

"INVESTIGATING CIVILISATION":  
THE CITY AS FRONTIER IN THE EARLY  
PRAIRIE NOVELS OF ISABEL PATERSON

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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## Abstract

This thesis examines two early prairie novels by Isabel Paterson, *The Shadow Riders* (1916) and *The Magpie's Nest* (1917). Isabel Paterson is an early Canadian writer whose work has been lost due to critical neglect: her work deserves to be recovered and given its rightful place in the canon of Canadian literature. Chapter One provides a critical survey and evaluation of prairie regionalism. This criticism is the critical background for the thesis. The following two chapters focus on *The Shadow Riders* and *The Magpie's Nest* and how they fit into the existing ideas of what it means for a text to be classified as prairie literature. Instead of being preoccupied with the pioneering experience and the prairie landscape, as established criticism holds that prairie novels do, Paterson's novels have urban settings and her characters experience the city as a frontier.

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## Introduction

In Volume I of the *Literary History of Canada*, Roper, Schieder and Beharriell write, "What most distinguished the fiction written by Canadian writers [between 1880 and 1920] from that written by their British and American contemporaries is their writers' experience of place, and, to a lesser degree, their experience of time" (299). Theorizing any national literature is necessarily concerned with place because criticism attempts to identify the things that make the literature connected to a specific place, a nation, unique. Canadian literary criticism has always been particularly interested in how place, especially landscape, shapes our nation's writing. Northrop Frye famously asked, "Where is here?" in 1965 and we have been trying to answer that question ever since (*The Bush Garden* 220).

Critics of prairie literature have been particularly interested in landscape. Edward A. McCourt's *The Canadian West in Fiction* (1970), Laurence Ricou's *Vertical Man/Horizontal World* (1973), and Dick Harrison's *Unnamed Country* (1977) are the three most important critical texts on prairie writing and they all focus on the importance of landscape in shaping the West's literature. According to these critics, prairie writers all draw their inspiration from the landscape, and the landscape is always rural.

But what happens to prairie writers whose works do not focus on the rural West? In the case of Isabel Paterson (1886-1961), a novelist, critic, and thinker whose first two novels, *The Shadow Riders* (1916) and *The Magpie's Nest* (1917), are set in the West, she has been sadly forgotten. Established criticism tells us that prairie writers largely explore

the experience of the West as a rural place, but Paterson's first two novels explore the West as an urban place. *The Shadow Riders* explores pre-World War I Calgary, where a courtship dance between East and West takes place. Two young women, Lesley and Eileen, search for personal fulfillment in the city. Two wealthy Easterners, Ross Whittemore and Chan Herrick, serve as love interests for Lesley and Eileen while also pursuing business and political ventures in the West. *The Magpie's Nest* focuses on the fortunes of Hope Fielding, a young woman who moves from her family's ranch in southern Alberta to search for work and love in Calgary before moving on to Seattle and eventually New York City.<sup>1</sup>

Isabel Paterson herself came from a rural background and moved to the city as a young woman. She was born in the Ontario community of Tehkummah on Manitoulin Island in 1886 (Cox, Introduction x). Her family moved from Ontario to Michigan, Utah, and finally Alberta in rapid succession while she was still very young (Cox, Introduction x). The bulk of her childhood was spent on a ranch in southern Alberta, close to the Canada-U.S. border and a stone's throw from the Blackfoot Indian reservation (Cox, Introduction xi). As an adult, Paterson continued the pattern established by her parents of nomadically criss-crossing the continent. She lived for a time in Calgary before going to work in Vancouver, Spokane, San Francisco, and New York (Cox, Introduction xiv). Paterson had some clerical jobs, most notably in the law offices of future Prime Minister R.B. Bennett, but for most of her career she was a journalist (Cox, Introduction xii). In 1924 Paterson landed a position with the *New York Herald Tribune* book's section (Cox,



Introduction xv). For more than twenty years, she remained with the paper writing book reviews and a weekly column titled "Turns With a Bookworm," in which she covered the New York literary scene, made observations about life and American society, and expressed her own political views.

In her lifetime Isabel Paterson published eight novels, one work of non-fiction, and numerous short stories in addition to her newspaper work. After her two books set in Alberta, Paterson penned three historical romances, *The Singing Season: A Romance of Old Spain* (1924), *The Fourth Queen* (1926), and *The Road of the Gods* (1930) and three novels with contemporary American characters and settings, *Never Ask the End* (1933), *The Golden Vanity* (1934), and *If it Prove Fair Weather* (1940).<sup>2</sup> Both *The Singing Season* and *Never Ask the End* enjoyed great success and were bestsellers (Cox, Introduction xxii). However, it is for her single non-fiction book, *The God of the Machine* (1943), that she is best remembered today and it is also the only one of her books that has been regularly reprinted. *The God of the Machine* is considered a classic of modern liberal thinking and, in a recent reader poll conducted by Randomhouse, it appeared at number five on the list of "best non-fiction published in the English language since 1900" ("Modern Library"). Paterson is also remembered for her friendship with Ayn Rand, who held similar political views and published *The Fountainhead* (1943) the same year as Paterson's book appeared.

Isabel Paterson's connection to Rand and radical individualist thought also provides a clue to why her fiction has been neglected in the United States. Both she and

the political views she expressed with increasing frequency and stridency in her newspaper column were unpopular by the time she left the *Herald Tribune* in 1943 (Cox, "Re: Information on Isabel Paterson"). Ayn Rand wrote in her journal at the time that Paterson was "a person wrecked by a fierce sense of injustice, which she has never analyzed or defined as such" (411).

However, personal and political unpopularity do not explain the puzzling lack of attention Paterson has received from Canadian critics. Why are the works of minor popular novelists such as Ralph Connor [Charles Gordon] still read today (if only occasionally by specialists in prairie cultural and literary studies) but Paterson's are not? It is true that when she wrote *The Shadow Riders* and *The Magpie's Nest* she was not at the height of her powers; she did not reach her artistic peak until many years later with *The Golden Vanity* and the experimental *Never Ask the End*, but she is still a more competent and readable novelist than the authors of many popular romantic adventure stories set in the West.

It is interesting to compare the early critical reception of Paterson's Alberta novels with the neglect she later suffered. *The Shadow Riders* and *The Magpie's Nest* were reviewed by *Saturday Night* in Canada and internationally by publications such as *Athenæum*, the *New York Times*, and the *Times Literary Supplement*. The reviewer in *Saturday Night* wrote that in *The Shadow Riders* Paterson "has thrown aside all the tawdry stage-devices of wild and woolly fiction, and has written a clean-cut . . . vigorous story of contemporary life in a small city in Alberta" and that "Furthermore, her

presentation of the business, social, and political life of the new West is animated and convincing." The *New York Times Book Review* praised her: "Her first novel is an achievement to arrest attention, even in such a novel-flooded world as this, and if in subsequent books she should prove able to carry out its promise Canada will have reason to be proud of her."

When *The Magpie's Nest* was released, it received more attention than Paterson's first novel, although some reviewers were offended by what they saw as the moral failings of its main character. The reviewer in the *New York Times Book Review* wrote that "The book is remarkably well written, and holds the reader's interest in spite of its reprehensible characters and very unpleasant situations. Among the former, the word 'Duty' appears to be obsolete; while the latter go far toward indicating that the age-old ideals of feminine conduct are fast crumbling to dust." However, Mary Alden Hopkins of *Publisher's Weekly* raved that the "first two-thirds [of the book] ring absolutely true, built from the storied memories of tense, bull, eager, devouring youth. The vitality, the wonder, and the hope of immaturity are poured out for us." Among Canadian reviewers, *Saturday Night's* critic regretted that the book was not set wholly in Canada because by moving part of the action from Alberta to New York Paterson had "deserted a new and promising field for one which [had] . . . already been sadly overworked."

In 1926, Lionel Stevenson wrote in *Appraisals of Canadian Literature*, "The sudden springing up of cities [in the West], with all the attendant complications of big business undertakings, speculation and intrigue gives further material for fiction" (240-

241). He goes on to group Paterson's *The Shadow Riders* with Robert Stead's *The Cowpuncher* (1918), Nellie McClung's *Purple Springs* (1921) and Douglas Durkin's *The Magpie* (1923) as examples of this trend in fiction. Stevenson also mentions *The Magpie's Nest*, which he says gives another "distinguished realistic picture of social life on the prairies" (241). This early critic's observations are interesting because they are so different from those of subsequent commentators on prairie writing. No subsequent critic has talked about the prairie city as a source of inspiration for prairie writing and most would deny that politics has had any real impact on Western writing. *Appraisals in Canadian Literature* was published a decade after *The Shadow Riders* appeared and after that Paterson's Alberta novels did not receive more than a sentence of critical attention until 1998, when *The Literary History of Alberta* was published.<sup>3</sup>

To what can we attribute the neglect of Paterson's work by Canadian critics? The answer will become clear in the course of this thesis: it is the product of a critical process that sought in its early stages to define prairie literature solely in relation to the land. The useful definitions produced through this process became fossilized over time and only a few texts were deemed worthy of study. A small canon of early prairie novels, whose authors are generally referred to as the "prairie realists," emerged from this process as representative of Western writing. Unfortunately, the definitions used to arrive at this group of books were originally so narrow that Paterson's works did not fit the paradigm. More recent critics, whose broader definitions do in fact allow for the inclusion of *The Shadow Riders* and *The Magpie's Nest* in the register of prairie writers, have typically

concentrated on re-evaluating older books already in the canon or analyzing the works of more recent writers that fall outside the original definitions. The time has come for Paterson's first two novels to take their rightful place on the roster of prairie writers.

In the following thesis, *The Shadow Riders* and *The Magpie's Nest* will be examined to show how they fit into the existing ideas of what it means for a text to be classified as prairie literature. I will first discuss the main critical trends in ideas about prairie writing and in what ways these trends allow for the exclusion or inclusion of Paterson's novels. I will then analyze both *The Shadow Riders* and *The Magpie's Nest* as novels that are, in fact, prairie literature but not in the sense that they are preoccupied with the pioneer experience in a rural setting. Rather, I will demonstrate how they are concerned with the "pioneering" experience in the city, how the main characters view the city, not the wilderness, as their frontier and place of discovery. When Alberta is the setting, the city of Calgary is the dominant location and Paterson portrays the interlinked business, political and social aspects of that city's life. When the characters move away from the prairies, their internal compasses continue to point back to the "Great Northwest."

## **Chapter One: Critical Background to Prairie Regionalism**

"It is by the nature of itself that fiction is all bound up in the local." Eudora Welty, "A Sense of Place"

The critical background for this thesis is prairie regionalism. The most important question a literary critic writing about the literature of Western Canada has to address is that of region. Is there a unique region that can be called "The Prairies" and, if so, what defines it? What kind of connections are there between the prairies as geographical region and the literature this region has produced?

Although, as Julie Beddoes notes, the topic of regionalism is "a mine-field and even books of literary criticism are taking on a lot when they tackle it" (34), a working definition of region is necessary for the purposes of my thesis. I will work from the notion that the prairies as a distinct region do exist and that this region has produced a body of literature. Historically, the Canadian prairies have been defined by the political boundaries that demarcate the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. The prairies have also been defined by geography; they are part of the North American "Great Plains" that straddle the border between the United States and Canada. Defining the prairies by geography is problematic because there is geographical diversity within the politically demarcated Prairie Provinces. For example, southwestern Alberta is mountainous, central Saskatchewan and central Alberta is parkland, and all three provinces are forested in places. Complicating things further, the "true" short grass prairie is a vast geographical area that overlaps the border between Canada and the United States. The culture of the prairies in the early twentieth century is generally thought to

have been dominated by English-speaking Anglo-Saxon immigrants who attempted to make a living farming in a harsh landscape they feared. Nevertheless, other groups of European immigrants also settled in the area and preserved their unique cultures with varying degrees of success from the influence of the dominant group of British immigrants. Furthermore, ranchers in Alberta and Saskatchewan developed a unique culture which has been widely dismissed by literary scholars as either an artificial American import or as atypical of the culture of the region.

Throughout this thesis, I will work with established definitions of the prairie region as defined by geography, political boundaries, and culture to try to determine how well Isabel Paterson's novels are served by these definitions and how her texts fit, or do not fit, within them. I will operate from the standpoint that the prairie provinces can be defined as a political and imaginative region and, to a lesser extent, a geographical one.

Over time, critics have defined the prairie region and prairie literature in different ways. There are three main trends in prairie regionalist criticism: environmentalist criticism, criticism that reacts against environmentalist criticism, and cross-border or plains/prairies criticism. This chapter will outline each of the main critical trends and the major texts related to them. It will also discuss how useful each group of critical texts is for examining Paterson's *The Shadow Riders* and *The Magpie's Nest*. Another important question that will be addressed is whether in fact the definitions offered by established criticism even allow for the inclusion of Paterson's texts in the regional literature. If we accept that there is a region called "The Prairies" and that this region produces its own

literature, how do we go about deciding where Isabel Paterson's books fit into that regional literary corpus?

The most important and well-established trend in the criticism of prairie writing is environmentalist criticism, so-called because of its focus on the influence of prairie landscape and environment on literature. The earliest environmentalist critic, Edward A. McCourt, published *The Canadian West in Fiction* in 1949. This study was followed in 1973 by Laurence Ricou's *Vertical Man/Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction* and in 1978 by Dick Harrison's *Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction*. Environmentalist criticism is connected to the larger trend in Canadian letters of thematic criticism, best exemplified by Northrop Frye's *The Bush Garden* (1971) and Margaret Atwood's *Survival* (1972). Environmentalist criticism became entrenched as the predominant discourse on prairie writing in the 1970s, a time of increasing Canadian nationalism when defining the Canadian identity was firmly tied to the project of establishing a canon of Canadian literary texts.

Thematic critics read Canadian literature for overarching patterns which would tell us who we are as a nation. For example, Northrop Frye says Canadian literature has been characterized by the garrison mentality while Atwood believes the major theme underlying our literature is survival. The most important contribution of environmentalist criticism is that it established prairie writing as a unique literature worthy of study. Environmentalist critics located specific image patterns in the texts they studied, such as the prairie patriarch in Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese* (1926) and the house that sits on the



prairie like a ship adrift on the ocean in Robert Stead's *Grain* (1926), images that pointed to the larger themes they saw underlying prairie writing. For environmentalist critics, the best prairie literature reflected the way settlers on the prairie "really" saw the landscape: as threatening and foreboding.

The appearance of McCourt's book marked the first time a critic undertook a serious study of Canadian prairie literature. In *The Canadian West in Fiction*, McCourt does not present his study as the definitive text on prairie writing; he knows that it is merely the first book in a new field of study. The most obvious limitation of *The Canadian West in Fiction* is apparent in the title of the book: McCourt examines fiction almost exclusively. In chapter one, McCourt traces the beginnings of prairie literature back to the writings of missionaries and fur-traders, whose logs and diaries preceded "the work of fly-by-night travellers, journalists, and romantic novelists whose knowledge of the prairies was at best seldom more than second- or third-hand" (12). He also includes the literary activities of "ordinary" people and outlines what was being done on the level of libraries, book clubs, and amateur writing. In this way, *The Canadian West in Fiction* comes close to being a literary history of the prairies.

