm equipment . . . delivered mail, organised the fighting of prairies fires, and acted as health officers."²⁴ Their activities exceeded the area of responsibility of a typical police force, but not without a cause. The close contacts with the settlers were important to prevent any occurrences of private justice, and ultimately to explain the law and impart Canadian values.

The force encouraged the 'correct view' of law and order. Those who endangered the newly established order were regarded as a threat to British society. Canadian civilisation had to be preserved in the West, especially when it came to supervising American immigrants. American settlers received more attention because they carried with them the American political attitudes—the seeds of disorder and violence—that had caused the lawless American West. Commissioner L. W. Herchmer noted in 1893:

A very large immigration, as you are aware, took place last year into the Edmonton country, mostly from the Western States where law and order are not rigidly enforced, and I am credibly informed that the flow this year will greatly exceed all previous seasons, most of the immigrants being drawn from Oregon and Washington States, and it will be necessary to greatly increase our patrols in consequence, as the opinion these people form of our administration of the laws on their first arrival, has the greatest possible effect on their future conduct, and inability on our part to impress them with the necessity of strictly obeying our laws, will, in my opinion, be certain to lead to heavy expenses later on in the administration of justice, the cost of which would greatly exceed

²³ S. R. Hewitt, "From RNWMP to RCMP: The Power of Myth and the Reality of Transformation," in William M. Baker (ed), The Mounted Police and Prairie Society 1873-1919 (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1998), 351-362.

²⁴ MacLeod, "Canadianizing the West," 229.

that of laying a good moral foundation, through the activity and vigilance of the police.²⁵

Another group that posed a threat to order were Canada's First Nations. The treatment of natives, therefore, worked in tandem with the role of the Mounted Police as advocates of British justice and its activities. The police force was concerned about maintaining peace with Natives and avoiding conflicts. They often had to cope with white settlers who believed that the 'only good Indian was a dead one.' The force managed to protect the interest of two groups and avoid any confrontation, because violent confrontation would definitely hinder the making of a 'mild' West. The Indians themselves acknowledged the advantageous aspects of the police presence. Crowfoot, head chief of the Blackfeet, once asked: "if the police had not come to the country, where would we all be now?" He added: "Bad men and whiskey were killing us so fast that very few, indeed, of us would have been left today. The police have protected us as the feathers of the bird protect it from the frost of the winter."²⁶

Canadian officials followed a somewhat different and less brutal path than the Americans by adopting a policy of co-operation and coerced assimilation: the so called "policy of the Bible and the plough."²⁷ This policy differed from the American policy of extermination because it aimed to civilise and assimilate Indians without the use of violence. Religion, farming and treaty-making became the foundations of Ottawa's Indian policy. This 'mild' approach helped to disassociate the Canadian West from the

²⁵ P.A.C., R.C.M.P. Records 18, Comptroller's Office Official Correspondence Series, vol. 74, no. 68, Commissioner L.W. Herchmer to Comptroller F. White, January 13, 1893. Quoted in MacLeod, "Canadianizing the West," 231.

²⁶ J.R. Miller, Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens. A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada (Toronto, London: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 161.

²⁷ Miller, Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens, 196.

Wild West. Ottawa intended to coercively remodel their Indians into ideal Europeans, who lived and behaved as Canadian settlers did.

Treaty-making was an important factor in the process of western settlement, because it became a cheap and ‘mild’ way of settling the Canadian West. The American way of eliminating native people had always been regarded as rather expensive. In 1877, the government under Alexander Mackenzie had a reason for defending the costs of treaty-making:

The expenditure incurred by the Indian Treaties is undoubtedly large, but the Canadian policy is nevertheless the cheapest, ultimately, if we compare the results with those of other countries; and it is above all a human, just and Christian policy. Notwithstanding the deplorable war waged between the Indian tribes in the United States territories, and the Government of that country, during the last year, no difficulty has arisen with the Canadian tribes living in the immediate vicinity of the scene of hostilities.²⁸

When Canada’s First Nation people signed the treaties, they gave up more than just their land title to the government; they also surrendered their Indian identity for the merits of British civilization. Indians agreed to:

... cede, release, surrender and yield up to the Government . . . all their rights, titles, and privileges, whatsoever, to the lands covered by the treaties, and do hereby solemnly promise and engage to strictly observe this treaty, and also to conduct and behave themselves as good and loyal subjects of Her Majesty the Queen.²⁹

Unlike the American government, the Canadian government pursued the aim of peacefully eliminating the Indians. John A. Macdonald once remarked: “. . . the red man

²⁸ Canada, Debates of the House of Commons, February 8, 1877, 3. Quoted in Miller, Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens, 162.

²⁹ Treaty Six. A. Morris, The Treaties of Canada with the Indians (Toronto: Belfords, Clarke, 1880), 352, 355. Quoted in Miller, Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens, 168.

has to learn that the white man governs." He continued that "the great aim of our legislation has been to do away with the tribal system and assimilate the Indian people in all respects with the inhabitants of the Dominion, as speedily as they are fit for the change."³⁰

Immigration and settlement were the last important factors necessary in order to fulfil the expansionists' dream of a 'mild' Canadian West. By the mid-1870s, Canada wanted an immigrant population of mainly agricultural settlers established in the Canadian West whose broad expanses of fertile land was viewed as a prime location for commercial agriculture. The region was to become "the bread-basket and granary of the old world for future generations."³¹ In its eagerness to attract *bona fide* settlers to the North-West, the Dominion government favoured agricultural immigration mainly from Eastern Canada and Great Britain. The majority of settlers that came to the West were primarily Protestant English-speaking settlers from Ontario and the British Isles. But not all settlers who came to the Canadian West in the 1880s wanted to stay there. Many immigrants chose to settle in the American West, which was, at that time, presented as a more attractive and accessible place. Before 1891, Canada was often called "a huge demographic railway station where thousands of men, women, and children were

³⁰ Return to an Order of the House of Commons, dated May 2, 1887, Canada, Sessional Papers, no. 20b, 1887, 37. Quoted in Miller, Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens, 189.

³¹ Norman Macdonald, Canada. Immigration and Colonisation. 1841-1903 (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1966), 169. In 1872, the federal government enacted the Dominion Lands Act. This act enabled settlers to acquire one hundred acres of free land, as long as he remained on his land for a period of three years, made certain minor improvements to the land, and paid a registration fee of ten dollars. Department of the Interior, Handbook. For the Information of Intending Settlers (Ottawa: Government Printing, 1914), 16-18.

constantly going and coming, and where the number of departures invariably exceeded that of arrivals.”³²

This changed in 1896 when the tide of immigration began to turn to the Canadian West. The American frontier was closed. Canada could now attract thousands of immigrants from the United States, Great Britain and Europe. Between 1896 and 1905, Clifford Sifton, the new Minister of the Interior, assumed responsibility for immigration and settlement in Western Canada. Sifton reorganized the immigration department and made it easier for immigrants to obtain homesteads. The focus of his efforts was to populate the North-West with farmers. He strongly believed in the agricultural potential of this region. Agricultural life became the only foundation on which a stable and progressive society could prosper, and only those citizens who were firmly rooted in the soil were seen as ideal immigrants.³³ In a memorandum for Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier, Sifton argued: “Our desire is to promote the immigration of farmers and farm labourers. We have not been disposed to exclude foreigners of any nationality who seemed likely to become successful agriculturalists.”³⁴ Different ‘races’ had different characteristics, and only those settlers whose features best fitted agricultural life were able to become farmers. According to Sifton, only a “stalwart peasant in a sheepskin coat

³² Donald Creighton, Canada's First Century: 1867-1967 (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1970), 76.

³³ D.J. Hall, “Clifford Sifton: Immigration and Settlement Policy 1896-1905,” in R. D. Francis, H. Palmer (eds), The Prairie West. Historical Readings, 2nd edition (Edmonton: Pica Pica Press, 1992), 77-84. In 1910, Sifton commented on the importance of agriculture: “It is the foundation of all real and enduring progress on the part of Canada. It is one of the striking facts of the present social condition in the United States and Canada that, with a few exceptions, those men who, by reason of strength of character and intellectual pre-eminence, take the lead in public affairs, in professional life and in scholarship are, as a rule, removed not more than one or, at most, two generations from ancestors who tilled the soil. The possession of a preponderating rural population having the virtues and strength of character bred only among those who follow agricultural life, is the only sure guarantee of our national future.” Quoted in Francis, Palmer, The Prairie West, 84.

born on the soil, whose forefathers have been farmers for ten generations, with a stout wife and half-dozen children”³⁵ was the right kind of settler for the Canadian West. No others were encouraged to apply.³⁶

Sifton preferred immigrants from Great Britain, but since there were not enough settling in the Canadian West during the late nineteenth century, he had to turn to others. Under these circumstances, his immigration policy became more flexible. Sifton was not in a position to be as selective as his successors. He pursued an ‘open-door’ policy in order to populate the West. He launched a recruiting campaign that aimed not only at the British, but also at Central and Eastern European farmers. Many Anglo-Canadians did not like this policy as they believed that these immigrants would be difficult to assimilate. But Sifton argued that agricultural immigrants who became attached to the soil would soon loosen their bonds to the old world and turn into model Canadians. The liberal Manitoba newspaper, Free Press, under the editorship of J. W. Dafoe, supported Sifton’s concept and announced that: “. . . in Canada if you get the immigrant on the land he becomes at once naturalised and nationalised.”³⁷

³⁴ Hall, “Clifford Sifton,” 78.

³⁵ Quoted in Georgina M. Taylor, “Art Nouveau, Immigration Propaganda, and the People of Saskatchewan,” Saskatchewan History, vol. 50, no. 2, Fall 1998, 31.

³⁶ Sifton outlined the objectives of the government’s immigration policy in the House of Commons in 1902: “It has not been the policy of the department, either under the late government or under this government, to make any attempt to induce mechanics or wage earners to come to Canada . . . The test we have to apply is this: Does the person intending to come to Canada intend to become an agriculturalist? If he does, we encourage him to come and give him every assistance we can. But we give no encouragement whatever to persons to come to work for wages as a rule, and we give no encouragement under any circumstances to persons desirous of coming out to get clerical situations of any kind, the view being that we should have enough persons to fill situations of that sort.” Quoted in Harold Martin Troper, Only Farmers Need Apply. Official Canadian Government Encouragement of Immigration from the United States, 1896-1911 (Toronto: Griffin House, 1972), 7.

³⁷ Quoted in Hall, “Clifford Sifton,” 80.