McCourt evaluates the novels of the prairies with traditional critical methods focusing on characterization and artistic coherence. He also evaluates the books' success as prairie novels by how well they meet his definition of good regional literature. His definition of regional writing comes from definitions developed by British critics to describe the work of writers such as Thomas Hardy. McCourt writes:

True regional literature is above all distinctive in that it illustrates the effect of particular, rather than general, physical, economic and racial features upon the lives of ordinary men and women. It should and usually does do many other things besides, but if it does not illustrate the influence of a limited and peculiar environment it is not true regional literature. (56)

The "limited and peculiar environment" McCourt identifies is a natural rural landscape rather than a cityscape. He makes this especially clear in the conclusion to *The Canadian West in Fiction* when he speculates that the unique literature of the West will continue to be produced: "[I]f the prairie environment preserves a measure of inviolability there is reason to believe that it may someday foster a literature which will be a dramatization of the universal human condition" (125). McCourt, it should be pointed out, does not think that the true prairie novel had yet been written, apparently not even by the time the revised edition of *The Canadian West in Fiction* came out in 1970.

Looking at a large number of prairie texts, McCourt examines the extent to which each is successful artistically and as a regional novel. His work covers the writings of early writers and explorers in the West, popular novelists such as Ralph Connor [Charles Gordon], more serious "literary" writers like Sinclair Ross, and recent prairie scribes like Margaret Laurence. When one looks at the total body of criticism of prairie literature, from McCourt writing in 1949 to contemporary critics such as W.H. New, the reader shortly realizes that they are dealing with an oddly circumscribed canon: Sinclair Ross, Martha Ostenso, Frederick Philip Grove and Robert Stead are often the only early writers discussed. However this is not yet the case in McCourt's book. The second chapter of *The Canadian West in Fiction* deals exclusively with the work of Ralph Connor [Charles

Gordon] who was, until the prairie realists became prominent, the best known writer from western Canada. Connor was so popular that "Some of his books outsold Nobel Prize-winner Sinclair Lewis's even in the United States" (Swayze 42). Connor's most popular books included *The Sky Pilot* (1899) and *Corporal Cameron* (1910). McCourt also devotes chapters to Frederick Niven and Frederick Philip Grove. Later chapters examine the literary depiction of the immigrant experience and writers who produced small bodies of work or who made lesser contributions to prairie literature.

Because McCourt privileges realism over romanticism in his evaluative process, women writers are put at a disadvantage, as they were more likely to be writing romances. Lorraine McMullen states, "Genres and themes frequently used by women writers have been devalORIZED by a patriarchal culture which values most the concerns and the literary genres popular with male writers. Such gender-specific valuations account in part for the disappearance of women writers from reference works and anthologies" (2). McMullen's point can also be used partially to account for the fact that Isabel Paterson's novels have not been reprinted or even discussed in critical surveys such as McCourt's. For McCourt, very few early writers can be considered "true regional novelists." The writers who come closest to achieving this status are Sinclair Ross and W.O. Mitchell. According to McCourt, "Ross shares with W.O. Mitchell the power to suggest the atmosphere of a prairie region which the reader, whether or not he is familiar with the Western scene, finds wholly convincing" (102).

Isabel Paterson's novels *The Shadow Riders* and *The Maggie's Nest* are two works that could easily have been included in McCourt's study but were not for unknown reasons. However, it is possible to speculate that based on his evaluative criteria, McCourt would have appreciated that Paterson's books were aesthetically or artistically acceptable for inclusion but perhaps he would have considered them flawed by their romantic endings. McCourt may have argued that these two novels are not truly regional, despite being set in Alberta, because the dominant landscape depicted is urban, not rural. Neither of Paterson's protagonists is shown to have been especially molded by the prairie landscape in a way that environmentalist critics would recognize. The influence that landscape and region exert on Lesley Johns and Hope Fielding is very subtle. Unlike the characters in Sinclair Ross's fiction, they do not display any fear of the landscape. Further, Paterson does not rely heavily on landscape description to establish her setting although the setting itself is immediately identifiable.

McCourt offers a definition of regionalism but he does not propose a totalizing theme underling prairie writing. Laurence Ricou, in *Vertical Man/Horizontal World* does, writing: "Man on the prairie, as portrayed in Canadian fiction, is defined especially by two things: exposure, and an awareness of the surrounding emptiness" (ix). Ricou suggests that the "basic image of a single human figure amidst the vast flatness of the landscape serves to unify and describe Canadian prairie fiction" (ix). The human urge is to "erect" things on this vast plain [Ricou seems oblivious to the potentially gender-specific nature of "erecting"]: houses, grain elevators, to assert their existence. In the

absence of other people and a developed society, man also looks to the land for companionship and purpose, hence the number of characters in prairie fiction who are fixated on the land [characters often described as prairie patriarchs<sup>4</sup>]. Early authors or undeveloped authors write not about this emptiness and the urge to fill it, but about a non-existent garden that they want to believe they are living in. The Canadian government portrayed the Canadian West this way as well in their pamphlet campaign to encourage settlement in the prairies.<sup>5</sup>

With the publication of *Vertical Man/Horizontal World*, environmentalist criticism becomes much more explicitly about the relationship between man and environment. Ricou privileges the prairie realists because they confront more directly the relationship between man and land. He writes, "Gradually . . . my attention shifts to the writer's use of the prairie to reveal not the local and provincial, but the universal. This aspect of prairie fiction provides the focus for the bulk of the study from Grove onwards, providing one test for the quality of Western Canadian fiction" (14). Ricou thus both defines prairie fiction based on his analysis of a few select texts and uses his criteria to judge all prairie fiction. For Ricou, the success of individual works should be judged based on how well they incorporate the vertical man/horizontal world motif.

Ricou quotes critics who say that romance gave way to realism in Canadian novel writing. Thus the Canadian prairie novel is viewed as progressing from romance to realism and, as a more advanced form, realism must be privileged. Ricou does not ask if this generalization applies equally to male and female writers. If subjected to Ricou's

analysis, *The Shadow Riders* and *The Magpie's Nest* are basically realist novels which can be interpreted as romances because of their "romantic" endings. For example, he says, "The realistic account of the rigours of prairie agriculture is . . . betrayed by a sentimental conclusion in Nell Parson's *The Curlew Cried* (1947)" (68). *The Curlew Cried* fulfills most of Ricou's criteria for "good" prairie fiction. The main character is an English woman homesteading on the prairie who finds it foreboding and terrifying for most of the book. These fears are well founded because she and her family face every possible natural disaster: hail, drought, blizzards and grass fires. However, the narrative also contains a romance plot, which Ricou sees as negating the other elements. In this way, Ricou's analysis excludes many more texts written by women than by men because women writers are more likely to use the romance plot than male writers are.

There are other problems with *Vertical Man/Horizontal World*. Ricou's parameters for what constitutes prairie fiction become conspicuously narrow when he discusses the early novels of the prairies (he does expand those parameters when referring to later works). For one thing, he considers only fiction written on the flattest part of the prairie, the "true prairie" or short grass prairie, to be "real" prairie fiction. All fiction from southern Alberta is automatically excluded (this excludes Isabel Paterson's books from prairie writing) as, presumably, is all writing from northern parts of the prairie provinces. Ricou also privileges fiction exclusively and does not take into account the production of other literary forms such as poetry, letters and memoirs. He differs somewhat from

McCourt, who does not limit his discussion to “serious” or “literary” writers, although he does focus on fiction.

The writers who garner the most attention in *Vertical Man/Horizontal World* are Robert Stead, Frederick Philip Grove, Martha Ostenso, Sinclair Ross and W.O. Mitchell. All but Mitchell can be grouped with the prairie realist school. Ross and Mitchell are praised as examples of writers who produce fully developed prairie fiction because they explore universal themes through landscape, and these themes are fully integrated in the works. In *As For Me and My House*, Ricou writes “The reader . . . is both less aware of the prairie and, because it is a continuing experience, more conscious of it. Locale permeates the fabric of the novel as it is internalized, and thus Ross represents both an escape from self-conscious local colour and a much more profound, if unconscious, feeling for place” (90). In Mitchell’s fiction, “man on the prairie looks not only inward, but also to the surrounding vastness. His visual focus on sky and horizon is a metaphor for man’s emotional and intellectual focus on the nature of the infinite, upon that which is normally beyond human comprehension” (95).

Dick Harrison’s *Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction* is the third major work of the environmentalist school. He claims that his analysis differs from both Ricou’s and McCourt’s because he takes culture into account whereas theirs does not. Culture is an important element influencing prairie literature because the earliest non-Native inhabitants of the prairies all came from somewhere else, from Eastern Canada, the United States, or Europe. When they came to the West, the

newcomers had to attempt to make sense of the new land using tools designed for a different country. The prairies were literally an “unnamed country” for which prairie writers had no cultural precedent. Yet, imaginatively, the newcomers to the prairies were still living in a different place.

Like McCourt and Ricou, Harrison believes that the early fiction of the West is romantic and then later becomes realistic, but unlike McCourt and Ricou, he traces the romantic and realistic works as two separate veins of literature. The Romantic period of fiction includes the works of Nellie McClung and Ralph Connor [Charles Gordon]. The land is presented as a garden in these works because the European culture could not deal imaginatively with the prairie landscape. Anglo-Saxon immigrants were from a culture that was particularly maladjusted to a prairie landscape and this is reflected in the fiction written in English. Other ethnic groups had a better time of things but they were not primarily the ones writing. Thus the point of view of the people of the British Isles, what he calls the “dominant minority” on the Prairies, dominates fiction (xiv). Another possibility is that Harrison did not look very hard to find writers from other ethnic groups. George Melynk has recently demonstrated that in the province of Alberta before World War II there were many authors writing in languages other than English, notably French and Icelandic.

Prairie realism followed the Romantic period and “Much of the best fiction in the period of prairie realism, including the work of Ross and McCourt, explores the varied, complex nature of . . . alienation from the land” (102). Prairie realists (and Harrison



privileges this school of writing just as Ricou does despite giving more attention to Romantic writers) reflect their cultural alienation from the land through “a cluster of domestic images suggestive of ruin: the derelict house, the failing patriarch, the stifled mother, the frustrated artist, the culturally starved child” (137). In the prairie realist novels, large Victorian houses are built on the prairie to make their inhabitants feel at home but they do not suit the landscape and they make it even harder to live there. These houses are like ships adrift on the prairie. The “prairie patriarchs” are “filled with righteousness of . . . [their] own purpose, but in fact . . . [are] land-hungry, work-intoxicated tyrant[s]” (90). According to Harrison, one of the most important figures characteristic of prairie realism is the frustrated artist. Philip Bentley in *As For Me and My House* is one of the most prominent examples. Harrison suggests that the frustrated artist and the other numerous symbols of ruin in prairie writing are caused by an inadequate cultural response to the land, rather than by the forbidding aspect of the land itself, as Ricou would argue.

During the twenties, thirties and forties, at the same time as the prairie realists were becoming established, there was a second group of writers which Harrison categorizes as “popular” authors. The most important and popular of the “popular” writers was W.O. Mitchell. Most of these writers were penning works that can be described as comedies, employing Northrop Frye’s definition from *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) (Harrison 164). In these comedic works, there is usually a scapegoat who is driven

out at the end of the book bearing the sins and problems of the community. Following his expulsion, the community is restored to a better state.

In the Romantic school, Harrison says that rural landscapes are presented as inherently better than urban ones. He writes: "The predictable counterpart to this divine natural order is a trivial, corrupt or evil human order, evident whenever the city appears in fiction of this era. The Calgary of Stringer's prairie trilogy or of Stead's *Cow Puncher*, for example, and the cities of Nellie McClung's stories, are areas of exploitation and vice" (33). In prairie realism, the city is not depicted at all – small towns and farms are the main settings. Paterson's books should be classified more with the realist school than the Romantic, despite the elements of romance they contain. This makes her portrayal of Calgary something of an anomaly according to the three major critical works on prairie fiction.

One of the most interesting statements Harrison makes, from the point of view of Paterson's books, is that "Once we begin to look for what is missing from prairie realism we discover some surprising gaps. During the 1930's two national political parties were formed in Saskatchewan and Alberta, yet with the exception of McCourt's *Music at the Close*, these novels give us practically nothing of the very active political life of the time" (181). Isabel Paterson's novels, which actually predate the prairie realists, *are* concerned with the political life of the time. In particular, *The Shadow Riders*, centring on the 1911 election and political machinations connected to land speculation deals in Calgary, is very much concerned with politics. The reader of *Unnamed Country* must ask what actually

constitutes “political” for Harrison. He mentions the absence of novels about the formation of the new political parties without noting that two of the books he does include in his study, Douglas Durkin’s *The Magpie* (1923) and Nellie McClung’s *Purple Springs* (1921), are centred around highly contentious political issues (though not the formation of political parties). *The Magpie* is set during the post-World War I labour strikes in Winnipeg and *Purple Springs* is concerned with the suffragist movement. McClung, as an important first wave feminist, is arguably one of the most political writers Canada produced in the first half of the twentieth century.

Although Harrison would deny a pattern of novel writing in the West treating politics, he devotes considerable time to discussing the tendency of “Canadian prairie fiction . . . to look East toward the centers of civilized order and refinement” (204). Several writers, such as Robert Stead in *The Cowpuncher* and Arthur Stringer in *The Prairie Wife* (1915), describe a marriage between a person from the East and one from the West. This literal marriage, which takes place between two people from two distinct regions of Canada, reflects the symbolic marriage which was taking place as the Canadian West was settled. Troubles in the marriages are the result of cultural differences between the East and West. The cultural marriage between Eastern and Western Canada also had a built-in power imbalance between the two parties because the seat of power always remained in the East. Harrison writes, “The Canadian West was . . . tied in loosely to Confederation with a railroad (and two armies) as a hinterland or a set of colonies of central Canada” (74).

In Isabel Paterson's works, marriage is a recurring theme. In both *The Shadow Riders* and *The Magpie's Nest*, the female protagonists are courted by Eastern businessmen who are in the West to invest money and expand their empires. Harrison's ideas about the cultural differences between East and West have interesting applications in the case of these two novels. So, despite the fact that Harrison's thesis grew out of Ricou's and therefore emphasized the treatment of the rural experience in realist novels, his emphasis on culture is extremely useful for examining *The Shadow Riders* and *The Magpie's Nest*.

The second major critical trend in criticism of prairie literature is the cross-border plains/prairies approach, which looks at the commonality between the literature of the Canadian prairie and the American plains. Within this school of criticism, the two most important plains/prairies critics are Carol Fairbanks and Robert Thacker. The rationale for this approach is that because the two Wests share a common landscape, this landscape shapes both their literatures in similar ways. Plains/prairies criticism grows out of environmentalist criticism and is closely related to it. Thacker, in particular, acknowledges the influence of McCourt, Ricou and Harrison. The plains/prairies critics in a sense carry the ideas of the environmentalist critics to their logical conclusion: if environment is the most important factor shaping the literature of the Canadian prairie region, then the prairie environment should shape the literature of the United States in a similar fashion. The only environmentalist critic whose ideas escape being taken to this

extreme is Dick Harrison, whose emphasis on culture identifies specific settlement patterns and institutions in the Canadian West that shaped culture and literature.

Plains/prairies criticism opposes in some ways the ideas of the environmentalist school because of the environmentalist connection with Canadian nationalism. Prairie literature (and often Canadian literature generally, not to mention culture) is often defined in opposition to the literature of the Western United States. Critics such as Dick Harrison often point to settlement patterns to explain differences in the literature of Western Canada and the Western U.S. According to Frederick Jackson Turner's "frontier thesis" (1893), America was settled as the frontier moved ever westward<sup>6</sup>. This resulted in the fabled lawless "Wild West." On the other hand, when Canada's West was settled, law and order arrived before the settlers, in the form of the N.W.M.P.. The railroad was also built in advance of settlement so infrastructures were already in place before the biggest waves of immigration into Western Canada.

The biggest difference between Canadian and American literature which Dick Harrison points out in his essay "Across the Medicine Line: Problems in Comparing Canadian and American Western Fiction," is that south of the border the dominant literary form was the "Western" novel, a form typified by the work of Zane Grey, (*Riders of the Purple Sage*, 1912 and *Wild Horse Mesa*, 1924) and Owen Wister (*The Virginian*, 1922), while in Canada only the "culturally insane" believed themselves to be living in a "wild" west. The "true" literary form of the Canadian West is that of the prairie realists. According to Harrison, the difference comes from the way in which the Canadian West

was settled: "The prairies were not thought of as the leading edge of a continuously expanding nation [like the American West was] but as a colony developed separately" (51). The authors of the two major plains/prairies studies point out that the Canadian critic who identifies "Westerns" as the characteristic mode of fiction in the prairie U.S. does not look very closely at the literature of this region. Westerns are usually part of the popular literary tradition rather than the "serious" or "literary" tradition, so it is inaccurate to draw direct parallels between American Westerns and prairie realism as characteristic literary forms of their respective countries. In fact, there are many similarities between the serious literature produced on the plains and the prairies.

One strong argument for a cross-border treatment of prairie literature is the conspicuous presence of Wallace Stegner in prairie criticism. Stegner was a dual citizen who grew up in the borderlands region of Southern Saskatchewan and lived most of his adult life in the United States. Critics on both sides of the border claim him because his autobiographical book *Wolf Willow* (1962) provides such an excellent (and quotable) articulation of what it means to live on the plains/prairies. Canadian environmentalist critics usually pass over Stegner's American connection quickly so that his presence in their discussion does not conflict with the subtext of their project, that being national self-definition and nation building through literature.

The first major work of plains/prairies criticism was *Prairie Women: Images of American and Canadian Fiction* (1986) by Carol Fairbanks. This book followed an earlier bibliographical work compiled by Fairbanks and Sara Brooks Sundberg titled

*Farm Women on the Prairie Frontier: A Sourcebook for Canada and the United States* (1983). Carolyn Hlus has observed that in *Farm Women on the Prairie Frontier*, "Items are not separated according to country; the implication is that subjects like the pioneer woman's response to the landscape transcend national boundaries and are dependent instead upon the geographical features shared by both countries" (348). The same observation can be applied to *Prairie Women*. Early in her discussion, Fairbanks states that her "emphasis is on areas that were originally covered by tall grass and that equate closely to present land-use zones classified as over sixty percent arable land. Excluded from the study are ranch country and irrigation communities of the short grass; these semi-arid prairies are usually designated by geographers as high plains rather than prairies" (3). In this way, Fairbanks uses criteria similar to Laurence Ricou's to determine whether books qualify as "prairie" or not. In fact, her study more stringently limits the texts considered by region because, while Ricou merely notes that certain texts, Robert Stead's *Dennison Grant* (1920), for example, do not completely qualify, he discusses them anyway (Ricou 27). Fairbanks, on the other hand, does not discuss any book produced in ranching country.

Apart from the fact that she examines the literary products of two countries, Fairbanks' study differs from environmentalist criticism in one major way: she writes against the image of prairie women as "worn and resigned, but determined," an image which "pervades frontier letters, journals, diaries, memoirs, poems, paintings, popular songs, fiction, travel books, and illustrations" (5). The image of woman as culture-bearer

who responds inappropriately to the landscape by clinging to the culture of another place can be found in many works. For example, in Nell W. Parson's *The Curlew Cried* the protagonist Tory keeps a china tea set in her sod hut to connect her with the cultured life she left behind in England. Fairbanks notes that these images of prairie women, which have been emphasized by literary critics on both sides of the border, are found most often in books written by men. She states that "Women writers minimized or even contradicted the myth of woman as culture-bearer" in their writing (214).

Fairbanks connects the prevalence of the woman as culture-bearer image to the fact that women's writings have been neglected or even lost until fairly recently. She writes, "Some novels have been 'lost' because critics have called them sentimental romances or potboilers. Many such works included in this study have redeeming qualities, primarily because they are rooted in the author's historical research and personal experiences, family histories, and interviews" (29). Fairbanks suggests that gender is an important factor which has shaped both the literature produced on the North American prairies, and the criticism of prairie literature. This is an important element which the environmentalist critics in their studies do not take into consideration.

Isabel Paterson's novels set on the prairie are excluded from Fairbanks' study, because they are not set on the "true prairie." They would also not fit the study because Fairbanks is concerned, as the environmentalist critics are, with the literary presentation of the pioneer experience. However because Fairbanks points out the sexist assumption that gender is not a factor in literary production, an idea which underlies much of the



literary criticism written about the Canadian prairies in the 1970s, her work is useful for examining any neglected work by a woman writer.

Fairbanks echoes earlier environmentalist critics when she says, "In many novels . . . there are references to local, state, and national elections and, depending on the era, to the Civil War in the United States, to the Riel Rebellion in Canada, or to World War I or II. Generally political events involve minor portions of the plot and minor characters" (215). The notable exception to this rule, according to Fairbanks, is Nellie McClung, and here she identifies something that most early critics utterly missed (215-17). By not recognizing the suffragist movement as a political movement, and the granting of the vote to women as a major political milestone, the environmentalist critics again reveal their gender bias; for them, only social and political movements involving men qualify as "political."

The second major work of plains/prairies criticism is Robert Thacker's *The Great Prairie Fact and Literary Imagination* (1989). Like Fairbanks, Thacker includes texts from both Canada and the United States in his study. However, unlike Fairbanks, he does not try to create a critical space for previously excluded or marginalized works. Thacker writes, "while every attempt has been made to base this argument on as broad a survey of prairie writing as possible, much material – from both sides of the prairie borderland – goes undiscussed in favor of a more detailed treatment of established figures, full Canadian and American coverage, and a complete chronology" (ix). He also discusses prose literature exclusively, which Dennis Cooley identifies as a weakness of the work

(81). However, he does discuss visual art, drawing parallels between the painter's and writer's struggle to render the prairie landscape. Thacker, like the Canadian environmentalist critics who influenced him, focuses on landscape: "The representative works examined . . . show that the opening of the prairie to art through its use as setting required as much imaginative and technical adaptation from writers as the landscape did of its settlers . . . For artistic pioneers as well as literal pioneers on the early prairie, clearly, 'the great fact was the land itself'" (183). As is obvious from this quotation, Thacker only examines works that have a rural landscape as their primary setting. *The Great Prairie Fact and Literary Imagination* "identifies several recurring patterns in scores of texts: the search for a vantage point, the prairie as ocean, characters who find themselves by losing themselves on the prairie, and the convention of describing setting before characters are introduced" (Cooley 81). Thacker's argument, therefore, suffers from many of the same weaknesses as studies by environmentalist critics; it looks almost exclusively at established works and how they deal with the problem of the "great prairie fact."

Cooley's 1993 review of *The Great Prairie Fact and Literary Imagination* raises objections to Thacker's book typical of the environmentalist school. His biggest problem with the work is Thacker's "explicit and continued disregard for nationality" (80). Thacker counters Cooley's criticisms by saying he crosses "the forty-ninth parallel . . . to analyse the nationalist assumption in prairie criticism. Far from being benign, such attitudes accentuate difference while ignoring or minimizing similarity" ("Erasing the

Forty-Ninth Parallel” 180-81). Perhaps Thacker’s strongest argument for the need for cross-border studies is made when he says: “Sitting Bull. The North West Mounted Police. Walsh. Here is the point where any closed system defined by the border, north or south, collides with the facts of history: however much our emotions pull, however strong our patriotism might wish it so, such an apprehended ‘closed’ system is not closed – cannot be closed” (“Erasing the Forty-Ninth Parallel” 195).

Thacker, like other critics writing about prairie literature, does not have any problem classifying later novelists such as Margaret Laurence as prairie writers even when their settings are urban rather than rural. The definition of what is “prairie” changes when they talk about later novels. When critics discuss earlier works, they say prairie novels must depict the prairie landscape, but when they discuss more contemporary novels, any literary product of the prairie provinces or the plains states can be included in the “prairie” category. Environmentalist and plains/prairies critics do not have a problem with classifying more recent prairie writers who do not write about landscape primarily as “prairie,” but they say that these works reflect a *development* or *progression* that has taken place. Margaret Laurence is a good novelist with whom to compare Paterson with because even though the characters in Laurence’s Manawaka novels do not necessarily live in Manitoba, the prairie is their “home-place,” the place they return to imaginatively. Stacey, in *The Fire-Dwellers* (1969), lives in Vancouver; and Morag in *The Diviners* (1974) lives in Vancouver, England, and Ontario at various points.

In the last decade, the primary trend in prairie criticism has been a reaction against the environmentalist criticism, even as the environmentalist critics continue to be a dominant critical force. However, instead of coming up with a different totalizing system to describe prairie literature, the anti-environmentalist critics question the ideological basis for the concept of region itself, recognizing region as a “construct,” rather than something that is “natural.” Herb Wyile writes:

Increasingly . . . critics are viewing region and regionalism as constructs rather than as natural formations and recognizing the processes of negotiation, contestation and conflict in forming their definition. That is, they are exploring and questioning not just what constitutes a particular region (the American Midwest, for instance, or the cross-border Great Plains) or a particular regionalism (such as Maritime regionalism or Southern regionalism), but what *region* and *regionalism* themselves mean.  
(x)

He goes on to say that “region, like race, gender, class and sexuality, is not an unproblematic category and must be theorized not in isolation but in relation to other elements central to the construction of subjectivity and of literature” (xii). The most important anti-environmentalist texts published to date include *Making it Home: Place in Canadian Prairie Literature* (1998) by Deborah Keahey; *Land Sliding: Imagining Space, Presence, and Power in Canadian Writing* (1997) by W.H. New; and *A Sense of Place: Re-Evaluating Regionalism in Canadian and American Writing* (1997) edited by Christian Riegel and Herb Wyile. For my purposes, I will add George Melnyk’s *Literary History of Alberta Volume One* (1998) because Melnyk’s history of the literature of one particular prairie province challenges the environmentalist critics merely by its inclusion

of non-canonical texts and by its depiction of the province as a place where literary production was varied, genre-crossing and multi-cultural.

An important thing that all the anti-environmentalist critics have in common is that they question the primacy of the prairie realist school. No one does this as well as Alison Calder in "Reassessing Prairie Realism." She observes that Harrison and the environmentalist critics writing after him fail to raise several important questions:

why is prairie realism so widely accepted as the pinnacle of prairie fiction? . . . What significance should be granted to the fact that the prairies are continually being reportrayed in the classroom as hostile, life-denying, and imaginatively sterile? What does it mean that we usually read and teach only a literature that places the prairies solely in the context of the past? (51)

This last question can be applied to the prairie realists themselves, who were writing about the pioneer experience on a "frontier" that was rapidly being fenced, criss-crossed with roads, and where "by 1911 the urban segment of the population had risen to . . . 38.07 percent in Alberta and 43.43 percent in Manitoba, suggesting that during the great western boom urbanization in these provinces was actually proceeding a bit faster than rural settlement" (Careless 25). Calder also asks, "what happens to the writers of the last fifty years whose works do not fit into a 'realistic' and therefore tragic view of prairie existence?" (51). Change "the last fifty years" to "the last hundred years" and we have our answer embodied in the fate of Isabel Paterson's novels: they are forgotten. Paterson's case is especially interesting in light of Calder's comments because Paterson was, in fact, writing realist fiction but it was not tragic in the "prairie realist" sense; none

of her characters are of the “simple folk learning to suffer on the barren prairie” (Tefs 46) variety.

Calder says that environmentalist critics view the world in prairie realist fiction as a direct reflection of “reality” rather than the fictional construct that it is. She writes,

we see the idea that prairie realism is not fiction but a reflection of a harsh reality; because the prairie is largely presented in these works as a sealed, lifeless, and inevitably doomed region, that is what, to critics, it becomes. The prairie that the prairie realists construct becomes real for these critics, and that constructed prairie is then used as a standard of evaluation to measure other books. (58-9)

This “constructed standard of evaluation” becomes especially harmful because it leads to the complete exclusion of books like Paterson’s. Prairie writing need not be presented in the classroom and elsewhere as reflecting an environment which is “hostile, life-denying, and imaginatively sterile” (Calder 51), but it is.

*A Sense of Place* is an extremely important work because it is “a re-evaluation of regionalism in Canadian and American writing” (Wyile et al. xiv). Two of the essays in the collection, “Towards the Ends of Regionalism” by Frank Davey and “Writing Out of the Gap: Regionalism, Resistance, and Relational Reading” by Marjorie Pryse, deal with the theoretical basis of regionalism.