The American farmer was one of Sifton's preferred immigrants. He wanted American settlers who had experience farming the open plains and who would bring their dry land farming technique to Western Canada. But not all Canadians favoured American settlers. Many were strongly concerned about this group of immigrants and its republican ideas. The Free Press published the following retort to show "Americanization" of the Canadian West as a groundless fear:

They are coming into a country where they will very soon realise that the will of the people rules. There is a greater freedom, a better administration of justice and greater respect for the law, guaranteeing the equal rights of all, in Canada than there is in the United States. The security of life and property is greater. The accessions to our population which we are now receiving from the United States are very largely of British origin. They are of our own stock. Their interests, once they make their homes on Canadian soil, become Canadian. So it has always been; and that it will continue so is not to be doubted.³⁸

Considerate emphasis was also put on the fact that the vast majority were expatriate Canadians returning to their own homeland. Most of them had left the Dominion and crossed the border in search for a better life. This emigration of Canadians had caused the loss of thousands of settlers annually to the United States. It was argued that those who returned rejoiced in the old institutions and rather preferred Canadian laws and customs.³⁹

³⁸ Quoted in Hall, "Clifford Sifton," 80.

³⁹ Cy Warman, Canada's "Poet of the Rockies" was impressed by this movement and wrote the following appraisal: "There's a bustle on the border, there's a shuffling of feet. Where the shores of the Republic and the big Dominion meet; for the sons of the Dominion, who have wandered far away are coming back to Canada to-day, true, their children sing "American," and "Hands Across the Sea," and they themselves have learned to love the land of liberty. But its feet across the border now, with toes the other way—they are coming back to Canada to-day. Now the sleeping North is waking, and their loyal hearts are thrilled, they are hearing from the home-folks who have tarried there and tilled. So, the Sons of the Dominion, who have wandered far away, are coming back to Canada to-day. They are coming back to Canada, new Empire of the West, to the boundless fields and forests, to the land that they love best; aye, its feet across the border now, with toes the other way—they are coming back to Canada to-day. They are coming back to Canada, although there's nothing wrong with the land of their adoption, but they've been away so long; and some of them have soldiered there, and some of them are gray, but they're coming back to Canada to-day." Quoted in Troper, Only Farmers Need Apply, 151-152.

Certain ethnic groups were considered as ‘undesirable’ immigrants, and barred from entering Canada. Sifton, and particularly his successors, believed these groups to be inferior and unable to conform to the Anglo-Canadian identity. The British headed the list as the most desired settlers followed by Americans and Northern and Western Europeans. Less desired settlers included Central and Eastern Europeans who were followed by Southern Europeans. The least desired settlers included Asians and Blacks. The government refused to encourage Black immigration. Canadians were aware of the racial tensions that were plaguing the United States, and they had no desire to import these problems to the North-West. They looked upon Blacks as totally unfit for the kind of society Canada wanted to create in the Canadian West. The African-American was hardly a desirable settler with “his aversion to silence and solitude, love of rhythm, excitability and lack of reserve. All travellers speak of their impulsiveness, strong sexual passion and lack of will power.”⁴⁰ The Dominion government assumed that an influx of African-Americans into the North-West would create social problems that would become unmanageable. The exclusion of African-Americans from immigration was an urgent issue, and in April 1911, the Toronto Mail and Empire published an editorial on this pressing question:

If negroes and white people cannot live in accord in the South, they cannot live in accord in the North. Our Western population is being recruited largely by white people from the United States. If we freely admit black people from that country, we shall soon have the race troubles that are the blot on the civilization of our neighbours. Canada cannot be accused of narrowness if she refuses to open up her west to waves of negro immigrants from the United States. The negro question is of the United States' own

⁴⁰ Quoted in Troper, Only Farmers Need Apply, 121-122.

making and Canada should not allow any part of her territory to be used as a relief colony on that account.⁴¹

Canadians were also concerned that certain groups of immigrants did not integrate as easily into Canadian society as had been predicted. Frank Oliver who became the Minister of the Interior from 1905 to 1911, consequently, reorganized the basic framework for settlement. The immigration department moved away from Sifton's 'open-door' policy and selected precisely those groups of immigrants it wanted to settle on the prairies, those it wanted to exclude, and those it wanted to marginalize. At this point, it is needful to remark that when Oliver took over office, he certainly was in a better position than Sifton had been. He could afford to be more restrictive, exclusive, and selective. By 1905 settlers flooded onto the prairies, and immigration reached record levels: 146,266 immigrants came to the North-West in 1905 and 189,064 in 1906.⁴² Oliver's concept of the ideal farmer differed from Sifton's ideal in the fact that he did not focus on the immigrants' ability to farm but on their good "class and character."⁴³ Filling the West with farmers was not the mere question. There was a great deal more to settlement policy than filling up the West with people who would produce wheat. Oliver argued that a policy of selective immigration based on racial and cultural considerations was necessary, and announced in the House of Commons in 1903:

It is a question of the ultimate results of the efforts put forward for the building of a Canadian nationality. This can never be accomplished if the preponderance of the population should be of

⁴¹ Quoted in Troper, Only Farmers Need Apply, 138. Though there existed a black population in Canada it was small and concentrated. The Immigration Branch managed to institute restrictions on Black immigration, yet the number of blacks, who crossed the forty-ninth parallel, rose from 98 to 1,524 in the years from 1901 to 1911.

⁴² Taylor, "Art Nouveau, Immigration Propaganda," 31-32.

⁴³ Frank Oliver, Canada, Debates of the House of Commons, 1903. Quoted in Taylor, "Art Nouveau, Immigration Propaganda," 31.

such a class and character as will deteriorate rather than elevate the conditions of our people and our country at large.⁴⁴

Oliver was a Social Darwinist and ranked people according to their ethnic and racial affiliation. In a social Darwinian manoeuvring, he carefully selected the pieces of the Canadian mosaic.

Advertising the Canadian West was another important task in realizing the concept of a ‘mild’ West. In 1870, Canadians faced a great challenge in selling its ‘mild’ West that was still unknown to the outside world. To attract potential settlers to the promising land, the Dominion government presented the attractions of the Canadian West in several ways, most effectively through advertising the Canadian West was the use of promotional literature starting in the 1870s. This kind of literature was primarily used to reach prospective immigrants overseas. Many of them had no or only a little idea about the Canadian West, and most got their first impression of the region from the information in promotional literature. The attributes of the Canadian West were carefully selected in order to present an image of a ‘mild’ West that was inviting and encouraging. The public was inclined to regard the information it received as ‘factual’ since there was no other information available.

For Canadian expansionists in particular, promotional literature was the best way to convince immigrants that the Canadian West was a much better place to settle than the American one. In this form of literature expansionists described all the advantages, which the ‘mild’ Canadian West had to offer to intending homesteaders if they decided to settle on the Canadian frontier. Expansionists also demonstrated the flaws of the ‘wild’ American West, and the difficulties settlers had to face in case they wanted to take up a

⁴⁴ Frank Oliver, Canada, Debates of the House of Commons, 1903. Quoted in Taylor, “Art

homestead there. This comparison gave them the opportunity to accentuate strongly the benefits of their West. People were needed to develop the country, and this development was crucial to ultimate success of the region. The Canadian poet Dr. Drummond put this idea in two lines: "What use de million acres, what use de belle rivière/ And ting lak dat, if you don't have anybody living dere?"⁴⁵

Thousands of colourful immigration pamphlets, which were mostly distributed across Europe and the United States, promoted the image of a 'mild' West. In 1906, the pamphlet Canada West declared that "it is no Utopian dream to look forward and see these endless plains thickly populated with millions to whom Western Canada has given happy homes, larger opportunities in life, and the assurance of a prosperous future."⁴⁶ During the settlement period from 1870 to 1914, more than 300 different immigration pamphlets were published by the Canadian government, railway and land companies, cities and villages. These pamphlets were often issued in large numbers of 100,000 or 300,000 copies.⁴⁷ In 1896, the Department of Immigration sent out sixty-five thousand pamphlets; by 1900 the number reached a million. But the government's effort was worthwhile. While less than 300,000 settlers populated the near-vacant lands of the West in 1906, population figures rose to one and a half million in 1914. The dream many wrote

Nouveau, Immigration Propaganda," 31.

⁴⁵ Department of the Interior, The Canadian West. Its Present Condition and Future Possibilities (Ottawa: Canadian Government Print, 1905-1911?).

⁴⁶ Department of the Interior, Canada West: The Last and Best West (Ottawa: Government Printing, 1906), 1.

⁴⁷ Bruce Peel, "The Lure of the West," Papers of the Bibliographic Society of Canada, vol. V, 1966, 10-12.

about turned into reality, and within only one generation, the West became a "home for millions."⁴⁸

The campaign to sell the "wondrous" Canadian West began in 1871, when Thomas Spence, the father of Western immigration literature, published his first pamphlet entitled, Manitoba and the Great North-West. Spence, a Scot who immigrated to Canada and who had moved to Red River in 1866, was committed to the development of this region. He shared the beliefs and hopes of expansionists who were convinced that the growth of the nation would depend on the settlement of western lands as had been the case in the United States. Summing up these hopes, he later stated in The Saskatchewan Country (1877) that "the grooves worn smooth by the millions tramping westward will here after change in the direction of Canada's boundless prairie lands."⁴⁹ Spence covered all the attractions of the North-West in his pamphlets. The North-West offered free homes as well as health and prosperity to emigrants of all nations. The prairie lands, for example, were immediately ready for cultivation. As soon as the settler set foot on his selected piece of land he could start farming. These conditions were contrasted to those in the East: "The settler in the East spends . . . ten or fifteen years of the best of his life in toilsome struggles to convert his farm into such proportion of open and wooded land as the settler on our partly wooded prairie lands finds his when he first goes on it."⁵⁰ As for the climate in the North-West, Spence argued that "the healthfulness of the locality" was important to the emigrant since it was going to be "the scene of his future labours, and the home for himself and his family." He continued:

⁴⁸ Nicholas Flood Davin (ed), Homes for Millions: The Great Canadian North-West; Its Resources Fully Described (Ottawa: B. Chamberlain, 1891).

⁴⁹ Thomas Spence, The Saskatchewan Country (Montreal: Gazette Printing House, 1877), 27.

What to him [the immigrant] are fair fields, flowering meadows, buried in the luxuriant growth of fertile soils and tropical suns, if they generate fever producing miasma and vapour?—What are soft and perfumed breezes, if they waft the seeds of pestilence and death?—What are bountiful harvests of golden grain, rich and mellow fruits, and all the wealth the earth can yield, if disease must annually visit his dwelling, and death take away, one by one, the loved and the young? It is well known that some of the fairest portions of the Western States are so fruitful of the causes of disease as almost to preclude settlement. And thousands have left their comparatively healthy Canadian and European homes to find untimely graves in the prairie soil of Indiana, Illinois, Iowa and Missouri.⁵¹

The North-West had much to offer. The prairie soil was extremely fertile and promised an abundant harvest for Canadian farmers. Those who settled on the Canadian side of the border were fortunate to live on fertile and habitable lands. Spence argued in Manitoba and the North-West (1876):

Upon the northern edge of that great Sahara, we have the valleys of the Red River and Saskatchewan, carrying their rich and grassy undulations to the gorges of the Rocky Mountains, forming an isolated belt of verdure across the western half of the British American continent; an isthmus of fertile and habitable lands between the Arctic wastes . . . on the north, and the vast desert on the south.⁵²

Spence was certainly a leading figure on the benefits of the North-West, but many others eagerly joined in the praise.