Frank Davey argues that region and regionalism should be situated in reference to ideologies – such as the nation-state, colonialism, and globalization – rather than by geographical locators. Marjorie Pryse demonstrates how regionalist writing by women and non-dominant men employs strategies of resistance, challenging the dominant culture and inviting readers to experience and identify with the positions of the disenfranchised Other. (Wyile et al. xiv)

David Martin discusses the “kinship” between regionalism and anthropology by looking at the “local colour genre” produced by a regionalist movement . . . [in] the late nineteenth-century United States” (Martin 36). W.M. Verhoeven looks at regionalism in works by Aritha van Herk. Verhoeven discusses how van Herk’s protagonists “continually try . . . to re/invent themselves past the boundaries of their destined regions – the home, the family, the domestic, and, particularly, conventional constructions of Woman” (61). In “Is Newfoundland Inside that T.V.?” Jeanette Lynes examines the relationship between regionalism and postmodernism. She notes that while many regional novels are both regional and postmodern, there are fewer novelists in Atlantic Canada who produce this kind of work (80-81). However, Wayne Johnston is one Atlantic Canadian writer whose “writing bears the stamp of both regionalism and postmodernism, exemplifying a unique intermingling of these two sensibilities” (82). Finally, “Richard Pickard’s essay examines the regionalism of three British Columbia writers in the context of postmodernism and the positioning of region in global monopoly capitalism” (Wyile et al. xiv). This is important because writing about regional literature has too often taken place in isolation, without its practitioners recognizing that the same process is essentially replicated across the country. Recognizing how other regionalisms in the country are constructed makes it easier to see the construction of one’s own region. However, in a review of *A Sense of Place*, Julie Beddoes says that she wishes “someone in this book had questioned perhaps our only unifying national myth, that in this highly urbanized country, region equals rural” (35). It is this questioning that is essential to the inclusion of new

prairie authors in the canon. Without it, writers like Isabel Paterson will remain forever forgotten or marginalized.

Deborah Keahey's *Making it Home: Place in Canadian Prairie Literature* questions the underpinnings of environmentalist criticism and proposes a different model for writing about place in prairie literature where "the home place" is "a powerful centre . . . around which the individual self can orbit and, occasionally, land" (68). She then applies her model to a number of different prairie texts, which are notable for their diversity in terms of genre, gender and race. Providing detailed readings of individual works in *Making it Home*, Keahey does not look to articulate a totalizing system like the earlier critics already discussed. Keahey is suspicious generally of the way regionalism is theorized in critical writing about the prairies. At the same time as Keahey is critical of the environmentalist critics, she is also careful to distance her analysis from post-colonial criticism, an area with which many recent Canadian scholars theorizing regionalism align themselves. David M. Jordan (*New World Regionalism*, 1994) is one critic who employs post-colonial theory to look at western Canadian regionalism.

Keahey has a more inclusive idea of regionalism but points out that "the concept of 'the Prairies' as a region is not so much inherent *in* the texts of 'Prairie literature' as it is constructed and imposed *on* the literature" (9). A major fault of the environmentalist critics is that they do not recognize region as a construct. Keahey writes:

To say that the Prairie region, like other regions or even nations, is not "natural" but invented, is not to say, however, that it does not exist. As a popular, political, economic, and critical category, it is widely used and accepted and thus takes on a life of its own, with its own performative



function in continuing to actually *create* that which it supposedly only *names*. For instance, in addition to the three major studies of Prairie literature that I have mentioned, there are also a number of literary anthologies and collections of essays that create and solidify the identity of Prairie literature as a literary "field." (9)

Keahey's analysis is very useful on many levels. For one thing, she is careful not to privilege the prairie realists, although she does include them. However, in some ways Keahey seems to be throwing the baby out with the bath water. Despite her careful protests to the contrary, she comes very close to a complete denial of region as a shaping force in writing. Further, Beddoes writes that Keahey's "main topic, how literature enacts, describes, constructs, a sense of being at home, is nebulous and . . . disappears from sight much of the time" (36). Keahey also rejects many of the things Harrison and others identify in terms of image patterns, things that can be very valuable and interesting without necessarily being used as part of a traditional thematic critique. Often, the patterns the environmentalists note *are* present in prairie writing, though perhaps only in a select group of texts. It would be very interesting to ask why certain images appear in one set of texts and not in others, but Keahey does not take this tack. For example, what does it mean that the heroine's father is completely absent in *The Shadow Riders*? If there is no prairie patriarch, what is Paterson doing that Ostenso is not – or vice versa?

It is important to realize that while Keahey re-reads canonical prairie texts such as *Wild Geese* and *As For Me and My House* and brings "into critical discussion a much wider canon of work than has conventionally been studied" (Beddoes 36), she does not try to expand the older canon by recovering or re-reading non-canonical texts. This is

tantamount to feminist critics questioning the inclusion of only male writers in the canon and re-reading those male texts from a feminist perspective without looking for the women writers who were lost in the original canonization process.

Keahey is concerned with the individual ways in which a group of authors write back to, around, and out of, their home places. She defines place as more than a physical region:

Just as the sense of place itself can be variously constructed, so the *place* of place in relation to home is multiple. In one version, itself multiple, the home place appears as a powerful centre – physical, imaginary, psychological, or emotional – around which the individual self can orbit and, occasionally, land. The “pull” of home reveals itself in the tensions between arrivals and departures, presences and absences, desires and fulfillments, attractions and repulsions. Like gravity, this sense of home is often visible only through its effects. It is a force, a form of energy, as much as a substantial entity, but this force is generated by two “massive,” attracted, even massively attracted, objects, and in this case the subject-object, the object that is granted subjectivity within the literary work, usually calls the other object “home.” [...] What constitutes the home place, then, Berger’s “center of the real,” may be thought of as something with great metaphorical weight or mass *vis-à-vis* the literary subject. (68)

Keahey’s idea of place as the “center of the real” is taken from the writings of John Berger, who in fact adopted it from comparative religion specialist Mircea Eliade. Berger writes, “Originally home meant the center of the world—not in a geographical, but in an ontological sense . . . Without a home at the center of the real, one was not only shelterless, but also lost in non-being, in unreality. Without a home everything was fragmentation” (56). He adds that when one was at home, one was “at the starting point and, hopefully, the returning point of all terrestrial journeys” (56). The idea of the “center of the real” is extremely useful in the analysis of Isabel Paterson’s novels. The “center of

the real” for Paterson’s characters is the Canadian West and this makes *The Magpie’s Nest* a prairie novel even when the setting is Seattle or New York because Hope Fielding’s internal compass always points to “the Great Northwest.” Although this is less of an issue in *The Shadow Riders*, when Eileen leaves Calgary for Montreal, her goal is always to return to Alberta in triumph. For Eileen too the prairies remain her “center of the real.”

Interestingly, Keahey’s model of region and place in literature is more friendly to the inclusion of Paterson’s novels than it is to earlier regional novels where the characters’ “center of the real” is in Eastern Canada or Europe. Paterson’s books in many ways have more in common with the contemporary writers Keahey discusses than they do with other realist novels written in the twenties and thirties. This is because prairie realist novels depict the experience of the first generation of prairie pioneers whereas Paterson’s protagonists are the children of pioneers, a generation for whom the landscape is no longer alien and threatening. Paterson’s characters leave the familiar prairie landscape, just as she did, in search of greener pastures and new frontiers. However, the prairie landscape remains their most important internal landscape, their “center of the real.”

Published after *Making it Home*, W.H. New’s *Land Sliding: Imagining Space, Presence, and Power in Canadian Writing* is one of the most interesting books about Canadian literature published in the last decade. New’s approach is interdisciplinary. He discusses historical texts and books from the social sciences, and illustrates his points

with paintings and other visual art. However, the main focus is on literature. New examines the whole of Canadian literature and how “land” and ideas surrounding it have been constructed. The background of his project is the obsession of Canadian thematic critics with the landscape, but instead of accepting “landscape” as a natural neutral referent, he examines how our very ideas of land are constructed; they are the political base on which thematic criticism is built. In the introduction to *Land Sliding*, New writes: “I am concerned in this book, then, not so much to explain what ‘land’ is – to tabulate the dimensions of Canada, the statistics of ownership, the chronology of expansion – as to explain how various *configurations of land* function in literature (and so in Canadian culture at large) to question or confirm configurations of power” (5).

New’s entire book is useful for a discussion of prairie regionalism because environmentalist theories rely on the notion that the prairie landscape is “natural” and there to be encountered, acting on the people who encounter it. New’s study points out that the way Canadians construct their landscapes is, and always has been, political. For example, New discusses how

The images of “garden” and “wilderness,” . . . which recur in [very early] writing[s about Canada, or “contact literature”] as well as in pictures of explorers traversing and taming savage lands – are not simple, objective references to a neutral empirical reality. They are *tropes*, or figurative ways of conveying attitudes and ideas. Such terms describe *territory*, clearly, but they also embody expectations about “nature,” and attitudes which over the course of time have come to express a complex set of relations between fertility (as in the phrase “Mother Nature”) and law (as in the phrase “Natural Justice”). (26)

Notions of “land” have been constructed in our literature since its earliest inception and have continued to be constructed throughout the twentieth century. In the chapter “Landed,” which examines constructions of region, New writes, “Topography and climate constitute the simple descriptive elements that critics and sociologists alike have declared to be much more than superficial markers of regional difference. And geographical determinism is too simplistic to be an adequate explanation of behaviour” (151). “Geographical determinism” is therefore too simplistic an explanation for what influences prairie writers.

New’s analysis cracks open all of the assumptions that underlie thematic criticism and environmentalist prairie criticism. If the Canadian “land” has been variously constructed over the centuries, then the “prairie landscape” is not quietly lying in the western half of our country waiting to be reflected accurately or inaccurately in our literature. Prairie writers are always actively re-constructing the landscape or regional environment. The way Sinclair Ross portrays the prairie as a harsh and threatening place is no more accurate than that of earlier writers who described it as lush garden. Both versions of the prairie landscape are merely different literary constructs of a geographical region. Therefore, Isabel Paterson’s novels cannot be excluded from the canon for failing to reflect the same constructed landscape as the prairie realists do. The fact that Paterson uses the urban prairie for the setting of her two earliest novels is not, as the environmentalist school would say, a failure on her part to recognize the “true” prairie landscape. The fact that she writes primarily about the city means that Paterson has re-

constructed the prairie landscape to include urban areas, not that she has failed to apprehend the rural ones.

Paterson constructs the prairie in *The Shadow Riders* and *The Magpie's Nest* as a place where the first generation of pioneers has already settled the land and it is no longer threatening to the people who have grown up there. When she uses the rural prairie landscape, it is the ranching country in the foothills of southern Alberta. In the foothills, the "true prairie," where Laurence Ricou says people focus on "erecting" things, is visible but rolling hills and the Rocky Mountains are also part of the scene. Thus, Paterson's novels describe a different landscape than the prairie realists, but they do not describe an unrealistic or inauthentic landscape.

George Melnyk's *The Literary History of Alberta Volume One: From Writing-on-Stone to World War Two* (1998) deserves a special place in this critical survey because it is the first time since the 1940s that Isabel Paterson's novels received more than a sentence of critical mention. Of *The Shadow Riders* and *The Magpie's Nest* Melnyk writes, "Paterson's work is refreshing in that it offers an urban image of Alberta, beyond the fantastic world of the N.W.M.P., Indians, and settlers" (85).

In his introduction, Melnyk states that "The role of writers in our history may be even less obvious than the distant oceans, because writers form the forgotten underpinning of our cultural consciousness" (xv). This is a strong argument indeed for writing the literary history of Alberta, and particularly applicable in Paterson's case. She has literally been forgotten and so we have also lost her fictional rendering of Calgary

and its culture from the 1910s. In addition to Paterson, Melnyk notes other “lost” writers such as Winnifred Eaton Babcock Reeve (who published many of her books under the pen name “Onoto Watanna”), Flos Jewell Williams, and Charlotte Gordon. Writers like Robert Stead and Nellie McClung who are already part of the canon are also included in the study, as are non-fiction writers and writers who wrote in other languages.

*The Literary History of Alberta* is an important first look at the lost literary heritage of the prairies. However, some inaccuracies in Melnyk’s book reveal the elementary stage the scholarship is in. For example, Agnes Deans Cameron is identified as an American (she was from Victoria) (77), and consulting *Who’s Who and Why in Canada and Newfoundland* from 1912 would have revealed this fact.

Melnyk’s ground-breaking study begins the process of re-reading forgotten or neglected prairie texts, something the anti-environmentalist critics like Keahey and Calder have not done. They have so far re-read older canonical texts, such as *As For Me and My House*, and included new ones from various genres that would have been excluded in the past, but for the most part little re-reading of forgotten texts has been done.

In many ways, *The Literary History of Alberta*’s most important contribution to prairie criticism is that it points to how much work is yet to be done. For example, Birk Sproxtton notes that “Some organizational strain appears . . . when Melnyk describes Nellie McClung, Ralph Connor [Charles Gordon] and Laura Salverson as ‘Alberta’ writers” (69). To my mind, this points to the need for a literary history of the Prairie

Provinces to be written. *The Literary History of Alberta* does the important work of cataloguing the literary products of the province of Alberta but it does not put them into the larger context of the Canadian West or the West in general.

In the following two chapters, Paterson's *The Shadow Riders* and *The Magpie's Nest* will undergo the re-examination that *The Literary History of Alberta* encourages. Of the critical works that have been discussed in this chapter, Dick Harrison's *Unnamed Country* and Deborah Keahey's *Making It Home* will be the most useful for examining Paterson's novels. Harrison's ideas about the importance of Eastern and Western culture will be brought to bear on both novels. However, instead of the characters having an internalized Eastern cultural perspective, they will be shown to have a Western cultural perspective. Paterson's heroines have the distinctive ranching culture they grew up with as their primary point of reference. As Keahey would say, the West is their "center of the real."

*The Shadow Riders* and *The Magpie's Nest* will also be put into the context of both the Canadian West and the West in general. Paterson's characters are interested in frontiers. The idea of the frontier is usually viewed by Canadian critics as important only in the American cultural context. In 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner first articulated "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." Turner stated, "American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West" (1). Paterson's characters do not see any distinctions between the Canadian and American halves of the "Great West" and the movement toward new frontiers is an important theme in Paterson's



work. However, unlike the plains/prairies critics who focus on the West as a geographical region, in *The Shadow Riders* and *The Magpie's Nest* Paterson shows the West to be just as important as a region of the mind.

## Chapter Two: The Marriage of East and West in *The Shadow Riders*

Isabel Paterson's 1916 novel *The Shadow Riders* opens with a train pulling into a station:

Three short warning blasts of a locomotive whistle floated out of the Eastward darkness like an echo from the unseen hills; a pinprick of light appeared, grew to the size of a candle flame and then to a great white hot moon. With a clamour of bells and thunderous iron wheels the Imperial Limited – the Canadian Transcontinental Express – drew in, and lay alongside the long wooden platform puffing vaingloriously and glaring ahead at a switchman who crossed a black waste of cinders netted with shining rails to throw the semaphore, swinging his red lantern. (9)

Ross Whittemore, one of the main characters, emerges from the train and proceeds into the urban landscape of pre-World War I Calgary. He turns onto Stephen Avenue “where a crowd blocked the pavement beneath a huge white bulletin board whose changing legends, announcing the varying political temperature of the district” the man who met him at the station had “paused to read” (12). In this opening passage the train, a machine created and run by humans, is the focus of the scene; the human world predominates.