Many government booklets on the Canadian West followed a standard formula. In an introductory section, the West was described as a promised land in terms of its size, opportunities, and potential for prospective settlers. The pamphlet The Canadian West (1906), for example, compared the size of Canada to the size of Europe:

⁵⁰ Spence, The Prairie Lands of Canada, 26-27.

⁵¹ Thomas Spence, Manitoba and the North-West of the Dominion (Quebec: S. Marcotte, 1876), 25.

Canada has an area of 3,745,000 square miles. It is thirty times larger than Great Britain and Ireland. It is larger than the continent of Europe, with the British Isles combined. It comprises one-third of the territory over which the 'Union Jack,' floats. It would take a train five days and nights running at the rate of over thirty miles an hour, without a stop, to go from Halifax on the east to Vancouver on the west.⁵³

The potential of the land was also documented in facts and numbers. The booklet Canada West (1906) outlined that "the average yield of wheat in the West during fourteen years has been 20 bushels per acre, the highest yearly average being nearly 28 bushels. In individual cases as high as 40 and 45 bushels per acre have been recorded."⁵⁴ Others sections dealt with the topography, climate, soil, crops, how to locate a homestead, advice on how to get started, means of transportation, and cultural as well as social facilities.

Other government booklets contained settler surveys and answers to the questions intended to remove any doubts prospective settlers might have. The booklet What Women Say of the Canadian North-West (1886), for example, contained the findings of women who were questioned about their life situations in the Canadian West. In this enquiry, 155 women were asked if they were contented with their present lot and future prospects. 153 women, interestingly enough, responded with "yes." A further question referred to relations between whites and natives. Expansionists were worried that people might be worried about Indians because of the American experience. But of 189 women asked, all denied any hard experiences with the aboriginal population.⁵⁵ Mrs. M. M.

⁵² Thomas Spence, Manitoba and the North-West, 13.

⁵³ Department of the Interior, The Canadian West, 12.

⁵⁴ Department of the Interior, Canada West, 4.

⁵⁵ What Women Say of the Canadian North-West: a simple statement of the experiences of women settled in all parts of Manitoba and the North-west Territories (London, M. Blacklock, 1886), 45.

Drury "considered them quiet, civil, and inoffensive."⁵⁶ Another question regarded the climate. All women considered it to be very healthy. Mrs. B. Marshall of Ardpatick stated that she liked the climate, and remarked that "some of my children were subject to croup and other diseases peculiar to children but since I came to Manitoba it has entirely left them."⁵⁷ Mathilda Ramsey of Stuartburn, Manitoba summed it up best:

Consider it the healthiest in the world, as there is no form of disease peculiar to this climate. In this respect, I consider it unequalled. Judging from the children I see round me, I think it is, as I have rarely seen a sick child. I would suggest that each family should provide a good supply of warm clothing, as our winters are cold.⁵⁸

This enquiry demonstrated that even women, who were often seen as weak and incapable of surviving in rough situations, could master the challenges of the Canadian West.

In a number of pamphlets much emphasis was put on the large tracts of fertile land that were available for agriculture. The booklet Canada West (1906), for example, stated that "this enormous agricultural country of nearly 3,000,000,000 acres" was destined to "surpass all other grain-growing countries in the production of wheat."⁵⁹ Others also commented on the large number of people who could settle on the land. In the government pamphlet Twentieth Century Canada (1906), settlers could read that "there is room for a hundred million inhabitants, and the resources are so great that no one can say how large the population will be fifty years hence."⁶⁰ The overall impression from the

⁵⁶ What Women Say of the Canadian North-West, 43.

⁵⁷ What Women Say of the Canadian North-West, 17.

⁵⁸ What Women Say of the Canadian North-West, 17.

⁵⁹ Department of the Interior, Canada West, 1.

⁶⁰ Department of the Interior, Twentieth Century Canada An Atlas of Western Canada. For the Guidance of Intending Settlers—Its Resources and Development with Maps of the Dominion of Canada,

pamphlets was that the soil was rich and presented the great advantage of being ready for the plough. The settler who took up a homestead in the West did not face the trouble of clearing stumps and stones. He did not need to waste time preparing the land for cultivation, because “there was no severe labour with the axe or any patient waiting for years in order that tree stumps may rot to facilitate their removal.”⁶¹ The settler, instead, secured “a ready-made farm of the richest kind” at no monetary costs. A farm in western Canada could immediately provide the homesteader with everything he needed as long as he made the effort. William A. MacDougall, first Lt.-Governor of the North-West Territories, pointed out in his handbook on the territories in 1882 that the settler could not expect a ready-made ‘garden of Eden,’ but he could find the ideal conditions for transforming the land into such just by the use of his labour. The settler had to work hard to succeed like anywhere else in the world, but unlike any other parts in the world, cultivating the Canadian West was “a mere child’s play.”⁶²

The climate of the region was a particular concern. It was an issue that could not be neglected in immigration pamphlets because “nothing connected with Canada is so much represented and misunderstood.” The pamphlet, Climate of Canada (1906), announced that the climate “has only to be experienced to be appreciated.”⁶³

Pamphleteers also found a way of explaining the deficiency of rainfall in the West. The successful growing of wheat usually required a fair amount of rain; this was not necessarily the case in the Canadian West. Pamphleteers argued that in a country

Provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, The Maritime Provinces, British Columbia and North Atlantic (Ottawa: Government Printing, 1906).

⁶¹ Dominion of Canada, Pacific Railway and the North-West Territories (S.I., 1886), 20.

⁶² W.B. MacDougall, MacDougall's Illustrated Guide, Gazetteer and Practical Hand Book for Manitoba and the North-West (Winnipeg: W.B. MacDougall, 1882), 7.

where the mean fall of rain was beneath the requirements for agriculture—the average rainfall was much less in the fertile belt than in Eastern Canada—the heavy deposition of dew caused by radiation was highly valuable. The ground would drench with dew overnight, and the spongy earth would take in sufficient moisture to stimulate and maintain its ability to reproduce crops. Charles Mair argued that:

For this reason, the prairie grass, or the well-tilled field, in a season of drought, often exhibits a growth which under the circumstances is really wonderful. On the North Saskatchewan, in the vast meadow of the Wascana and the Moose Jaw, in the Souris and Wood Mountain, and Maple Creek, and Medicine Hat and Macleod districts, the grass, in fact, never fails, nor has there ever been known a season when . . . the Indian pony or buffalo could not find its living there, and turn up in good condition in the spring.⁶⁴

The decline of temperature at night during the North-Western summer was also an advantage. In the East, where the summer nights were warmer, the wheat undoubtedly matured faster, but “what it gained in this way it lost in quality.”⁶⁵ The hard wheat of Manitoba and the Territories gained its inestimable value by a process of slow maturation; “this process can attain perfection solely in a climate which alternately stimulates it by day and represses it by night.”⁶⁶ The pamphlet Twentieth Century Canada (1906) even stated the advantages for stock farmers:

The coolness of the prairie night after the hot summer day causes heavy dew. This, to a certain extent, protects the grain from the effects of drought, even in the driest seasons. They also produce a rich growth of prairie grass, making the climate peculiarly favourable on this last account for the stock farmer.⁶⁷

⁶³ Department of the Interior, Climate of Canada (Ottawa: Government Printing, 1906).

⁶⁴ Charles Mair, “General Description of the North-West,” in Davin, Homes for Millions, 12.

⁶⁵ Mair, “General Description of the North-West,” 14.

⁶⁶ Mair, “General Description of the North-West,” 12.

The southern prairie lands in the Canadian West were also continuously contrasted to the ‘Great American Desert.’ The southern region was regarded as an extension of this phenomenon where nothing but drought and dust were “in store for those foolish enough to settle on prairie lands.”⁶⁸ The existence of these desert lands in the United States was not denied, but Canadian pamphleteers emphasized that the ‘Great American Desert’ had not crossed the border. Mair, for example, admitted to the existence of desert land but stressed that:

A certain extent of the great plains is of much the same arid and desolate character as the great American desert to the south ... They are a projection of that frightful barren waste rounding into our territory like a huge hump, yet, they are by no means worthless. The utterly ruinous denudation seems to end close to the boundary line, when the desert graduates into the arenaceous clays of the cretaceous system, and assumes as it sweeps northward a loamy surface, and richer vegetable clothing.⁶⁹

The true West was disguised in many ways. Negative features of the West were dismissed, minimised or changed; the climate was often described in terms of its positive effects on farming and on the human character. The West had always been associated with images of frost, coldness and snow. To push settlement, these images had to be changed. Daily publications of temperature and weather conditions of the territory were banned. In their publications, pamphleteers eliminated negative words like “snow” and “cold” and used instead positive terms such as “bracing” and “invigorating.” The coldness of the West was redefined. In Climate of Canada (1906), the government reported on the merits of snow and coldness:

⁶⁷ Department of the Interior, Twentieth Century Canada, 3.

⁶⁸ Tyman, “By Faith, Hope and Charity,” 30.

Everywhere the appearance of snow is hailed as seasonable and beneficial, sleighing parties of pleasure are arranged for the period of full moon, and the sound of the sleigh bells is a merry one. The snow protects the autumn-sown wheat from the frost, aids the lumberman in drawing his timber from the forest, and also the farmer in hauling his produce to market, and so contributes alike to business and pleasure.

The absence of warmth was also believed to be healthier for mankind. The climate in Western Canada made man stronger and more resistant to diseases. In 1893, the Marquis de Bouthillier-Chavigny remarked in his booklet Our Land of Promise:

It was a sensation a physical and more well-being which I cannot describe. It seems as if a weight was lifted off the shoulders and my spirits are correspondingly elevated. And this is just the beneficent effect which the cold of Manitoba exercises on the organism. It is dry, tingling, and seems to infuse into the blood a fluid that increases its vigour tenfold. The cold in the Eastern Provinces tends to stupefy, and, being saturated with humidity, provokes rheumatism. That of Manitoba, on the other hand, cures that malady.⁷⁰

Many settlers believed in the healthiness of the western climate, and their beliefs became the testimonies for pamphleteers; it made them good propagandists. Septimus Field, for example, announced in Timely Remarks and Letters from Western Canada Settlers (1898):

The country is one of the healthiest that can possibly be, far healthier than England in any part of it. Far be it from me that I should utter one word to draw any man from his home to come out here to meet with disappointment, but I know that the country is all that one can desire, ..., I can truthfully say that this is the country to come to, where true freedom reigns and every help is given to those who will try to help themselves.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Mair, "General Description of the North-West," 15.

⁷⁰ Marquis de Charles Marie Claude Bouthillier-Chavigny, Our Lands of Promise : A Run Through the Canadian North-West (Montreal: The Gazette Printing Company, 1893), 21.

⁷¹ Septimus Field, Timely Remarks and Letters from Western Canada Settlers (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1898), 18.

A similar statement was given by an American farmer. McLaughlin had moved from Michigan to the Canadian West and observed in the government pamphlet Prosperity Follows Settlement in Western Canada (1905): "I would like to go back to Michigan for a visit some time, but I have no desire to go back there to live on the best farm I could pick out, for I think the climate here is far ahead of Michigan and much healthier. If it is cold here sometimes we do not feel it as we did there."⁷²

As time passed by, settler testimonies became the most valuable accounts on the Canadian West. The letters home often exaggerated the "wonder of the new world." The embellished stories of good fortune and happiness succeeded in encouraging others to come. They were first-hand accounts proving that agricultural settlement was possible. A man did not need much capital to become a successful farmer, but what he needed instead was the will and ability he was endowed with. H. Dorrell, an Englishman who took up a homestead in 1883, told his story of success in the government booklet, Farms and Farmers in Western Canada:

I may state, that coming from Worcestershire, England, I settled on my homestead in April, 1883. I began in a small way with the typical yoke of oxen which, with a few other necessaries, exhausted my limited capital. I met with indifferent success till I commenced summer-following and thorough cultivation in 1887. From then till now, on followed land I have averaged over 29 bushels of wheat per acre. Since 1902 I have been selling land as opportunity offered. In that year I had 1,440 acres of land and 500 in crop yielding nearly 20,000 bushels of grain. I am now retiring to a 320 larger than that of the average professional man. I only bought to cultivate and what I have is the natural outcome of labour and sticking to it.⁷³

⁷² Department of the Interior, Prosperity Follows Settlement in Western Canada (Ottawa: Canadian Government Print, 1905), 11.

⁷³ Department of the Interior, Farms and Farmers in Western Canada (Ottawa: Canadian Government Print, 1896-1905?), 22.

This story of success was an example for all others.

The Canadian West with its richness of soil, healthy climate, fertility, beauty and its social structures convinced many homesteaders to adopt the West as their new home country. Crop failure, as the Saskatoon Board of Trade proclaimed in a promotion in 1908, was entirely unknown, and if it happened it was entirely the farmer's fault:

It is not surprising that our farmers succeed so well: The crop never fails. Why, then, should the farmer? We have men here who have cropped the same land for as many as 24 consecutive years, threshing each time a full, fine harvest. If a farmer here suffers crop failure, it is safe to say that the fault lies solely with himself. Crop failure can only result from laziness, carelessness or indifference to the correct and very simple methods of soil cultivation.

The West was blossoming; there was no destructive element that could ruin this idyll. Poverty was non-existent; it was practically eliminated. Pamphlets repeatedly announced that the West was not the place where the seeds of poverty could take up roots, because the region was "a land of independence and plenty."⁷⁴ It was impossible to be poor in a paradise like the Canadian West.

Another significant feature of the Canadian West was order. The Mounted Police was highly praised for keeping order throughout the West. But the mere presence of the police force was not the only factor that kept peace and order. The Mounted Police had little difficulty in maintaining the law because the settlers themselves were law-abiding:

The law is obeyed cheerfully and voluntarily, not grudgingly and reluctantly. The eastern man is dominant through he calls himself a westerner after three months' residence. It is he who has been in the van of development out here. Now and then, prominent in western political life or business one finds an Englishman, Scotchman or Irishman, who come west without becoming first Canadianized in Ontario, and more rarely an American or non-English-speaking newcomer assumes a leading position.

⁷⁴ Department of the Interior, The Canadian West, 40.

Doubtless the proportion will be larger immediately. But the eastern man is yet the dominant and controlling factor in politics, legislation, the pulpit, education, journalism and commerce. It is on his shoulders that has fallen the burden of the making of the West, and he may reflect with pride on the splendid results visible today.⁷⁵

To the question whether it was well to carry a revolver, a pamphleteer responded that "it is against the law to do so without a special license, and it is most unusual and altogether unnecessary to do so under ordinary circumstances."⁷⁶ After all, in the American West, settlers were allowed to possess firearms and were often involved violence. The Canadian settlers, on the other hand, led a peaceful life:

He wears a broad-brimmed felt hat, a coloured flannel shirt, a belt of the same material and roomy trousers, stuffed into boots that reach to the knees. And it is only just to add that the man whom we meet on the prairies in this picturesque garb is ever courteous; eager to serve you ... In his belt you do not see those murderous pistols which in illustrations distinguish the Yankee ranchman or cowboy of the Wild West. Nor is this absence of the pistol so commonplace a matter as certain readers might be inclined to consider it. It is the complete security in which the Western Canada farmer passes his life, which peculiarly characterises the country.⁷⁷

The Immigration Branch of the Dominion was not the only agency that was responsible for advertising the North-West. The Canadian Pacific Railway also put a considerable effort into selling Western Canada. In 1885, the railway was completed, and the company faced the challenge of paying for it. It intended to finance the railway by selling the land it had received from the government for building the railway. It established an immigration department and began a campaign to attract settlers and

⁷⁵ Department of the Interior, The Canadian West, 42.

⁷⁶ Department of the Interior, The Last Best West. Canada in the 20th Century. Western Canada: Vast Agricultural Resources. Homes for Millions (Ottawa: Canadian Government Print, 1907), 27.

⁷⁷ Bouthillier-Chavigny, Our Land of Promise, 44.

travellers to Western Canada. Railway pamphlets showed more imagination and reader appeal than the pamphlets published by the Canadian government. Canadian Pacific Railway promoters made the Canadian West an attractive tourist destination and presented colourful images of the West, particularly of the Rocky Mountains. It created the idea of the West as "a scenic theme park, promising tourists the chance to see mighty rivers, vast forests, boundless plains, stupendous mountains and wonders innumerable."⁷⁸ The West was the 'utopia,' for which men had long searched for. In 1892, Nicholas Flood Davin, editor of the Regina Leader, the first newspaper in Assiniboia, and pamphleteer for the Canadian Pacific Railway company, described in his pamphlet, Homes for Millions, the charms of the Canadian West. He began his pamphlet by outlining his objective:

It is not only to reach the intending settler, particularly the farmer, but to convey to him the truth, not clothed in exaggeration, but as plainly put as experienced agriculturists can who are now living and working in the Territories, and who have no thought save to make the country known, and to attract to it men to assist in its development.⁷⁹

Davin also claimed that the North-West had nothing to offer to those who merely sought to find adventure. To pioneer the vast prairie country "active and intelligent men" were demanded and "not adventurers who come simply to 'fly kites,' or to build big doors without any houses behind them." He continued:

There is no room . . . for physical inertia, or for minds barren of all definite or intelligent purpose . . . the richest prairie farm if possessed by a thriftless sluggard who preferred knitting and knotting and basking in the sun, to honest work, would infallibly see him sink year by year into the bowels of debts and poverty. This is not what is wanted immediately in the North-West, but

⁷⁸ Quoted in Daniel Francis, National Dreams, 26.

⁷⁹ Davin, Homes for Millions, 17.

intelligent, industrious and patriotic settlers, no matter whence they come so long as they are true to Canada.⁸⁰

Davin believed that “the tide of human life will flow over the great West.”⁸¹ He declared:

Inert people, without enthusiasm, and with a poor, barren imagination sometimes express surprise that highly-educated men and women who have seen all the Old World has to show should be able, as they say, “to bury themselves in the wilderness” and to “live away from civilization.” They little know the beauties of the “wilderness” and we have seen “civilization” enter the North West side by side with the settler. Nor are people whose ambition is satisfied by attending balls and 5 o’clock teas capable of realizing the serious noble pleasure of aiding in the building of a new country, affecting the course, of the world around, and affecting something for your fellow men. All the charms that belong to youth, hope, energy, are found in the North West, and the bracing influence of the new free land on mind and character is remarkable. The Ontario farmer is a fine specimen of the yeoman, but three years in the North West raises him higher on the scale of manhood—while a commensurate improvement is noted in all classes and races from Europe who have come amongst us, having the essential qualities of capacity for work, perseverance, sobriety and intelligence.⁸²

Another form of advertising Western Canada was the use of photographic lantern slides which offered the seductive images of the West. During the nineteenth century, the “magic lantern show”—a series of hand-coloured glass slides—was a popular form of entertainment. The Department of Agriculture used slide shows as a method of promoting Canadian products abroad, and later as a method of promoting immigration and settlement. Professional photographers, such as Horatio Nelson Topley, John Woodruff and R. Sarallows, were hired by the government for special photographic tours across Western Canada. They were instructed to capture only specific types of images of the West: farming in Canada, historic sites, national parks, and Canadian beauty spots. Slides

⁸⁰ Davin, Homes for Millions, 20

⁸¹ Davin, Homes for Millions, 77.

portraying a negative image were removed; especially those that showed Natives, icy landscapes, and snow slides. At the turn of the century, lantern slide lectures became very popular. Lectures mostly ran from October to March after the harvest period and attracted large crowds of people approximately between 800 to 1200 people. By this way, people learned about the Canadian West and the benefits of a life on the prairies. The presentations helped to lure settlers to the promise land.⁸³

But what is debatable at this point is whether the idealized mythical West had any basis in reality. The image of the Canadian West as an orderly and peaceful place was certainly an incentive for western settlement, and propagandists were extremely successful in luring immigrants to the West. But what actually emerged was something much more clearly moulded by the frontier environment and much less controlled, orderly, and law-abiding than has traditionally been suggested. The imaginary Canadian West was far from the reality homesteaders actually faced, but the idea of a better and new life on the prairies was so overwhelming that settlers hardly questioned the truth. After all, the portrayal of the ideal Canadian West could not be a lie if everyone believed in it. Dream and reality were bound together. In the long run, though, those people who believed in the greatness of the ‘mild’ Canadian West did not end up with what they had wanted. Disillusionment and dissatisfaction were unavoidable components of the settlement process.

In 1894, Adam Shortt, a professor of political economy at Queen’s University in Kingston, pointed out that the distorted image of the West needed to be balanced in the

⁸² Davin, Homes for Millions, 108.