Compare *The Shadow Riders*' opening with that of another prairie novel:

Here was the least common denominator of nature, the skeleton requirements simply, of land and sky – Saskatchewan prairie. It lay wide around the town, stretching tan to the far line of the sky, shimmering under the June sun and waiting for the unfailing visitation of wind, gentle at first, barely stroking the long grasses and giving them life; later, a long hot gusting that would lift the black topsoil and pile it in barrow pits along the roads, or in deep banks against the fences. (Mitchell 3)

These sentences from the opening of W.O. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind* (1947) show the prairie as we have become accustomed to visualizing it. The land is almost barren, the wind is in control and the natural world dominates. People are present only on

the edge of the scene in “the town” that the prairie surrounds. In the prairie novel as we have come to think of it, even when people are present, they are at the mercy of the elements.

The first scene of Frederick Philip Grove’s *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925) provides a second contrast to Paterson’s novel: two men are “fighting their way through the gathering dusk” (15). As they walk, Grove describes their physical countenance, but the environment, not the men, is again in control. Just as in Mitchell’s novel, the wind is the most powerful element in the scene: “The wind came in fits and starts, out of the hollow north-west: and with the engulfing dark an ever thickening granular shower of snow blew from the low-hanging clouds. As the trail became less and less visible, the very ground underfoot seemed to slide to the south-east” (15-16). The people have so little control that they cannot direct even their footsteps.

The opening of *The Shadow Riders*, then, establishes the urban setting of the book – obviously the city of Calgary given the street names and landmarks. Because Whittemore arrives on an election day, a second major feature of the novel is revealed: the interlinked political machinations and business dealings of the characters drive the plot. Throughout her life, Isabel Paterson was passionate about politics. Commentary on political events featured prominently in her column for the *New York Herald Tribune*, “Turns With a Bookworm,” and culminated in *The God of the Machine*.

For her earliest-published novel,<sup>7</sup> Paterson chose an explicitly political theme. Whittemore once aspired to a political career as a Liberal. A wealthy Anglophone from

Montreal who is visiting the West, he has a number of acquaintances and business associates in Calgary. These men are also wealthy Easterners who have come West to advance themselves materially and socially, something they may not have been able to do as easily in their home cities. Ross has come to Calgary to check on one of his investments, a power plant that he partially owns, and to visit his nephew Chan Herrick, who is recovering in the dry climate from typhoid-pneumonia.

In the opening scenes, the reader witnesses an altercation between Eileen Conway and Harry Garth. Eileen, it is implied, is pregnant but Harry refuses to marry her because he is already engaged to a woman in the East, a match that is more socially and financially advantageous than one with Eileen. Eileen and Harry's relationship introduces the theme of marriage in the novel. Most of the marriages in *The Shadow Riders* are portrayed as shallow matches of convenience originally made to further both partners socially. The marriage theme also connects the social relationships to the political and business theme: just as many of the actual marriages involve one partner from Eastern Canada and one from the West, the people involved in business relationships try to effect a marriage between Eastern wealth and social connections and Western natural resources and raw potential.

The first half of *The Shadow Riders* focuses on the relationship between Chan and Lesley Johns. The pair, who live next door to each other, become friends. Chan visits Lesley often at her boarding house. On these visits he also sees Amy Cranston, Lesley's married landlady whose husband is often out of town. Chan reluctantly begins to carry on

a casual, adulterous affair with Amy whenever Lesley leaves the room. Lesley, however, develops feelings for Chan, although he does not reciprocate them at this point.

Just as a married woman pursues Chan, a married man named Jack Addison, whom Lesley has no interest in, chases the latter. Along with Ross, Chan and several other businessmen, Jack is involved in a streetcar and land speculation deal. The deal eventually falls through after the city council fails to grant the group a development permit.

In this first section of the novel, Lesley meets Eileen Conway for the first time (although she has heard rumblings at the newspaper that the other woman is "in trouble") when Eileen faints in front of Lesley's house. Lesley carries Eileen inside and revives her. In the few minutes they spend together, the two women form a bond. Shortly after this event, Eileen is sent away by her family to hide her shame. Meanwhile, Lesley, who has worked for several years to save enough money to go to college in Eastern Canada, experiences her own disappointments. When her mother falls ill, Lesley must spend all her savings to finance a recuperative trip to California for her mother.

The second half of *The Shadow Riders* initially centres on Eileen and Ross. It is set mainly in the West but some early parts take place in the East. While in Montreal, Ross goes to his doctor for minor throat surgery and meets Eileen who is working as a nurse. He remembers her from Calgary but she does not recognize him, because they never officially met. Ross, who has just been offered the appointment of Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, proposes to Eileen and she accepts. Their marriage is one of mutual

convenience at the beginning, a marriage only consummated after they have been married two years. They return to the West where the same "society" people who gossiped openly and cruelly about her illegitimate pregnancy bow and scrape before Eileen because she is now their social superior. Back in Alberta, Eileen renews her acquaintance with Lesley and they become close friends.

The main event driving the plot in the second half of *The Shadow Riders* is the reciprocity election campaign (which historically took place in 1911, although Paterson does not stick strictly to this date) in which Chan wins a seat in parliament. Unbeknownst to him, this victory is brought about largely by Lesley, who suppresses a set of letters that the opposition unearthed linking him to the streetcar deal (which involved bribing municipal politicians) earlier in the book.

*The Shadow Riders* concludes in the fall of 1914 after Chan has been an M.P. for two years. He returns to Calgary and discovers that Lesley will soon leave for a newspaper job in Chicago. A dance is held in the city and all the main characters attend. Harry Garth is there with his new wife. After speaking to Harry, Eileen and Ross go home where they finally declare their love to each other. At the same dance, Chan realizes that he loves Lesley and they finally confess their feelings for each other when he goes to visit her the next morning. The novel ends happily but the reader is left wondering what will happen to Chan and Lesley because we assume she is still going to Chicago and he is heading off to war.

In *Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction*, Dick

Harrison states that "Canadian prairie fiction has always tended to look East toward the centres of civilized order and refinement" (204). In Harrison's view, the "struggle" in what he calls "The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction" comes from the fact that the Eastern culture was not adapted to the Western landscape. In *The Shadow Riders* the main character Lesley does not experience any problems associated with her internalized "culture" being at odds with the external surroundings. She is of the second generation of settlers to the West, the daughter of pioneers. However, the culture Paterson depicts in early Calgary is very much an Eastern transplant. All of the characters look East to central Canada, or further still to Britain for their cultural touchstones.

This gazing Eastward can be said to be characteristic of all Western literature, both Canadian and American. Writing about the popular "Western" genre, typified by Zane Grey novels and John Wayne movies, Jane Tompkins says that the classic Western hero reacts against the forces of Eastern order and culture and what is portrayed as the hypocrisy they represent (73). The popular American Western, then, reacts against Eastern order while the Canadian prairie novel tries to maintain the Eastern culture in the new settlement of the West. The manifestation may be different but the impulse is the same; in both cases the Western gaze is firmly focused on the East.

The plot of *The Shadow Riders* focuses on the interaction of East and West when Eastern culture-bearers, mainly Ross Whittemore and Chan Herrick, come to Calgary. This is different from the stereotype of women as culture-bearers that Carol Fairbanks

refutes in *Prairie Women* because the culture-bearers in *The Shadow Riders* are men. The business, political and personal relationships in the novel are created at the intersection of East and West. On all three levels, Paterson depicts the uneasy courtship dance between East and West.

The two main female characters, Lesley and Eileen, are Westerners who provide a contrast with the Eastern elements. Lesley, in particular, is presented as an ideal Westerner and a true representative of her culture: she is young and intelligent with rural roots. When Lesley and Chan first become friends, he assumes she is American because she is not like other (Eastern) Canadians he knows. This is not an unreasonable assumption given the large number of transplanted Americans living in Calgary at the time.<sup>8</sup> Instead, she reveals that she “was born here . . . in this province, in a little sod-roofed shack near Fort Macleod” (57). Chan responds, “Perhaps that is why you are different, . . . ‘Not like the Eastern girls, I mean’” (57). Lesley is also unlike the Eastern girls because she rides astride on a Western saddle rather than sidesaddle on an English one. Additionally, Lesley works in a newspaper office and she is also the only woman Chan has ever known who works for a living.

The most interesting thing that Lesley reveals in the passage where she tells Chan where she is from is that she believes she has no history. She directs him “You tell me one of the histories [you have imagined for me] and I’ll adopt it. I have no history” (57). This statement pre-figures statements by Wallace Stegner who, reflecting on his Saskatchewan childhood in *Wolf Willow*, writes, “In general the assumption of all of us,



child or adult, was that this was a new country and that a new country had no history. History was something that applied to other places" (28). This idea is echoed by Robert Kroetsch several decades later when he writes, "We feel a profound ambiguity about the past – about both its contained stories and its modes of perception" (5). Kroetsch also laments the fact that prairie-dwellers have lived in a kind of cultural void where their history has been forgotten and must now be recovered by artists who act as archaeologists digging for their collective past (7).

Lesley's experience of growing up with little money on a ranch near Fort Macleod is what sets her apart culturally from Chan and the other wealthy Easterners in the novel. The ranch culture she grew up in is substantially different from the homesteading culture usually depicted in well-known prairie novels. Ronald Rees discusses ranching and ranch culture, which he contrasts with homesteading culture, in *New and Naked Land* (1988). He argues that ranching is better adapted to the high plains of Western North America than farming (149). This may explain why a fear of the landscape and natural environment is reflected in literature about farming but not in literature about ranching. A drought, hail storm or plague of grasshoppers would be more likely to destroy a field of wheat than they would a herd of cattle. This fear is also notably absent from *The Shadow Riders*, a novel that grows out of the ranching environment and has ranching as its main character's historical background. The same can also be said of *The Magpie's Nest* (1917), Paterson's second novel, which is discussed in the next chapter.

According to Rees, ranching culture is characterized by movement, individualism and independence (151). This comes from the very activities associated with ranching itself: moving on horseback with herds of stock in search of good grazing, shelter and water (145-6). Ranchers were likely to have had their own start up money, as opposed to homesteaders who were much more reliant on the benevolence of the state to give them land and sometimes supplies (139). Ranching culture is much more concerned with self-reliance as a virtue and remains so to this day.<sup>9</sup>

The movement and individualism associated with ranching culture can best be seen in the character of Lesley in *The Shadow Riders*. Lesley moved from the family ranch to Fort Macleod and Calgary to work, migrating from a rural to an urban world, taking the opposite path of the one her parents' generation took when they came to the West. At the beginning of the novel, she is saving money to go to college in Montreal. When her mother falls ill and Lesley must use her savings to send Mrs. Johns to California to recover, Lesley steadfastly refuses to accept money from Chan to go to school; she is much too self-reliant for that. On the other hand, Chan, the wealthy Easterner, has never had to work for a living and has inherited all his money.

Literary criticism has privileged homesteading culture and the literature portraying it over ranching literature and culture despite the fact that there has been no dearth of writing on ranching. Ranching seems to have especially inspired poetry, at a time in Alberta's literary history when there was otherwise little poetry being produced. According to George Melnyk, "Poetry was published extensively in newspapers and

periodicals, but its appearance in volume form was sparse" between 1905 and 1919 (95). Rhoda Sivell's *Voices From the Range* (1912) is but one example of ranching poetry published in book form. According to Rees, the editor of the Fort McLeod *Gazette* "had to turn away poetry in praise of ranching and the ranch country for fear of 'getting mobbed' by unsolicited submissions" (136). Ranching has also provided the backdrop for prose writers. For example, Winnifred Eaton's novels *Cattle* (1923) and *His Royal Nibs* (1925) are set on ranches near Cochrane, while Flos Jewell Williams' *Fold Home* (1950) is set on a ranch south of Calgary.

Possibly criticism of prairie writing has overlooked ranching literature because it has been found mainly in only one province, Alberta, with some examples from southern Saskatchewan, such as Stegner's *Wolf Willow*. Another possibility is that ranching and cowboy culture has been seen as "too American" and events like the Calgary Stampede the product of a kind of cultural wishful thinking that pretends Canada had a wild western frontier like the United States did. Cowboy culture did indeed move up from the United States, and, during the time before the Northwest Territory even had fences, the Canada-U.S. border was not even an imaginative reality for ranchers in southern Alberta. Stegner writes that in his own childhood, divided between the two countries, "We ignored the international boundary in ways and to degrees that would have been impossible if it had not been a line almost completely artificial" (83). However, while ranching methods connected to handling livestock were adopted from the U.S., the society connected with ranching was much more closely tied to the British nobility. Rees points out that ranching

in Western Canada was an Anglo-Canadian occupation connected to nobility because of the capital required for start up (139). Many of the big ranches in Alberta were started up by remittance men or gentlemen looking for adventure (Rees 137-141). In one famous example, the Prince of Wales fell in love with the ranch country while on vacation and bought a ranch, called the Prince of Wales ranch, that he ran from afar.

The connection between ranching and the Anglo-Canadian upper class is reflected in *The Shadow Riders*, although it is not the case with Lesley's family. It is seen when Ross casually tells Chan, "I've bought the Chatfield ranch . . . and you might keep an eye on that for me" (194). Ross stays at the ranch on a casual basis, treating it like a kind of summer cottage rather than a way of life or a necessary source of income.

Like Lesley, the character of Eileen is also depicted as a product of the West but she is not the ideal Westerner that Lesley is. Her father is a judge and Eileen was raised in the city, rather than in rural Alberta as Lesley was. This origin leaves her more vulnerable than Lesley because she is involved in Calgary's polite society where her value is measured chiefly by the kind of marriage she is able to make.<sup>10</sup> Her affair with Harry Garth renders her valueless in the marriage market. This is different from Lesley's situation because her actions are not as closely monitored and noted by parents and society as Eileen's are. As a virtual unknown who comes from a rural ranch, Lesley enjoys more freedom and autonomy than Eileen does. This is not to say that she would not be socially devalued if she had an affair similar to Harry and Eileen's, but her social value and identity are more closely tied to the work she does at the newspaper than to her

marriageability. That Lesley's personal identity is more closely connected to her intellectual goals and abilities is driven home in the first half of *The Shadow Riders* when she realizes she will not have the money to go to college in Montreal. This is disappointing but not devastating because she ultimately achieves the goal she set out to reach by going to college: she becomes a journalist. By contrast, Eileen's big disappointment comes when Harry refuses to marry her and thus ruins her reputation. This ultimately leaves Eileen exiled in Montreal pursuing a nursing career, ironically the place where Lesley had hoped to attend school so she could pursue a journalism career.

But ultimately, Lesley has more power as a woman than Eileen because her worth is based on her intellect and ingenuity rather than her ability to attract and keep a man. This is particularly true in the first half of *The Shadow Riders* after Harry has cast Eileen aside. Lesley is sitting on her front steps in the dark when Eileen comes walking down the street: "when the solitary figure, starting violently at sight of her, screamed faintly and dropped to the sidewalk, Lesley found herself singularly self-possessed" (47). Chan, we later learn, also witnesses the scene from his window next door. However, it is Lesley, not Chan, who "rescues" Eileen by scooping her up and carrying her into the house: "Lesley slipped an arm under her shoulders, raised the prostrate form deftly, and kicking the gate open with her foot, went up the short walk with stumbling speed" (47). Lesley's appropriation of the male role reflects the power she has relative to Eileen in the novel. When Lesley "saves" Eileen she appropriates the male role, which is later Ross's. In fact, her actions pre-figure Ross's later in the novel. Lesley saves Eileen from despair and

from the suicidal thoughts that follow her that night, and imagines “this unhappy creature, looking at the midnight river, longing for the silent obscurity of it, beaten by its darkness and mystery and the stark loneliness of death, walking for hours dogged by her own terrible and despairing thoughts” (49). Lesley saves Eileen from despair and perhaps death, just as Ross later saves her from social death when he marries her to “give her back her opportunities” (229).

However, this is not to say that Lesley has the same freedom and autonomy that the men around her possess. Lesley is, in fact, very aware of the limitations society imposes on women’s freedom. For example, Jack Addison, a married man with children, freely and openly pursues extra-marital affairs. He tells Lesley that he talks to her simply because he wants to: “His enthusiasm about doing as he pleased was really refreshing. ‘I don’t know — [I talked to you] because I wanted to. Don’t you do what you want to?’ he inquired.” Lesley responds, “‘I don’t think women can, much,’” (40). On another occasion, while talking to Chan, Lesley much more forcefully expresses her displeasure that, as a woman, she is denied political power because she is denied the vote: “I was born disinherited, wasn’t I? ‘Women, and Indians, and lunatics,’ my chivalrous and just country’s laws mention. Do I get a foot of all this land? Or a word of what’s to be done with it? I do not. My brother does, not me. I get my head and my hands” (89).

However, Lesley gets around the male power structures that deny her the right to vote and inherit property. Just as she appropriates the male role when she rescues Eileen, Lesley appropriates the male voice on the newspaper where she works. After stints in the

circulation department and writing a humour column under the pseudonym "Mary Jane," Lesley gets a chance to become a serious journalist. The editor, a man named Cresswell, gets drunk and writes an incomprehensible editorial piece. Lesley re-writes his garbled copy and the editor realizes what has happened the next day. He offers her a promotion – to ghostwriter: "I've already told the circulation manager that you belong to me exclusively henceforth. I'm damned if I didn't think I had written that until I found my own notes on my desk – and couldn't read 'em. You're my assistant now, and can do all the work, and I'll take the credit. Will you do it?" (178). She agrees to the arrangement but points out, "if any one knows I write them [the editorials], you know they won't pay the least attention to them" (178). However, with Cresswell's name on them, Lesley's editorial writings are definitely influential. In fact, her pieces and behind-the-scenes political maneuverings are instrumental in getting Chan elected when he runs in the federal election. Lesley does much more to effect the outcome of the political process than any one man who has the right to vote.

The relatively powerless positions of Eileen and Lesley are sharply contrasted with the freedom the male characters enjoy. For example, Eileen's affair with Harry and her subsequent pregnancy force her to retreat into exile in disgrace. On the other hand, although Harry's male business acquaintances are disgusted by his behavior, they do not ostracize him. In fact, they do not even tell his fiancé or her family what he has done: "He [Walter Burrage] was torn between a desire to cook Garth's goose for him by seeing that the story reached the family of his fiancée, and mere masculine *laissez aller*, obedience to

the code of not telling on another man. Of course he chose the latter course, and held to it" (70). Eileen is exiled to Montreal but Harry's life does not change at all.

Chan also enjoys much more freedom than Lesley, because of both his gender and his wealth and class. While for Lesley, higher education becomes an impossible goal and traveling freely is also unlikely, Chan is free to play at college and seek adventure at will:

Chan had come back to a Canadian college, sauntered back to Germany to sample Heidelberg and decided that hairsplitting over the cosmogony did not suit his temperament, returned to Montreal and played at banking a little while . . . dropped that and attached himself to a Canadian arctic exploring party to shoot a musk ox – which he missed – and had come home again to succumb ingloriously to a Quebec winter and go into exile in the West. (60)

The fact that the Easterners in the novel view the West as a place of exile is emphasized in *The Shadow Riders* and is central to their experience there. Chan goes West to recover from an illness. Ross also describes Alberta as a place of exile when he tells Chan, "I would never have asked you to exile yourself out here to do this for me [run my company] if circumstances hadn't brought it about" (27-8). At another time he refers to the West as a "No-Man's Land" (22). For the Easterners in *The Shadow Riders*, the West is a place of exile because it is far from Ontario and Quebec, Canada's centers of culture and political power.

This view of the West is the one reflected in many prairie novels, Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House* and Nell Parsons' *The Curlew Cried*, for example. It is also the view of the West focused on by critics like Dick Harrison who emphasize the inability of Eastern culture to deal imaginatively with the West – to see it as anything other than a



place of exile. Harrison points out the difficulty Anglophone pioneers had adapting to the new land: "It seems . . . that the culture they brought with them, including certain of their attitudes, ideals, and institutions, was ill-designed to encourage adaptation" (18). In *The Shadow Riders* the Easterners are not pioneers but they still experience their time in the West as exiles, albeit to a lesser extent because they have the financial means to leave whenever they choose.

However, Paterson does not depict the West exclusively as a place of exile in *The Shadow Riders*. As we have seen, for the two main female characters, Lesley and Eileen, the West is home. Even as she desires to move East to further her education and career, Lesley's "center of the real" remains in Alberta, and she never thinks of it as a place of exile even after she discovers she cannot go to college. For Eileen, Alberta is also the "center of the real." She leaves town in the middle of the night after her parents learn what happened with Harry. Burrage reports to Ross: "Jimmy Buskirk said he saw her taking the morning train East.' The morning train went at two a.m. 'Her brother saw her off. Her mother says Eileen's gone away to study music!'" (69). Of course, she goes away to have a baby that does not survive and eventually she studies nursing in Montreal. Although Quebec is in Central Canada, Eileen views her time there as a period of exile because she is away from her home in the West. She always yearns to return to Calgary in triumph. Speaking to Lesley after she is established as the Lieutenant Governor's wife, Eileen asks, "'Didn't I eat my heart out in exile for this?'" (278).

The West is often depicted as a place of exile away from culture in prairie writing because for characters born in Europe or in the East home remains elsewhere, even after they have spent years in the West. However, for Lesley and Eileen, the West remains home so they do not think of it as a place of exile.

Whether Calgary is seen as home or hinterland, many aspects of this Western city are shown to be Eastern transplants. Specifically, the politics, business and workings of polite society have their roots in the East. Furthermore, politics, business dealings and society are all interconnected in Paterson's novel. Of course, these interconnections are class-specific as well as being characteristic of urban rather than rural life. Lesley, whose family is not wealthy and who comes from a rural background, is on the edges of all three structures. She writes about politics and works behind scenes but she is not a member of a political party (Chan and Ross are both Liberals), nor can she vote. In terms of business, Lesley invests two hundred dollars in the streetcar scheme but she does not know what has even become of the money for most of the book. Finally, Lesley is a working woman and is involved in the teas, horse shows and dances that are part of society only when Eileen persuades her to attend.

The fact that Lesley participates even in these limited ways in powerful business, political and social circles reflects an openness in Alberta society that is more marked than that in the East. Historically, Calgary society was much more inclusive in the early twentieth century than that of Eastern cities. Max Foran writes, "In the absence of

tradition and heritage, entry to Calgary's upper class depended primarily on financial success" (*Calgary: An Illustrated History* 84).

While Western society may be more open than that of the East, the politics of the West are shown to be controlled by Easterners. The by-election in chapter one is the first of three elections in *The Shadow Riders*. The first election is significant because the Conservative candidate who wins, Edward Folsom, is an old friend of Ross's, a man from the East who now has a seat in a Western legislature, "Folsom and Whittemore had attended the same college" (21). We also learn that "Once, more than ten years before, he [Ross] had been considered a rising star politically, though in his inmost heart he knew he had played the game only for diversion. He had been a Liberal" (21). This affiliation with the Liberal party is important in *The Shadow Riders* because it sets Ross and Chan apart from the majority of the people in Alberta who at the time were Conservatives. It also reflects the historical reality that the federal Liberals controlled the region. Hugh Dempsey notes that "Although there were probably more card-carrying Conservatives than Liberals in the new province [of Alberta], the influence of the federal Liberals on the provincial scene was pervasive" (79-80). Until 1911, Wilfrid Laurier's Liberals were in power in Ottawa. Ross's connection to the Liberals ties him more closely to the Eastern centre of power than it does to Conservative-dominated Calgary. He is rewarded for his long-time support of the party by being appointed Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, despite the fact he is not an Albertan, and has only recently bought property there. His

biggest connection to Alberta before he marries Eileen is his part ownership of the Belle Claire Power company and a recently acquired ranch.

The business and political elements in *The Shadow Riders* are especially notable because, according to established criticism, they were wholly absent from the prairie literature produced at the time. Harrison has noted that when cities are written about in early prairie literature, they are usually contrasted with the rural and shown to be places of sin and degradation (33). He points to "The Calgary of Stringer's prairie trilogy," Stead's *The Cow Puncher*, and "the cities of Nellie McClung's stories" as examples (33). However, in *The Shadow Riders* the rural and urban are not contrasted in this way. Lesley is shown to have rural roots and a rural cultural background, but this does not make her more pure or morally upright than the characters from cities or towns. Eileen would be Lesley's natural foil if this kind of contrast were made. However, Eileen's major moral failing, her affair with Harry Garth, is not shown to be the result of the permissive and corrupt nature of the city, but in part because her parents were strict and repressive, denying her the pleasures of innocent fun like going to dances. In the words of one character, "she had to fight to get a little harmless fun, and it probably looked all alike to her" (17).

One of the biggest themes in *The Shadow Riders* is marriage. The business dealings in the book resemble a courtship dance between East and West. The natural resources and raw materials are all found in Western Canada, while the money and experience to develop them comes from Eastern Canada. Ross Whittemore is an Eastern

capitalist who has cultivated business relationships in Alberta for several years. At the beginning of the novel, we learn that he is in town in part to see “the power plant, owned by the Belle Claire Company, which was in part himself” (23).<sup>11</sup>

According to Max Foran in *Calgary: An Illustrated History* (1978), in the early twentieth century “Calgary’s business community provided the city with aggressive leadership. Although firms based in Eastern Canada, Winnipeg and United States were establishing branches in the city, control over economic development continued to devolve on Calgary residents” (82). The same is true of the business community in *The Shadow Riders*. Jack Addison and Walter Burrage, for example, are both Calgary residents who are also influential and wealthy business people. However, these Calgary residents are also transplanted Easterners. Foran points out that “Most of Calgary’s business and social leaders were born in eastern Canada” (36). Therefore, although Calgary leaders could be local in the sense that they lived in the city, they were really Easterners. Ross Whittemore and Chan Herrick in *The Shadow Riders* make more explicit the influence of Eastern business on the development of industry in Calgary because they are both actually residents of Quebec at the beginning of the novel.

The first business venture Ross undertakes in the West is a power plant. Historically, the establishment of a local power plant was a very important step in Calgary’s development. According to Max Foran, in 1911 Calgary’s city council “considered many alternatives, including natural gas and municipal power rights on the Elbow River, before bowing to the financial muscle of the Calgary Power Company,

formed under the guidance of Max Aitken (Lord Beaverbrook), Sir Herbert Holt, Richard Bedford Bennett and several local capitalists" (*Calgary: An Illustrated History* 79). He also points out that "The importance of cheap power to the city cannot be overestimated. In addition to an annual civic savings of \$100,000, it enabled the development of the street railway system, which in turn dictated the direction and extent of physical growth" (79).

The development of the streetcar franchise in *The Shadow Riders* is also directly connected to the fictional Belle Claire power company. The proposed streetcars will be electric so if the same group of people, Ross and his associates, own the streetcars and the power company, they will make twice the money. The streetcar franchise deal also involves land speculation. Land speculation was rampant in early Calgary. According to one historian, there were 443 real estate firms operating in Calgary at the beginning of 1912 and "two thousand odd men . . . owed their livelihood to the real estate industry" (Foran, *Frontier Calgary* 212). Much of this speculation was driven by rumors about where new railway lines would be built.

Isabel Paterson's husband, Kenneth B. Paterson, was an agent for the real estate company McCutcheon Bros during the boom.<sup>12</sup> Isabel Paterson may also have worked as a real estate agent around the same time. In a 1926 column for the *New York Herald Tribune* Paterson writes, "For two years we sold sections of the boundless prairie to hopeful settlers, and we trust it turned out for the best" ("Turns With a Bookworm" June 6, 1926). She may also have been referring to her job in the offices of the Canadian

Pacific Railway because they were selling settlers land at the time, or to her position in the law offices of R.B. Bennett, a CPR lawyer. In any case, the land speculation seen in *The Shadow Riders* reflects an important stage in the historical life of early Calgary that Paterson witnessed.

In the novel, Jack Addison tells Lesley about a plan to speculatively buy land and arrange for a streetcar line to service it, thereby raising its value. Jack says,

Look up there,' he waved his hand across the river, to the heights just above them. 'D'you know who owns that land? I do – as least, I control it. It's worth fifty dollars an acre now, but eighteen months from now it'll be worth that much for a twenty-five foot lot. I'm running a syndicate that's just bought it, and a lot more on the other side of town. And – this is what you're to keep to yourself – by spring a street railway will have commenced to build across the river. (121)

The streetcar and land speculation deal depicted in *The Shadow Riders* may have been inspired by historical events. According to Hugh Dempsey,

In 1906, entrepreneur A.J. McArthur<sup>13</sup> decided that the prospects were too good to miss, so he acquired a piece of farm land at the top of the [North] hill, subdivided it into lots, and registered it as Crescent Heights. He then formed the Centre Street Bridge Company Limited and sold shares to other speculators and landholders on the North Hill. As plans progressed, lots were sold on the guarantee of a connecting Bridge to the downtown area. (89-90)

In *The Shadow Riders*, the area of speculation, the North Hill, remains the same but the linking mechanism, a streetcar line rather than a bridge, has changed. Historically, the bridge's owners got into a dispute with the city council over who would maintain the structure. The city finally connected the area to the rest of the city with a new streetcar

line (Dempsey 92). In both *The Shadow Riders* and in reality, the streetcar system was built by the city, not by a private company (Foran, *Calgary: An Illustrated History* 90).

In *The Shadow Riders*, the people involved in the streetcar franchise and land speculation deal are almost all originally from Eastern Canada. They try to marry Western resources, the undeveloped prairie land, the water that creates the power for the Belle Claire Company, with Eastern wealth and business acumen. The money particularly needs to come from the East because the Westerners simply do not have it. When the streetcar project is being developed, Ross contemplates how it will be financed: "A good deal of money would be required for what he had in view, more than he could or cared to raise himself. For that he meant to go to Montreal" (67).