⁸³ Ellen Scheinberg, Melissa K. Rombout, “Projecting Images of the Nation: The Immigration Program and its Use of Lantern Slides,” no. 111, 1996, 13-17.

propaganda campaign by presenting a realistic image. In his article on the West for the Queen's Quarterly, he observed that:

Still, in the midst of these unpromising circumstances one may find people of charming manners and most enjoyable conversation. One cannot but feel that it was a shame to have lured such people out into the wilderness to make shipwreck of their lives. But failures of many kinds are too common there to attract much attention or excite much pity. If, however, they begin to give vent to their hardships in print and to accuse the Government or the Railroad of deception, they are styled "chronic kickers," and attempts are made to smother them out. They are abused as thriftless and incapable; and most of them certainly are when set out on the prairie. Why, then, encourage such people to come to the country by giving such an exaggerated and misleading account of it as to cause them to suppose that it is very easy to make a living and even to grow rich there?⁸⁴

But a realistic image, as Shortt demanded, was unthinkable because it would not serve the purpose of expansionists.

As settlers arrived on the prairies facing the reality of prairie homesteading, they had to realise that the conditions on the western frontier did not match the image in the pamphlets. The promises made could not be kept. The Canadian West was anything but the promised "land of milk and honey"⁸⁵ Settlers now faced bitter disillusionment. The reality of the West was harsh. Yet, many homesteaders tried to adapt to the reality of their new environment. In the 1920s, the Grain Growers' Association, a cooperative organization that was part of the agricultural protest movement, published a series of articles on homesteading experiences in the Grain Growers' Guide. A more realistic image of the West emerged from the individual accounts of homesteaders. One viewed his western experiences rather soberly and cynically:

⁸⁴ Adam Shortt, "Some Observations on the Great North-West. Part I: Immigration and Transportation," Queen's Quarterly, no. 2, January 1895, 189.

I was born in Yorkshire England . . . Whilst away from home I met the man who now is my husband, [and who] often like myself read the literature which was distributed wholesale especially in rural parts of England describing the beauties of Canada, showing pictures of cattle knee deep in prairie grass, miles of golden grain all just waiting for some one to come to take possession. . . . We arrived at Estevan, Saskatchewan about the first week of April 1907, any one who remembers that winter and spring will surely feel sorry for the immigrant who left their own country of green hedges, green fields, primroses, snow drops out and found here huge banks of snow the likes of which we had never seen before, and zero weather, people muffled up to the eyes in furs. Certainly pamphlets we read on Canada did not describe that side of the country to us.⁸⁶

The difficulties of the West had been played down or completely ignored by propagandists in order to promote settlement. And when settlers failed, propagandists who had led them to believe in the image of the ‘mild’ West refused to take any responsibility but held the settlers responsible. Settlers did not realize the potential of their possibilities; they did not work and struggle hard enough. The stories of failure were often disregarded, especially since they took place in a land that promised so much.⁸⁷

A different way of adjusting was protest. Western agrarian protest grew rapidly and was mainly supported by farmer organizations. Farmers started to blame propagandists and the government for their miserable situation. They felt betrayed, and “turned their back on the older perception of Canada and began to look for their identity in the land around them.”⁸⁸ The western protest movement was an attempt by western farmers to free themselves from Eastern exploitation. They believed that the region’s true potential would never be realized if it remained a colony of the East. The reverie of a

⁸⁵ Francis, Images of the West, 156.

⁸⁶ Quoted in Francis, Images of the West, 158-159.

⁸⁷ Francis, Images of the West, 161.

'mild' West consequently became a permanent protagonist in the interplay of reality and imagination. Willie Nelson's quotation was confirmed. The 'mild' Canadian West was a dream that continued to exist; it became a "place of imagination."⁸⁹

Promoting the image of a 'mild' West, Canadians used the image of the 'wild' American West. The world-wide reputation of the American West in the mid-nineteenth century contradicted the Canadian idea of law and order, which allowed westerners to argue that their West was 'mild'—whether it was true or not. Canadians used the American situation to portray the Canadian West in positive terms. They deliberately filled their pamphlets with negative aspects and examples of the Wild West to accentuate the Canadian West as a better place in which to live. The concept of the 'mild' West was created by expansionists as a direct challenge to the 'wild' West. Ironically, though, the mildness of the Canadian West helped to create the image of the 'wild' American West. Both Wests cannot be understood and appreciated in isolation; rather, the two define one another.

⁸⁸ Owram, Promise of Eden, 191.

⁸⁹ Owram, Promise of Eden, 168-191.

Chapter Three

The Wild American West: A Paradise Postponed

Here or nowhere is the West'—no matter where on the physical globe that 'here' may be, for it exists really in our heads, in the altered consciousness not just of New Men in a New World, but of all men anywhere once that New World has been opened up to the imagination.¹

When Canada turned to the task of settling Western Canada, the federal government wanted to avoid the violence and lawlessness that characterized the American West. Ottawa intended to establish a peaceful and orderly frontier and portrayed the western interior as a 'mild' West in comparison to the 'wild' American West. From a Canadian perspective the American West represented all that was bad and destructive for the kind of society it wanted. To propagate the image of the 'mild' West, Canadians played upon the image of the American Wild West. In promotional literature, Canada often exaggerated or sensationalized the image in order to attract settlers to the Canadian West. The so-called lawlessness and wilderness of the American West was used to contrast the peacefulness of the Canadian West. This dialectic of 'wild' and 'mild' helped to promote Western Canada.

The 'mild' Canadian West was often defined through its opposite. In the case of the Canadian West, it was the Wild American West. Canadians rejected all those features that characterized the Wild West, and in their endeavour to portray the mild Canadian West, Canadians were willing to bend what they saw to fit what they wanted. They defined the Canadian frontier through all that it was not allowed to be: not wild, rugged and lawless, but tame, law-abiding and peaceful. The American West as Canadians

¹ Leslie Fiedler, "Canada and the Invention of the Western: A Meditation of the Other Side of the Border," in Dick Harrison (ed), Crossing Frontiers. Papers in American and Canadian Western Literature (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1979), 91.

viewed it was incompatible with the Canadian dream—the desire to conquer the terrain, to tame the climate, to shrink the distances, to people the plains, to exploit resources and to establish a civilised world. Canadians dreamed of a West that was modelled on the British way of life. British civilization, with all its positive features, strongly influenced Canadian thinking and was projected on the Canadian West. In order to fulfill their dream Canadians used the image of the ‘wild’ American West as a contrary example. The American West was a bad place, which settlers ought to reject, the Canadian West was a good place, which they needed to strive for.

It is critically important to look closely at the general idea of the American West as a wild place, and its origins, in order to determine to what extent Canadians used this image to contrast their peaceful frontier. In 1870, when the Canadian government acquired the western interior, it was believed that the two Wests shared some of the same features. Both Wests were situated on the same continent, had the same degree of longitude, and both were divided from each other by the forty-ninth parallel. Before the settlement period began, both Wests started out as a wilderness sparsely populated by white settlers. So the western region of Canada seemed to hold the same basic conditions for settlement. Canadians consequently needed to prevent people from starting to believe that the Wild West would likewise come into existence on the Canadian side. This task was particularly difficult to perform since the reputation of the Wild West was deeply anchored in the people's mind. Believing that things are possibly best described through their opposites, Canadians reported everything negative that could be associated with the Wild West. They wrote about shoot-ups, thievery, and violent confrontations. They even listed death statistics, always contrasting them to the peacefulness of their Canadian

West. As a consequence, settlers received an impression of what to expect in the American West, and in the Canadian counterpart. In Our Land of Promise (1893), the Marquis de Charles Marie Claude Bouthillier-Chavigny, for example, glorified the Canadian West and compared it to the American West:

From the shores of Lake Superior to the shores of the Pacific; from the United States frontier to the Arctic Ocean, the traveller may pursue his way without the least fear through the boundless prairie or the vast solitude of the far North. No matter where one encamps the steep is never troubled by the howling of coyotes or the hooting of the birds of darkness. The Canadian North-West is as vast as the United States. While the latter is every day the stage of darkest tragedies, the former is, on the other hand, inhabited by a peaceful population in the midst of which desperadoes would cut out a poor figure. Only an imaginary line separates one country from the other, and yet how marked is the difference of moral standard and practice!²

The image of the malicious and disorderly American West turned into a historical cliché and was used by those who sought to profit from it.

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the American West had the poor reputation as the Wild West. Violence was constantly associated with the American frontier. It was the "home of 'wild' and 'woolly' turbulence."³ Typical images of the American West included the gunfight, the drunken fist-fight, chase on horseback, lynch laws, thievery, prostitution, and the whiskey trade. These images were overpowering and became inseparably connected to the Wild West. In one of his best-known novels, Hondo (1953), Louis L'Amour emphasized that random violence was an integral part of the American West:

² Marquis de Charles Marie Claude Bouthillier-Chavigny, Our Land of Promise: a run through the Canadian North-West (Montreal: The Gazette Printing Company, 1893), 44-45.

³ Graham Adams jr., "Frontier Violence and the American Mind," The Canadian Review of American Studies, vol. VII, no 1, Spring 1976, 105.

Somewhere along the tangled train of his thoughts he dropped off and slept, and while he slept the rain roared on, tracks were washed out, and the bodies of the silent men of Company C lay wide-eyed to the rain and bare-chested to the wind, but the blood and the dust washed away, and the stark features of Lieutenant Creyton C. Davis, graduate of West Point, veteran of the Civil War and the Indian wars, darling of Richmond dance floors, hero of Washington romance, dead now in the long grass on a lonely hill, west of everything.⁴

According to L'Amour, to go west, as far west as you can go, "west of everything," was to die. Death was everywhere.⁵ The power of the frontier environment was strong, and Americans showed no respect for the law. They behaved in undisciplined and intemperate ways showing no regard for authority whatsoever. Law in the American West appeared to be a luxury. Here major, even minor, disputes were resolved violently. The American style, as Pierre Berton, a popular historian, once declared, was "to stand aside and let the civilians work out matters for themselves even at the risk of inefficiency, chaos and bloodshed."⁶ In the Wild West, one had to do one's best to survive.⁷

The source of this image of the American West as the Wild West lay in the nation's way of thinking. Americans believed they were destined to conquer and colonize the New World, regardless whether the use of violence was necessary or not. In 1845, J. L. O'Sullivan, editor of The United States Magazine, and Democratic Review, justified this trait by arguing that it was the nation's "manifest destiny to overspread the continent

⁴ Louis L'Amour, Hondo (New York: Bantam Books, 1953), 59.

⁵ Jane Tompkins, West of Everything. The Inner Life of Western (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 24-26.

⁶ Pierre Berton, Klondike (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973), xviii.