Paterson depicts the involvement of Eastern investors in the West as necessary and desirable. However, at times the attitude of the Easterners toward the Westerners is somewhat condescending. For example, at one point, Ross says that Albertans "are rather infantile . . . 'That's why it's interesting – the things they don't realise. They're puddling about the shores of an ocean with teaspoons" (28). In other words, Eastern business savvy and vision is required if the region is to develop. Softening this remark, Ross includes himself among the people of the West when he adds, "So – we're Colonials. Sort of a national suburb" (28). The idea that the prairies were seen and developed as a kind of colony of central Canada is often found in critical writing about prairie literature. Dick Harrison, for example, writes, "The Canadian West was shaped separately to a greater



extent [than the American West] and tied in loosely to Confederation with a railroad (and two armies) as a hinterland or a set of colonies of central Canada" (74).

The colonial attitude of Eastern Canada toward Western Canada is also demonstrated in *The Shadow Riders* by the fact that most of the Western politicians are Easterners. In the case of Ross, he is made Lieutenant Governor of Alberta even though he is not an Albertan. Most of the other politicians in the novel are also Easterners; Ross and Folsom actually went to school together in Montreal. Chan, who is groomed for political life in the course of the story, is also an Easterner who becomes a successful Western politician. The assumption is not always that Westerners cannot handle their own affairs. More often these men have chosen to establish careers in the West because there are more opportunities and, because things are not as established as they are in Eastern Canada, young politicians can rise faster and further than they could at home. This state of affairs is very reminiscent of young British men going to the colonies to make their fortunes when their possibilities were limited at home. The younger sons of the British nobility, so-called "remittance men," for example, were often found ranching in southern Alberta (Rees 138).

The situation in *The Shadow Riders*, where the business elites and the political elites are the same people, reflects the historical reality of life in early Calgary. Many of the political events in the novel reflect actual political events of the time, albeit in a slightly altered form, just like the streetcar and land speculation deal. The Liberal Prime Minister "Sir Lucien" in *The Shadow Riders*, for example, bears a striking resemblance to

Wilfrid Laurier. The Prime Minister is described when Lesley unexpectedly meets him at Eileen and Ross's home in Banff: "He had a warm, strong, magnetic clasp, brilliant black eyes under drooping, wrinkled lids like 'Dizzy's,' and the large, firm mouth of the orator" (311). Like Laurier, Sir Lucien's party loses a federal election over reciprocity. After the election, we learn that "gallant old Sir Lucien, turned out of his keep with a few faithful men-at-arms, was a free lance once more" (327).

Sir Lucien is not the only character in *The Shadow Riders* involved with the reciprocity election that is probably based on an actual historical personage. The owner of a local paper, Frankland of the *Onlooker*, is a thinly disguised Bob Edwards, who published *Calgary Eye Opener* in the early days of the city. Hugh Dempsey writes that "With a skilful blend of humour, news, and comments on social and political events of the day he . . . developed a faithful following who looked forward to each issue of the *Calgary Eye Opener*, usually published weekly or, as he stated, sometimes 'semi-occasionally'" (112). In *The Shadow Riders*, Paterson writes, "Frankland was a more than local celebrity, owner and editor of a small semi-occasional sheet, a newspaper by courtesy, named the *Onlooker*. He wrote his own copy. He was the wittiest man in Canada, with a bent for stinging satire truly Swiftian, and that is even rarer than wit" (297).

The issue of reciprocity with the United States is central in the novel and the central issue in the biggest election campaign in *The Shadow Riders*. The major characters in the novel are all Liberals and supporters of reciprocity. Chan's speech on the

eve of the election neatly encapsulates the prevailing view of reciprocity among the main characters:

In fifteen minutes he managed to cover the whole ground – the growing chauvinism of Canada, the alarming class solidarity and power of the country's financial men, the absurdity of that mare's nest of annexation – annexation, by a nation whose foreign policy is dictated by the man in the street, who hardly knows whether Canada is a town or a cocktail, and whose interest in territorial acquisitions is absolutely nil and in taxes paramount – and the real, clear, candid issue, entirely domestic, of a lowering of the tariff. If they didn't want the tariff lowered, well and good; they might go on paying for their fancy; if they did, why turn the country into a vast nursery wailing over a bogey? (320)

In the passages which describe this key debate, Chan is described as having “an executive, correlative mind, a passion for demonstrable facts, and an impatience of the emotional appeal in practical matters” (319). In other words, Chan and the Liberals are basing their campaign platform on facts and reason. On the other hand, Chan's Conservative opponent Folsom is presented as basing his campaign on blind patriotism and emotional appeal:

he could pile up metaphors as clouds tower on a June day, to darken and discharge in a Jovian explosion of question or statement; there was something irresistible about the way he recited statistics, which he handled in a manner to recall Modjeska's famous feat of bringing tears to her auditors' eyes by declaiming the Polish alphabet. And his patriotism – it burned, oh, indeed, it went up in fireworks that left trails of glory down the lowering sky! One could see him repelling an imaginary enemy at the point of a lance – well, no, hardly that, but one could see a band of gallant youths doing the repelling, while Folsom waited with decorations and wreaths well in the rear. (320-321)

Chan wins the election, which is presented as a good thing because he is portrayed as being clearly in the right as far as the major issues go – his position is the rational

rather than the emotional one. However, he does not win the election because the voters find his stand on the issues more convincing. Throughout the campaign, Lesley works behind the scenes for Chan's cause writing editorials for the Liberal newspaper: "She sat at her typewriter like the sentinel at the gates of Pompeii, repeating her beliefs until she could have recited them backwards. Cresswell derived much amusement from her earnestness" (288). The reader is not privy to exactly what Lesley writes, but we may imagine it sounds very much like the opinions Isabel Paterson sarcastically expressed in a 1911 column for the *Vancouver World*:

An interesting pastime for anyone whose time is not worth more than two and a half cents a week, is to go around and collect from acquaintances reasons why reciprocity is going to ruin Canada. (If living across the border, this covers reasons why it will ruin the United States.) . . . the commonest reason is a reference to the British empire, and a gloomy prognostication that this is but 'the thin edge of the wedge.' Good old wedge! When everything else fails, no matter what the question may be, just skilfully insert the thin and trusty wedge and it settles the matter. ("Postscripts")

Paterson points out what she sees as the emotional basis of many arguments against reciprocity, just as the narrator does during Folsom's speech in *The Shadow Riders* and Lesley may in her editorials.

Despite the fact that Lesley is a woman and cannot vote, she influences the outcome of the election in more than one way. As we have already seen, she writes editorials in favour of Chan's position in the newspaper. Additionally, she prevents potentially damaging letters revealing Chan's involvement in the streetcar franchise deal from falling into the hands of the opposition. Suppressing the incriminating papers wins

Chan the election because at the same time the *Onlooker* exposes an adulterous affair involving Folsom. In the end, Chan wins not because of his stand on the issues but because of political intrigues not directly related to the campaign. This makes the victory somewhat hollow for Chan: ““There doesn’t seem to be any other way in politics,’ growled Chan. ‘This whole election’s going by default, by a fluke. Just raving prejudice. . . Do they think they’re voting on Folsom’s private life, the American accent, or tariff reduction?’” (325).

The outcome of the election is unsatisfactory to Chan because emotion rather than reason decides it. However, the fact that Chan ends up with a seat in the House of Commons is presented in the novel as a positive thing, indicating that he is clearly the best man for the job because he takes the reasoned position. The fact that Chan and his supporters were involved in the earlier land-speculation and streetcar deal does not make them less moral or less fit to govern and therefore it is right that Lesley prevents the incriminating documents from being made public. The fact that Ross, Chan and the other people involved in the earlier deal bribed city counselors to try to secure the streetcar franchise does not make them immoral in the world of the novel because they are perceived as the best people to develop the project. It is much more desirable for private business people to develop essential services for the public because it is assumed they will do a better job of it. In the first part of the book, we learn that

government ownership was in the air of the West just then. A good many towns had already taken over their lighting plants; the province of Alberta owned all the telephone lines; and there was talk of expropriation of the grain elevators. There would undoubtedly be opposition to a private

corporation building and owning the street-car lines of the province's largest city, if that opposition were allowed time to ripen. (67-8)

Ross and the other Eastern capitalists are the best people to set up the streetcar lines because they are the ones with the business know-how to do so. The fact that these men will make money from the deal does not make it less appropriate for them to be in control of it. In fact, profit is presented as a pure motive for doing something. Chan argues for reciprocity and tariff reduction because it will be good for business and the national economy. The appeals Folsom makes to King and country are far less valid arguments, based as they are on emotion.

It is interesting to note that while the Eastern businessmen in *The Shadow Riders* are at times condescending about the ability of the Westerners to develop their abundant natural resources, the novel does not question that Easterners are the best people to be doing it. The fact that ownership of businesses important to the health and prosperity of Calgary remains in the East (in the case of the Belle Claire Company, for example) is not presented as a negative thing. The Easterners are the ones with the capital and expertise to run things, and it does not matter if they run them from afar. When, in the course of the novel, Ross and Chan come to see the West less as a place of exile and more as a home, they do so because they fall in love with Western women and the possibilities of the vast new land, not because it is important that those holding business and political power actually be Westerners.

The business and personal relationships, which eventually tie Ross and Chan to the West, are developed through their interaction with polite society. Just as the same

group of people move within the business and political circles, they also participate in Calgary society. The polite society of early Calgary has also been transplanted from Eastern Canada, just as the business and political life has been. Polite society provides many of the social opportunities where business deals and political alliances come about. However, unlike Calgary politics and business, which are outwardly dominated by men, women largely run society. Of course, in *The Shadow Riders* the women's respective positions in society are often dependent on the status of their fathers or husbands. For example, as a fallen woman, Eileen has no status at all until she marries Ross and Lesley has no known father or husband to derive status from.

Calgary society as it is depicted in the novel is governed by the customs and etiquette of Victorian England. The character who is most involved in society is Eileen after she gets married. Victorian customs such as teas, calls and introductions are all part of early Calgary society. For example, rules for properly introducing people are apparent in the section in which Eileen triumphantly re-enters Calgary society after marrying Ross. Leonore Davidoff explains Victorian introduction etiquette in *The Best Circles* (1973): "The inferior was always introduced to the superior, who ideally should have been asked beforehand if he or she wished to be introduced. The higher in rank, the older and the woman (among women, the married) were those to whom the newcomer was introduced" (41). In *The Shadow Riders*, Eileen flouts this etiquette the night she makes her debut as Lieutenant Governor's wife at a horse show. At one point she introduces Lesley to a group of society matrons:

Lesley, do you know Mrs. Ames – Mrs. Manners – Mrs. Dupont – How d'ye do, Mrs. Varney?" For Mrs. Varney had come also, executing a flank movement and visiting the next box, to lean over and nod to Eileen with just the proper degree of carelessness. Eileen knew she was violating "form" in presenting the matrons to Lesley, instead of the reverse. She did it on purpose. (263)

The connection and similarities between political maneuvers and the machinations of society are emphasized by the description of Mrs. Varney's entrance into the private box next to the one Eileen is in as a "flank movement," a military metaphor. When women jockey for positions for themselves or their families in society, their activities might be less bloody than skirmishes on the national political scene that men are involved in, but the outcomes are still important.

Most of the time Eileen does keep "form," participating in society's round of teas and calls. She has a specific day when she is "at Home" to visitors for tea. The ridiculous elements of polite society (which is very concerned with fashion and keeping up appearances) are emphasized in the novel in ways that the political and business elements are not. For example, when Lesley arrives unwittingly at Eileen's home just before her callers will arrive, Eileen convinces her to stay until it is over so they can talk:

wait until the mob has come and gone. Oh, now, you don't get out this time; you'll stay and pour, young lady. Give everybody three lumps, no matter what they ask for, but be sure you ask them first, to make it really annoying. Give Mrs. Dupont four, if she comes; she's getting fatter all the time. (272)

During the tea, Lesley entertains herself by making up lies about her grandparents to shock one of the visitors:



I remember my grandfather still wore two waistcoats – but it may have been to keep him warm. He *would* get drunk, and was out all night once, and might have frozen if he'd had only one. Of course he didn't get drunk *every night*. Perhaps grandmother drove him to it; she took morphine. But she was a dear old thing, just the same. She smoked a clay pipe, and wore the queerest shoes – pattens, didn't they call them? I just remember her; she died when I was five. I cried so. Grandfather was sober for a week. (276)

Calgary society is much more open than English society. For example, despite the fact that Lesley does not come from a “good” family and she works for her living, her presence at society events is not questioned because she is friends with Eileen. However, it is still difficult for complete newcomers to gain entrance to Calgary society. Eileen decides to help a newcomer to the city get established by helping her host a ball. Eileen reports that Mrs. Callender approached her and asked if she would help “receive” at the event. Eileen says, “I was so at loose ends I said I would; besides, I’m tired of watching her struggle. It will be a relief to boost her in. The worst that can be said of her is that she wears those pearls even with a riding habit” (337). Davidoff reports that in Victorian and Edwardian society, “Society leaders could be used [by the *nouveau riche*] as sponsors in place of kin [who usually provided introductions and access to society] if necessary” (27). Davidoff quotes a Victorian woman who attended an event where a lady “of fashion” invited and received all the guests and introduced them to their host and hostess (27).

The society events depicted in *The Shadow Riders* are not limited to those controlled by women. When Ross first gets to Calgary at the beginning of the novel, he is taken by his business associate to a local men’s club for lunch: “He had been unable to escape his business associates during the morning; they had seized him and imprisoned

him in a motor car immediately after breakfast and kept him till luncheon, a very mediocre luncheon at the Round Up Club" (23). The "Round Up Club," with its name evocative of Alberta ranching culture, sounds very much like the Ranchmen's Club, a private Calgary club still in operation today. Dempsey explains that "When the elite Ranchmen's Club was formed about 1891, it combined the best features of private British clubs and the free and easy ways of Western ranchers. It was ostentatious and conservative, yet very convivial. It brought the British class system to Calgary but related it to cowmen and pastoral life" (68). The Ranchmen's Club was basically a private men's club for Calgary's elite, counting local cattlemen and lawyers among its members, and it even entertained the Prince of Wales during his time in the province (Dempsey 70).

The connection between Canadian polite society and politics is made explicit during Ross's trip to Montreal, where he attends a dinner given by old friends. At the dinner, Ross feels "chilly and grown old" (202) in the presence of several young debutantes along with the men of his own age, mostly successful politicians. He realizes that he is on the edge of things and somewhat of an anomaly as the only unmarried man of his age in the room. After dinner the young debutantes depart for a dance, leaving the men behind to discuss politics. The discussion at first centres around the possibility of reviving "the question of Reciprocity" (205). The fact that several of the men in the room are politicians and Ross is a generous contributor to Liberal campaign coffers shows how society events are connected to politics and operate to shape party and government policy. This is also the first time reciprocity is discussed in-depth in *The Shadow Riders*.