⁷ John W. Bennett, Seena B. Kohl, Settling the Canadian-American West, 1890-1915: Pioneer Adaptation and Community Building (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 9.

allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.⁸ The European invasion of North America created a frontier between natives and white newcomers. This frontier became the site of violent confrontations as settlers sought to conquer the territory, and natives struggled to defend their homelands. The Wild American West was the result of what happened when cultures clashed.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the American West formed the counterpart to the East and the Old World. The cultural, legal, and political influences of the Old World were weak. The frontier, and the seemingly unlimited possibilities it offered, stimulated the human imagination. American historian Richard Slotkin argued in The Fatal Environment (1985) that the frontier "was less defined by maps and surveys than by myths and illusions, projective fantasies, wild anticipation, extravagant expectations."⁹ Men rejected civilization, and moving westward, they sought a free and unconstrained life on the frontier. As a margin to something new, unknown, and perilous, the American frontier constituted "a spatial, a fluid concept...an environment, a condition of life."¹⁰ Escaping from the social bonds of civilization, or the Old World, and turning towards the freedom of wilderness was the frontier experience. The frontier strongly influenced the individual who wandered west. Here, the trapper, the hunter, the scout, the cowboy, and the outcast, who took the law into their own hands, were the protagonists of the Wild American West. Their actions and ideas became the new norms of western life. Those who decided to leave their civilized life behind were confronted with the new

⁸ J. L. O'Sullivan, "Annexation," The United States Magazine, and Democratic Review 17, 1845, 5.

⁹ Richard Slotkin, The Fatal Environment. The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1891 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 11.

¹⁰ Gerhard Hoffmann, Raum, Situation, erzaehlte Wirklichkeit:poetologische und historische Studien zum englischen und amerikanischen Roman (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1978), 642.

environment of the Wild West. The law of the strongest was decisive and was enforced mercilessly. The new theme of American experience and identity was, in Alexis de Tocqueville's words, "man himself, taken aloof from his country and his age and standing in the presence of Nature and God ..." ¹¹

The image, however, symbolized the kind of West Canadians did not want. A replica of the Wild West—this unstable, disorderly and crude place—was unthinkable and intolerable. Canada wanted to avoid the negative characteristics of this region. The Dominion government believed that settlers would be more attracted to civilization than wilderness. Canadian officials reasoned that settlers would rather prefer to farm on those lands where peace and order were assured, and where they could raise their children in a civilized manner. This was not the state of the American West; instead of peace and order, violence was a part of everyday life. But Canadians were convinced that the transition from wilderness to civilization had to be made without bloodshed and tragedy. They therefore distanced themselves from their more aggressive southern neighbour and kept to the boundary that separated them. The Globe, one of Canada's major newspapers, announced that Canadians "are divided only by an imaginary boundary...from a people who have now proved themselves aggressive—a people who believe in Manifest Destiny, universal sovereignty, and other ideas not very reassuring to their [Canada] neighbours." What developed in Western Canada was a culture transplanted from Britain and the East, which did not adapt to the crude and unsophisticated conditions on the frontier. Many settlers carried the basic British character with them. This attribute overcame the pervasive influence of the frontier environment and assigned to the frontier a secondary role in shaping the new society. "The Canadian people," as Rev. Aeneas

¹¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, vol. 1 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1853), 148.

throats and train-robbers who could never gain right of citizenship in Canada.”¹⁴

Montague Davenport, a British man who travelled to the American West in 1875, said, “the spirit of lawlessness increases as we go west. I think the American eagle should be portrayed with a six shooter in his claw: he is incomplete without it.”¹⁵

Canadians often drew attention to the lawlessness and violence that characterized the American West. On the American frontier, everyone, including women, seemed to carry and use guns, particularly six-shooters. Americans were drawn to the six-gun culture, and were more likely to resort to firearms whenever the situation demanded it; shoot-ups were not uncommon. Stories were often told of American cowboys coming north and causing trouble in Canadian bars. On February 16th, 1886, a reporter complained in the Macleod Gazette that “blazing away with a pistol, whenever a man gets drunk, whether it be in the hands of a policeman or a citizen is getting monotonous.” To portray the utter lawlessness of the American West, William Pearce included in his reminiscences a letter written by a resident of Whoop-Up country to a friend in Fort Benton in the fall of 1873:

Dear friend:

My partner Will Geary got to putting on airs and I shot him and he is dead—the potatoes are looking well.

Yours truly,
Skookum Jim¹⁶

¹³ G. F. G. Stanley, “Western Canada and the Frontier Thesis,” Canadian Historical Association, 1940, 111.

¹⁴ Bouthillier-Chavigny, Our Land of Promise, 45.

¹⁵ Montague M. Davenport, Under the Gridiron, A Summer in the United States and the Far West, Including a Run Through Canada (London: Tinsley, 1876), 53.

¹⁶ Quoted in Paul F. Sharp, Whoop-Up Country. The Canadian-American West, 1865-1885 . (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), 45.

Throughout the American West, law enforcement did not exist; murder and theft were common occurrences. Local newspapers constantly reported thefts, deadly shoot-outs, and cold-blooded murders. On October 14th, 1882, the Fort MacLeod Gazette reported an incident where a man refused to assist some cowboys put out a prairie fire. After they had put out the fire, the cowboys “took him and hung him.” Cowboys were considered the most ruthless and feared species on the American frontier. Owing to the exigencies of a nomadic life in a wild country, they were invariably armed and most of them, as an elderly pioneer remembered, had only one aim: “that was to buy as much ammunition as they could, become as quick on the draw as possible, and become deadly accurate shots.”¹⁷ Canadians viewed the American cowboy with scorn. The Commissioner of the North West Mounted Police reported to John A. Macdonald in 1885: “It is well to bear in mind that the American ‘cowboy’ or horse thief is a desperado of the worst description, who holds the life of a man as cheaply as that of an animal, being always well mounted and armed.”¹⁸

The existence of law and order in the Canadian West, and its non-existence in the American West, was an important issue in Canada’s promotional literature. In “General Description of the North-West” (1891), Charles Mair, for example, dedicated an entire section to law and order on the frontier. His pamphlet also contained a speech at the celebration of the opening of the Regina and Prince Albert Railway, in which Mr. Justice

¹⁷ “Veteran Mountie Tells of Adventures in West,” Albertan, April 23rd, 1942. Quoted in Warren M. Elofson, Cowboys, Gentlemen & Cattle Thieves. Ranching on the Western Frontier (Montreal, London, Ithaca: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), 112.

¹⁸ Canada, Sessional Papers, no. 153, 1885 (Ottawa, 1886), “Report of Commissioner of North West Mounted Police to J. A. Macdonald,” 15. Quoted in Sharp, Whoop-Up Country, 237.

Maguire compared both Wests and emphatically testified to the morality of the country north of the forty-ninth parallel:

In new countries in border settlements, where the judicial machinery is sometimes slow in getting into proper working order, the hope of immunity from punishment is an incentive to evil men to commit crime. The border States of the Republic to the south of us, in their early days, at any rate, bore an unenviable reputation in this respect. Frequent failures of justice, and the want of confidence in the administration of the law thereby created, tempted men to take the punishment of crime into their own hands. Lynch law, however, is a thing unheard of in our Canadian West, and intending settlers, from whatever land they may come, may rely on finding here a community as order-loving, as law-abiding and as honest as in any portion of the civilised world; where the weak as well as the strong may freely enjoy to the full the inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness by honest toil.¹⁹

The security enjoyed by the settlers in the Canadian North-West was also due to another cause. For more than fifty years the exodus from Europe was directed to the United States before it was Canada's turn to open the doors to new settlers. This delay was viewed as the salvation of the Dominion. Unlike the situation in the American West, the settler coming to the Canadian West found himself among people who realised the necessity and advantage of maintaining law and order. In the pamphlet The Last Best West (1907), Canadian pamphleteers argued that "the laws are cast on reasonable lines, in its maintenance, owing to the law-abiding character of the population and to the fact that

¹⁹ Charles Mair, "General Description of the North-West," in Nicholas Flood Davin (ed), Homes for Millions: The Great Canadian North-West: Its Resources Fully Described (Ottawa: B. Chamberlain, 1891), 19. In his speech Justice Maguire referred to the statistics of crime published annually by the Minister of Agriculture. These figures given for the last ten years and issued in the Blue books demonstrate that the number of offences was much less in the Territories than in any other Province of the Dominion. The proportion of convictions to population was, for all Canada, 1 for each 142, while for the Territories it was only 1 for every 1,738. Compared to the United States, the numbers were much higher considering the fact that records were given for each city instead of the entire region. The city of Chicago, for example, showed a record of 176 murders with only 2 convictions during the years 1875-1881. Sharp, Whoop-Up Country, 108.

no favouritism of any kind is permitted or indulged in.”²⁰ Similarly, the Edmonton Board of Trade stated in 1890 “throughout the length and breadth of these Territories the law is as rigidly enforced, the individual man is protected in his person ... There is no lawless class, there is none of the defiance of law and destruction of order that is popularly supposed to be an outgrowth of pioneer life.”²¹ In order to emphasise this superiority, the board mentioned the situation in the American West:

Bad neighbours, bad laws, bad government ... cannot be made up to the law-abiding, industrious, thrifty progressive man ... It is generally the draw back of new countries that the laws are weakly enforced, that there is a numerous lawless class and that the man who goes into the wilderness to make a home for himself must be content to see his children grow up in ignorance and without the restraining influences of religion which would be felt in older and more densely peopled districts.²²

An issue related to the subject of lawlessness was the possession of firearms in the West. In a list of questions on the conditions of the Canadian frontier, the most frequent one asked by prospective settlers was whether it was necessary to carry a revolver. Canadian government officials strongly denied the need: “It is against the law to do so without a special license, and it is most unusual and altogether unnecessary to do so under ordinary circumstances.”²³ Another related issue was the presence of the Aboriginal peoples. The impression existed that the North-West was overrun with wild savages. But in Facts and Figures, the Highest Testimony (1886), R. L. Richardson

²⁰ Department of Interior, The Last Best West, Canada in the 20th Century. Western Canada's Vast Agricultural Resources. Homes for Millions (Ottawa: Canadian Government Print, 1907), 4.

²¹ Edmonton Board of Trade, The Edmonton District of Northern Alberta. Western Territories of Canada (Edmonton: Bulletin Office, 1890), 9-10.

²² Edmonton Board of Trade, The Edmonton District of Northern Alberta, 9-10.

²³ Department of Interior, The Canadian West. Its Present Condition and Future Possibilities (Ottawa: Canadian Government Print, 1905-1911?), 27.

reported: "this, of course, is entirely erroneous."²⁴ Here again, the way Americans coped with their native population served as a guide and warning. The American policy of extermination was inappropriate; Canadians distanced themselves again. A.G. Irvine, for example, referring to Indian-white relations in Canada, argued, "the experience of our neighbours to the south of the international boundary cannot be without its lesson to us. The American settlers, unaccustomed to the Indian manner and habits, do not...exhibit the tact and patience necessary to successfully deal with Indians."²⁵ The American experience had been both violent and disreputable. Only law and order established by the Canadian government—with the help of its organized and incorruptible force—could avoid a repetition of the disaster that occurred south of the boundary.²⁶ As one Canadian official argued, "the experience of the United States shows that it is of great importance that the confidence of the Indians in the good faith of the government should not be shaken and that Indian affairs should be honestly administered."²⁷ It seemed a lesson Canadian officials acquired immediately: "from the very beginning the policy of the police [the North West Mounted Police], and of the Dominion government behind them, has been to keep absolute faith with the Indians, to fulfil to the letter every treaty obligation."²⁸ Americans, on the other hand, faced a different situation. "Where good relations with Indian tribes allowed Canadians to rest peacefully, their brethren across the

²⁴ R. L. Richardson, Facts and Figures, the Highest Testimony. What Lords Dufferin, Lorne, and Lansdowne, say about the Canadian North-West (Ottawa: s.n., 1886), 26.

²⁵ Canada, Sessional Papers, no. 3, Pt II, 1881, 6. Quoted in Sharp, Whoop-Up Country, 105.

²⁶ Doug Owram, Promise of Eden. The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900 (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 130-132.

²⁷ Canada, Sessional Papers, no. 10, 1878 (Ottawa, 1879), Special Appendix E, xiii. Quoted in Sharp, Whoop-Up Country, 95.

border sleep with their rifles at their sides, prepared at any moment to hear the fearful war-whoops of the Indian.”²⁹

Most of the credit for the peaceful Indian situation in Western Canada was attributed to the policies of the Canadian government:

Religion has raised its voice of pity on behalf of the Indians, and succeeded in calming their minds, and, on the other, in promoting, with the aid of the government, their well-being and education. The first step taken by the government to raise the moral status of the Indians was to place them under the control of special agents charged with their supervision. These agents have endeavoured to awaken in their minds some elementary notions of civilization. After having set apart the reserves on which they were to reside, the government made provision for their subsistence by distributing among them at regular intervals rations of food. Their immediate wants being thus supplied they were gradually accustomed to a settled mode of living.³⁰

Instead of trying to exterminate the native population, the Canadian government was lauded for its efforts to preserve the natives and improve their condition. “It placed within their reach all the resources of civilisation, instead of using these resources to destroy them.”³¹ In a similar manner, Alexander Begg mentioned in the paper, The Great North-West of Canada, read at a conference on June 8th, 1886, the difference in the treatment of the native population in the two Wests:

It is notable that the Indians of the British North-West have ever compared favourably with those of the United States, and we have no wholesale massacres or prolonged Indian wars to chronicle such as the Americans have experienced at the hands of their savages. This is owing to the good treatment ever extended to the Indians by the Hudson’s Bay Company, and to the faithful

²⁸ A. L. Haydon, The Riders of the Plains: A Record of the Royal North-West Mounted Police of Canada 1873-1910 (Edmonton: M. G. Hurtig, 1971), 38.

²⁹ Owram, Promise of Eden, 144.

³⁰ Bouthillier-Chavigny, Our Land of Promise, 72-73.

³¹ Bouthillier-Chavigny, Our Land of Promise, 74-75.

performance of treaties and considerate management of Indian affairs by the Canadian government.³²

When it came to managing Indian affairs, one government agency played a very important role. The Mounted Police was not only established to ensure security to settlers but was also a protection to all those who needed it most. The native population, as Rev. McDonnell Dawson believed, needed to be protected against foreign contamination. He argued that:

The denizens of the United States could not, indeed, even before the days of the Mounted Police, attack our Indians with gunpowder as they do their own, but they maintained against them an exterminating guerrilla warfare, in which the chief material of war was that fatal fire-water, as the Indians so appropriately termed the poisonous beverage which destroyed their moral powers, and so speedily exhausted that physical strength which was the glory of the red man. There remains not now any such evil to be contended with, and the Indian of the North-West Territories more tractable than most other tribes of red men, shows a willingness to learn the noble art of agriculture, and to make up for the departure of his former movable property—the wild cattle of the plains—by the rich harvests which he may so easily produce by the labour of his hands.³³

The tame Canadian West, according to Lady Aberdeen, who wrote a journal about life in the North-West from 1893 to 1898, was the right and better place for settlers to realize “their golden dreams of the West.”³⁴ They came to a country where freedom and liberty existed for all, where law and order was respected, and where a good relationship with the native population was kept. It was the responsibility of the Dominion government to provide peace, stability, guiding authority, and security. All these were

³² Alexander Begg, The Great North-West of Canada. A Paper read at Conference, Indian and Colonial Exhibition, London, June 8th, 1886 (London: H. Blacklock & Co., 1886), 7.

³³ Rev. McDonnell Dawson, The North-West Territories, 18-19.

³⁴ John T. Saywell (ed), The Canadian Journal of Lady Aberdeen, 1893-1898 (Toronto: Camplain Society, 1960), 262.

certainties "to which a prudent and loyal people could cling while all about them raged the giant storms of a vital and turbulent world whose enthusiasms they dared not share."³⁵ This was all possible because of the form of government that existed north of the border. In 1884, C. Cliffe, in his pamphlet Manitoba and the Canadian North-West, set Canada's form of governing against the American way. He announced that "we have the freest form of Government and the best constitution in the world. We know nothing of revolvers or bowie knives, or of troubles with the Indians, such as are of frequent occurrence in the United States, because of the harsh treatment meted out by the American government."³⁶ In the Canadian West, life and property were perfectly safe even in the most remote corners of this country. According to Cliffe, "every man is free, and required only to respect the laws that are framed for the protection of life and property."³⁷

Wandering from the south to the north, crossing the forty-ninth parallel, the violence of the Wild West vanished at the international boundary. Lawlessness and disorder were exchanged for law and order. The lawfulness of the Canadian West was expressed in the description of the 'wild' American West. There could not exist a 'mild' West without the lawlessness of the Wild West. It seemed impossible to attribute a different image to one or the other; the Canadian West became anchored in the people's mind as the 'mild' West, and the American West remained the Wild West.

³⁵ S. F. Wise, Robert Craig Brown, Canada views the United States: Nineteenth-Century Political Attitudes (Seattle: University of Washington Press; Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1967), 97.

³⁶ C. Cliffe, Manitoba and the Canadian North-West as a Field of Settlement (Brandon: Mail Steam Book and Job Printing Establishment, 1884), 72.

³⁷ C. Cliffe, Manitoba and the Canadian North-West, 7.

Conclusion

The “True” Mythical West: A New Dream to Follow

I think of faith as irony, which is perhaps why the only leaps of faith I’m capable of, are those required by the creative imagination, by fictions that don’t pretend to be fact, and so telling the truth.¹

Canadians created their ‘mild’ West by differentiating it from the ‘wild’ American West. The image of the ‘mild’ Canadian West was formed by Canadians’ efforts to create a western world, which was entirely different from the American West. As time passed, Canadians developed a sense of difference between themselves and their southern neighbour. Unlike an American frontiersman, the Canadian settler moved westward to establish a new home based on the best features of British civilization. Canadians put considerable effort in establishing and maintaining a British and Eastern way of life in the west. They were determined to prevent a repeat of the Wild West on their side of the border.

In the portrayal of a ‘mild’ West, Canadians rejected everything that characterized the ‘wild’ American West. They often pointed to the violence of the American West and described the benefits of a life in their West by contrasting it to the disadvantages of a life in the American West. But the ‘mild’ Canadian West would not exist without the presence of the American West. The existence of the ‘wild’ American West was necessary to propagate the ‘mild’ West they envisioned. The uniqueness of the ‘mild’ Canadian West only developed from the differences between both Wests. According to Canadians’ view, the American West served as a good example of what their West was not. In comparison to the Wild West, the Canadian West was a much better place to live.

Citing the American West as a ‘wild’ and uninhabitable place, Canadians sought to create a West where settlers could live according to British norms and Old World institutions. The image of the Canadian West as a mild place was enhanced by the permanent contrast of the two Wests. There were no guidelines to determine whether or not a place was mild. But reflecting on the Canadian West, one just knew there was a place south of the forty-ninth parallel that was wilder. The ‘wild’ American West was the yardstick for the mildness of the Canadian West. The ‘mild’ Canadian West could be portrayed only through the ‘wild’ American West.

¹ Salman Rushdie, The Ground Beneath Her Feet (London: Jonathan Cap, 1999), 123.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS

Saskatchewan Archives Board

PAMPHLETS

Begg, Alexander, The Great North-West of Canada. A Paper read at Conference, Indian and Colonial Exhibition, London, June 8th, 1886 (London: H. Blacklock & Co., 1886).

Bouthillier-Chavigny, Marquis de Charles Marie Claude, Our Lands of Promise : A Run Through the Canadian North-West (Montreal: The Gazette Printing Company, 1893).

Carle, Frank A., The British Northwest; Pen and Sun Sketches in the Canadian Wheat Lands (St. Paul: Pioneer Press, 1882).

Cliffe, C., Manitoba and the Canadian North-West as a Field of Settlement (Brandon: Mail Steam Book and Job Printing Establishment, 1884).

Davenport, Montague M., Under the Gridiron, A Summer in the United States and the Far West, Including a Run Through Canada (London: Tinsley, 1876).

Davin, Nicholas Flood (ed), Homes for Millions: The Great Canadian North-West; Its Resources Fully Described (Ottawa: B. Chamberlain, 1891).

Fleming, Sandford, C.M.G., Engineer-in-Chief, Report and Documents in Reference to the Canadian Pacific Railway (Ottawa: Maclean, 1880).

Field, Septimus, Timely Remarks and Letters from Western Canada Settlers (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1898).

Hind, Henry Youle, North-West Territory. Report on the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Exploring Expedition (Toronto: John Lovell, 1859).

Hudson's Bay Company, "A Million," Shall We Take It? Address to Shareholders (London: Baily and Co., 1866).

MacDonnell, Allan, A Railroad from Lake Superior to the Pacific: the shortest, cheapest and safest Communication. For Europe with all Asia (Toronto: Hugh Scobie, 1851).

MacDonnell, Allan, The North-West Transportation, Navigation, and Railway Company: Its Objects (Toronto: Lovell and Gibson, 1858).

McDonnell Dawson, Rev. Aeneas, The North-West Territories and British Columbia (Ottawa: C.W. Mitchell, 1881).

MacDougall, W. B., MacDougall's Illustrated Guide, Gazetteer and Practical Hand Book for Manitoba and the North-West (Winnipeg: W.B. MacDougall, 1882).

Macoun, John, Manitoba and the Great North West (Guelph: World Pub. Co., 1882).

Morris, Alexander, Canada and her resources : an essay, to which, upon a reference from the Paris exhibition committee of Canada was awarded, by his Excellency Sir Edmund Walker Head, bart., governor general of British North America (Montreal : John Lovell), 1855.

Rawlings, Thomas, The Confederation of the British North American Provinces including British Columbia and the Hudson's Bay Territory (London: S. Low and Marston, 1865).

Richardson, R. L., Facts and Figures, the Highest Testimony. What Lords Dufferin, Lorne, and Lansdowne, say about the Canadian North-West (Ottawa: s.n., 1886).

Richardson, Sir John, Arctic Searching Expedition (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, 1851).

Simpson, Sir George, Narrative of a Journey Round the World During the Years 1841 and 1842 (London: H. Colburn, 1847).

Spence, Thomas, Manitoba and the North-West of the Dominion (Quebec: S. Marcotte, 1876).

Spence, Thomas, The Saskatchewan Country (Montreal: Gazette Printing House, 1877).

What Women Say of the Canadian North-West: a simple statement of the experiences of women settled in all parts of Manitoba and the North-west Territories (London, M. Blacklock, 1886).

GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS

Alberta, Edmonton Board of Trade, The Edmonton District of Northern Alberta. Western Territories of Canada (Edmonton: Bulletin Office, 1890).

Canada, Department of Interior, The Canadian West. Its Present Condition and Future Possibilities (Ottawa: Canadian Government Print, 1905-1911?).

Canada, Department of the Interior, Prosperity Follows Settlement in Western Canada (Ottawa: Canadian Government Print, 1905).

Canada, Department of the Interior, Farms and Farmers in Western Canada (Ottawa: Canadian Government Print, 1896-1905?).

Canada, Department of the Interior, The Last Best West. Canada in the 20th Century. Western Canada: Vast Agricultural Resources. Homes for Millions (Ottawa: Canadian Government Print, 1907).

Canada, Department of the Interior, Climate of Canada (Ottawa: Government Printing, 1906).

Canada, Department of the Interior, Handbook. For the Information of Intending Settlers (Ottawa: Government Printing, 1914).

Canada, Department of the Interior, Canada West: The Last and Best West (Ottawa: Government Printing, 1906).

Canada, Department of the Interior, Twentieth Century Canada An Atlas of Western Canada. For the Guidance of Intending Settlers—Its Resources and Development with Maps of the Dominion of Canada, Provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, The Maritime Provinces, British Columbia and North Atlantic (Ottawa: Government Printing, 1906).

Canada, Department of the Interior, Pacific Railway and the North-West Territories (S.I., 1886).

NEWSPAPERS

Globe

Regina Leader

Nor' Wester

Free Press

Mail and Empire

Gazette

Secondary Sources

BOOKS

Anderson, Benedict, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1983).

Baker, William M. (ed), The Mounted Police and Prairie Society 1873-1919 (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1998).

Bennett, John W., Kohl, Seena B., Settling the Canadian-American West, 1890-1915: Pioneer Adaptation and Community Building (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

Berton, Pierre, Klondike (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1958).

Bhabha, Homi K., the location of culture (London, New York: Routledge, 1994).

Blouet, Brian, Lawson, M. (eds), Images of the Plains: The Role of Human Nature in Settlement (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975).

Brown, R. C., Cook, R., Canada, 1896-1921, Centenary Series XIV (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974).

Butler, Sir William Francis, The Great Lone Land (London: Marston, Low, & Searle, 1872).

Careless, J. M. S., Brown of The Globe. Vol. 2. Statesman of Confederation, 1860-1880 (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1963).

Coupe, Lawrence, Myth (London, New York: Routledge, 1997).

Creighton, Donald, Canada's First Century: 1867-1967 (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1970).

Cruise, David, Griffiths, Allison, Lords of the Line (Toronto: Viking Penguin, 1988).

Doughty, A. G., Martin, C. (eds), The Kelsey Papers (1690, Ottawa: Public Archives of Canada and the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, 1929).

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

Francis, Daniel, National Dreams, Myth, Memory and Canadian History (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1997).

Francis, Douglas R., Images of the West. Changing Perceptions of the Prairies, 1690-1960 (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Book, 1989).

Francis, Douglas R., Palmer, Howard (eds), The Prairie West. Historical Readings (Edmonton: Pica Pica Press, 1985).

Frye, Northrop, The Bush Garden (Toronto: New Press, 1971).

Glover, Richard (ed), David Thompson's Narrative, 1784-1812 (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1962).

Goetzmann, William, Exploration & Empire: The Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American West (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1966).

Harrison, Dick (ed), Crossing Frontiers. Papers in American and Canadian Western Literature (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1979).

Harrison, Dick, Unnamed Country. The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1977).

Haydon, A. L., Riders of the Plains: A Record of the Royal North-West Mounted Police of Canada, 1873-1910 (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1971).

Hoffmann, Gerhard, Raum, Situation, erzaehlte Wirklichkeit: poetologische und historische Studien zum englischen und amerikanischen Roman (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1978).

Hoskin, Geoffrey, Schoepflin, George (eds), Myths & Nationhood (New York: Routledge, 1997).

Lamb, W. Kaye (ed), The Journals and Letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1970).

L'Amour, Louis, Hondo (New York: Bantam Books, 1953).

Limerick, Patricia Nelson, Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987).

Macbeth, R. G., The Romance of the CPR (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1924).

MacDonald, Norman, Canada. Immigration and Colonisation. 1841-1903 (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1966).

MacGregor, James G., Vision of an Ordered Land. The Story of the Dominion Land Survey (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1981).

MacLeod, R. C., The North-West Mounted Police and Law Enforcement 1873-1905 (Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1976).

Malinowski, B., Myth in Primitive Psychology (New York, 1926).

Miller, J. R., Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens. A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada (Toronto, London: University of Toronto Press, 1989).

- Nash, Gerald D., Creating the West. Historical Interpretations 1890-1990 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991).
- Owram, Doug, Promise of Eden. The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West 1856-1900 (Toronto, London: University of Toronto Press, 1980).
- Rasporich, A. W., Klassen, H. C. (eds), Prairie Perspectives 2. Selected Papers of the Western Canadian Studies Conferences, 1970, 1971 (Toronto, Montreal: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada Limited, 1973).
- Ricoeur, Paul, Lectures on Ideology and Utopia edited by G. H. Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).
- Rushdie, Salman, The Ground Beneath Her Feet (London: Jonathan Cap, 1999).
- Sharp, Paul F., Whoop-Up Country. The Canadian-American West, 1865-1885 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973).
- Said, Edward W., Culture and Imperialism (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993).
- Saywell, John T. (ed), The Canadian Journal of Lady Aberdeen, 1893-1898 (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1960).
- Slotkin, Richard, The Fatal Environment. The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1891 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985).
- Smith, Henry Nash, Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (New York: Vintage Books, 1950).
- Spry, Irene, Introduction to the Papers of the Palliser Expedition, 1857-1860 (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1968).
- Starr, Kevin, Inventing the Dream: California through the Progressive Era (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).
- Taussig, M., Mimesis and Alterity (London: Routledge, 1993).
- Tocqueville, Alexis de, Democracy in America, vol. 1 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1853).
- Tompkins, Jane, West of Everything. The Inner Life of Western (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

Troper, Harold Martin, Only Farmers Need Apply. Official Canadian Government Encouragement of Immigration from the United States, 1896-1911 (Toronto: Griffin House, 1972).

Turner, Frederick Jackson, The Significance of the Frontier in American History edited by Harold P. Simonson (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1963).

Vernant, Jean-Pierre, Myth and Society in Ancient Greece (London: Methuen, 1982).

Waite, P. B., The Life and Times of Confederation, 1864-1867. Politics, Newspapers, and the Union of British North America (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1962).

Walden, Keith, Visions of Order (Toronto: Butterworths, 1982).

Webb, Walter Prescott, The Great Plains (Boston: Grim and Company, 1931).

Wise, S. F., Brown, Robert Craig, Canada views the United States: Nineteenth-Century Political Attitudes (Seattle: University of Washington Press; Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1967).

ARTICLES

Adams jr., Graham, "Frontier Violence and the American Mind," The Canadian Review of American Studies, vol. VII, no 1, Spring 1976.

Baritz, Loren, "The Idea of the West," American Historical Review, vol. 66, April 1961.

Emerson, Hugh, "The Settlement of the Frontier: A Study in Transportation," Century Magazine, November 1901, 91-107.

Francis, Douglas R., "From Wasteland to Utopia: Changing Images of the Canadian West in the 19th Century," Great Plains Quarterly, vol. 7, Summer 1987.

Harrison, Dick, "Popular Fiction of the Canadian Prairies: Autopsy on a Small Corpus," Journal of Popular Culture, vol. 14, no. 2, 1980.

Horrell, S. W., "Sir John A Macdonald and the Mounted Police Force for the Northwest Territories," Canadian History Review, vol. III, June 1972.

Hoy, Jim, "Wither Cowboy Poetry," Great Plains Quarterly, vol. 19, no. 4, Fall 1999.

Kelton, Elmer, "The Myth of the Mythical West," Western American Literature, vol. 26, no. 1, 1991.

Morton, Desmond, "Cavalry or police: keeping the peace on two adjacent frontiers, 1870-1900," Journal of Canadian Studies, vol. 12, no. 2, Spring 1977.

O'Sullivan, J. L., "Annexation," The United States, Magazine, and Democratic Review 17, 1845.

Peel, Bruce, "The Lure of the West," Papers of the Bibliographic Society of Canada, vol. V, 1966.

Scheinberg, Ellen, Rombout, Melissa K., "Projecting Images of the Nation: The Immigration Program and its Use of Lantern Slides," no. 111, 1996.

Shortt, Adam, "Some Observations on the Great North-West. Part I: Immigration and Transportation," Queen's Quarterly, no. 2, January 1895.

Stanley, G. F. G., "Western Canada and the Frontier Thesis," Canadian Historical Association, 1940.

Taylor, Georgina M., "Art Nouveau, Immigration Propaganda, and the People of Saskatchewan," Saskatchewan History, vol. 50, no. 2, Fall 1998.

Walson, Wreford, "The Role of Illusion in North-American Geography: A Note on the Geography of North American Settlement," The Canadian Geographer, vol. 13, Spring 1969, 16.

Weinstein, Mark A., "The Creative Imagination in Fiction and History," Genre, vol. 9, no. 3, 1976.

Worster, Donald, "New West, True West: Interpreting the Region's History," Western Historical Quarterly, vol. 18, April 1987.

THESES

Waiser, William A., "Macoun and the Great North-West," M.A. Thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1976.