After the reciprocity discussion, they begin talking about the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, who is dying. The position of Lieutenant Governor is described as “purely honorary, a party reward” (206). One of the group, James Campbell, a cabinet minister, reveals that the Prime Minister has commissioned him to ask Ross informally if he is interested in the position once it becomes available. Ross responds, “A ribbon for my button-hole, no. I have no one to be gratified by the bauble. A man takes those things because it pleases his family, I suppose” (208).

This scene makes Ross contemplate his loneliness, and he thinks, “[H]e did not need to be reminded that he had no one to whom he might carry a ‘bauble’” (209). Despite the fact that he is a man, Ross’s unmarried status makes his role in polite society less certain than that of married men. If he had pursued a political career, he would have been at a disadvantage because he would have had no one to be his hostess. According to Davidoff, marriage was the basic unit of Victorian and Edwardian society. It was considered “not so much an alliance between the sexes as an important social definition; serious for a man but imperative for a girl” (Davidoff 50). When Ross and Eileen meet in Montreal, they are both unmarried. His marital status makes Ross unable to take the office of Lieutenant Governor and Eileen is a complete social outcast because she has had a child out of wedlock.

The courtship between Eastern and Western business and political interests is mirrored in the literal East-West marriage of Eileen and Ross, which begins as a marriage of convenience and ends as a union based on love and admiration. The romance plot in

*The Shadow Riders* runs parallel to the more realist plot involving politics and business. It provides an interesting counterpoint to the realist plot, and thus *The Shadow Riders* melds the two strains of fiction that Dick Harrison identifies in the literature of the prairies: the realist and the romantic (40). Marriage is a theme running throughout *The Shadow Riders* and in fact, in all of Isabel Paterson's novels. Most of the marriages in *The Shadow Riders* are contracted for convenience. Both Ross and Chan take possession of Western women the same way they pursue business and political ventures in the young city. There is an interesting parallel in the novel whereby the Easterners see both the Western women and the West in general as the "exotic other."<sup>14</sup> At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, the Canadian West was a popular setting for romance and adventure novels. So powerful was the appeal of the West as a setting that many writers who had never even been to the region used it. Bessie Marchant (*Sisters of Silver Creek: A Story of Western Canada*, n.d.), Harold Bindloss (*Prairie Gold*, 1925), and James Oliver Curwood (*The Flaming Forest: A Novel of the Canadian Northwest*, 1921) are examples of such novelists, which Isabel Paterson in a 1922 article referred to as "absentee novelists of Canada" ("Absentee Novelists of Canada" 133). Paterson wrote that "The imaginary portrait of Canada produced by . . . absent treatment has solidified into a cliché, and is taken as a standard for all later efforts" resulting in all realistic portraits of Canada being judged as unrealistic (133).

Chan finds Lesley all the more interesting when they first meet because she was born "in a little sod-roofed shack near Fort Macleod" (57). The reader learns that Chan

“was remarkably interested in the sod-roofed shack. One read about that sort of thing, but it never seemed real. He had lived in a tent, of course. Perhaps a sod-roofed shack would be more fun. Better, at least, than an igloo” (58). This is, of course, a truly romanticized notion of what it was like to live on the prairies in such a flimsy structure. In a 1935 “Turns With a Bookworm” column, Paterson herself painted a far less romantic picture of pioneer life when she described sleeping on the floor on a hay mattress in her youth: “You know hay gets into horrible lumps, and speargrass pokes through the ticking unexpectedly – but that’s just one thing . . . . The snow drifted in on our pillow, and it was forty below zero – we mean forty . . . .” (March 3, 1935). Not only is Lesley the female “other” for Chan, but she is also the Western “other” to his Eastern subject, a representative of the romantic West.

While Chan sees Lesley as a romantic Western “other” even before he has romantic feelings for her, Ross does not see Eileen in that way. Ross wants to rescue Eileen and redirect her life just as he redirects the political and business life of the West. Ross and Eileen’s union originally begins as a marriage of convenience, rather than a love match. When he proposes, Ross asks Eileen what she desires, ““What do you want? Love?”” (228). When she answers in the negative, he says, ““I can give you everything else. Will you take it?”” (228). When she demands a reason for his sudden offer, he explains, ““I want an intelligent companion, with charm and beauty, some one who will give me an excuse for taking part in life, for buying a house, making plans”” (230). Ross and Eileen’s marriage is more a social pact than anything else, initially not even a sexual

relationship, making Ross's reasons for marrying her all the more mysterious to Eileen.

On their way home after they become engaged, "Eileen sat rigidly in her corner, so small in her voluminous cloak, waiting for him to claim his new rights" (231-32). The reader later learns that Ross is trying to redeem himself by marrying Eileen and giving "her back her possibilities" (229) to make up for failing a woman he loved in his youth.

Ross and Eileen's marriage is the most important loveless marriage in *The Shadow Riders* but it is by no means the only one. Both of the people who pursue Lesley and Chan in the first part of the novel, Jack Addison and Amy Cranston, are married. Infidelity is portrayed as a matter of course for both Jack and Amy, who lose no sleep over their dalliances. When Lesley meets Jack, she already knew that "He had a wife, living uptown, while he inhabited gay bachelor chambers in the Carhart Block" (37). Jack is not vilified by the narrator, who explains that "no one ever saw any tears in Mrs. Addison's eyes for his absence" (38). The reader also learns that "Their domestic affairs formed one of the most piquant staples of local gossip, though neither of them ever contributed any items thereto. Across the border, such a state of affairs would have presaged divorce, but divorce is not simple in Canada" (38). At the time, only the very rich and well-connected who were determined to do so could obtain a divorce because it required "an appeal to parliament for a statutory divorce" (Strong-Boag 99).

In Paterson's novels, hasty or ill-advised unions often lead to abandoned marriages like Jack's. For example, Hope Fielding and Mary Dark in *The Magpie's Nest* make disastrous marriages from which they have difficulty extricating themselves. Both

Marta and Russ in *Never Ask the End* (1933) are also divorced. In *The Golden Vanity* (1934) one of the biggest puzzles for the reader is the relationship between the main character Mysie and Jack, her best friend. At the end of the novel, it is revealed that they got married on a whim and then spent years trying to divorce one another. In fact, Isabel Paterson herself had an abandoned marriage. After wedding Kenneth B. Paterson in 1910, she lived with him only a short time but remained "Mrs. Paterson" the rest of her life (Cox xiii). Unfortunately, society continues to see couples in abandoned marriages as married even though they lead separate lives. When Jack, desperate for Lesley's affections, tells her, "I'm going to take you away from here, and teach you to love —" (184) she rejects him on the basis that he is married and has a family. Jack protests, "I haven't had a wife for two years" (184). This may be an emotionally accurate statement, but it is not a legally accurate one and society still views him as a married man.

In the case of Amy Cranston, her husband is a travelling salesman who is often away. She amuses herself in his absence by pursuing Chan in her parlor when he comes to visit Lesley. Eventually, Lesley sees Amy and Chan through the parlor window: "the picture burnt under her eyelids; Amy's lax figure and clinging arms, and the look in Chan's eyes; his satisfied mouth. And that indescribable air of use, of past intimacy . . . ." (125). Amy does not see anything wrong with her "friendship" with Chan, but as the narrator observes, she "was not exactly a vicious woman; but she was rather rudimentary. The sea urchin is nothing but a slightly animated stomach, but it cannot help that" (159).

There are other instances of unhappy marriages and infidelity in *The Shadow Riders*. For example, in his youth, Ross had an affair with a woman married to a man much older than she. She committed suicide after Ross refused to run off with her. His sister convinced him to wait until after she got a divorce so they would not be putting themselves "outside the pale" (370). After her death, Ross learned that she had been pregnant and that was why she wanted to leave so quickly. This is the relationship Ross tries to atone for when he marries Eileen.

In another example of infidelity in marriage, one of the society matrons who shunned and gossiped about Eileen after her affair with Harry Garth is the first to greet Eileen when she returns as the Lieutenant Governor's wife. The narrator reports that "Mrs. Dupont was even clever enough to appreciate the sub-acid flavour of herself according the *pas* to Eileen, receiving the black sheep into the fold – Mrs. Dupont, whose love affairs, to call them by no cruder term, had become a matter of course. She had waited for matrimony, that was all" (261). The irony, of course, is that the very people who drove Eileen out of the city because of her soiled reputation were regularly carrying on affairs themselves.

Finally, Folsom, Chan's opponent in the federal election, is destroyed when the *Onlooker* reveals his extramarital affair: "Scandal – the kind of scandal a public man cannot survive – a baldly ugly story about a woman. . . . No mere hints nor innuendoes, all of a most stark and damnatory explicitness" (323). Overall, the novel presents a dark vision of romance and the possibility of happiness and personal satisfaction in marriage.



Ross and Eileen's marriage never involves adultery, but in the beginning it does not involve love. After the pair have been ensconced at the head of Alberta society, the reader learns that "Eileen's cold, bright beauty, Ross's detached devotion, were impenetrable to the scrutiny of the mob. And it was not an unhappy marriage, though to both it seemed something insubstantial and dreamlike. . . . The crux of it was, it was not a marriage at all. It was a play, put on by two who feared realities" (269). The couple come to marry for their own selfish reasons, Ross to redeem his conscience by giving back a young woman her possibilities after he took away those of his first love, and Eileen so she can return triumphantly to lead the society that shunned her after she was used by Harry Garth. The "play" that is Ross and Eileen's marriage also gives both of them an increased value in society. Ross's charming young wife allows him to entertain as a successful politician and businessman, and Eileen is disgraced in exile until Ross marries her and redeems her socially and financially.

However, both Ross and Eileen crave more from each other emotionally and physically as time passes. The parts of *The Shadow Riders* that deal with Ross and Eileen are more romantic than the political sections. The descriptions used in these sections are much more flowery and indulgent than the others. For example, the first time Lesley sees Eileen after she returns to Calgary, she hears Eileen say "'Oh-h-h!' in a drawn-out, breathless manner" and then sees her in an automobile wearing "a grey coat and a long grey veil around her head like the clouds behind the mountains" (242). The women's clothing in *The Shadow Riders* is described in much more detail than the men's, but there

is special attention paid to the description of Eileen's wardrobe, particularly after she gets married. For example, to the horse show where she makes her Calgary debut Eileen wears

a blue-green chiffon, weighted at the hem with blue paillettes, held over the shoulders with strands of jet. When Eileen added a carved Spanish comb of silver to her own shining coppery crown, and at last bent her graceful neck while Lucie [her maid] clasped a single strand of large diamonds about it, which caught colour from her gown and shot blue-green rays into the depths of the dresser mirror, whence they reflected again, Lesley was dumb and dazzled. (255-6)

At another time, the contents of Eileen's dressing room are described: "gold-stoppered bottles of crystal, the gold-backed mirror, the perfumes and *bijouterie* and vellum-bound *bibelots*; the closets overflowing with lacy and ribbony things" (313). This attention to the details of Eileen's dress and appointments is typical of popular romance novels published today, according to Ann Radway in *Reading the Romance* (1984). Radway writes that one of the ways that romance novelists create the illusion that the stories about ideal love that they write could actually happen is by describing the clothing and surroundings of the heroines in great detail: "the romance's mimetic effect can be traced to several linguistic devices, one of the most crucial is the genre's careful attention to the style, color, and detail of women's fashions. Extended descriptions of apparel figure repeatedly in all variations of the form" (193). These details of dress add to the mood Paterson creates in the romantic sections of the novel, one very different from the political sections.

The two romance plots involving Chan and Lesley, and Ross and Eileen generate much of the tension in the novel. The reader is just as eager to see the literal East-West

marriages take place as they are to see the figurative ones in the political sections succeed. The reader becomes absorbed in Lesley and Eileen's lives, wondering when and if they will actually confess their love to their male counterparts and if this love will be reciprocated. In Lesley's case, her search for happiness involves fulfilling paid work as much as it does love and recognition from Chan. At the end of the novel, she receives financial returns from the money she invested in the streetcar deal as well as a new job on a newspaper in Chicago. Lesley has hopes that the Chicago job will be "the antechamber of New York" (345), New York being the centre of the publishing industry at the time and the highest achievement for any aspiring writer or journalist. The reader knows that Lesley's dreams in at least one area of her life will be fulfilled before she goes to the ball at Mrs. Callender's house.

However, in the case of Eileen, the reader knows that her happiness depends completely on whether she and Ross can communicate their love to one another. Eileen's life's work is her role as hostess and society maven but she does not always find it satisfying and yearns for a closer relationship with Ross. At one point after they have unsuccessfully tried to become closer, the reader learns that "Eileen got thinner, and her gaiety was feverish" (288). There is sexual tension between Ross and Eileen as soon as they get together. On the night he proposes, Eileen anticipates that Ross will "claim his new rights" and is puzzled when he does not (232). When they return to Calgary and Lesley is introduced to Ross by Eileen, the physical description of the newlyweds emphasizes their attractiveness and reveals that they have not consummated their

marriage. Lesley is "struck by the fact that he [Ross] still had a waistline, retaining the peculiar firm elasticity of youth in his figure. His mouth was young, too, with no hint of that slack-lipped look which betrays the man of gross appetites and indulgences as the years pass" (256). Ross's expression reminds her of a "hermit, priest, [or] solitary" and the narrator reveals that is in fact "the expression of the celibate" (256). As he looks at Eileen, Ross's blood rises slowly to his temples. When Ross compliments her appearance, Eileen is also keenly aware of his physical presence: "She threw back her head, with a rising of her bosom that made her seem about to float toward him, her arms held out a little from her sides" (256). After her successful introduction to society at the horse show, Eileen and Ross return to their separate rooms at the hotel where they are staying. Eileen lies awake until four o'clock wondering what Ross wants from her: "She was like a debtor whose creditor does not send a bill, and who for that reason cannot put the bill out of mind . . . What could a man want – other than the obvious thing he never claimed?" (267). Eileen's "pride smarted, for a reason she would not allow herself to examine" (267). Of course, Eileen lies awake with frustrated desire; she is unable to go to Ross because it is his role to make the first move. Also, when Eileen gave in to her desires in the past and became intimate with Harry, she was abandoned and punished.

They finally consummate their marriage the night Eileen learns that Harry Garth and his wife are returning to the city. She seduces Ross and then has a guilty dream in which "she had abased herself for something that was her right" (283), probably because, when she finally acted on her desire for her husband, it was connected in her mind to her

affair with Harry Garth. Ross hears her talking in her sleep, saying “Yes . . . I had to pay – I couldn’t have everything for nothing ——” (284). She is talking about her affair with Harry, but Ross thinks she is talking about him.

After this incident, the reader knows that Ross and Eileen will eventually admit that they love each other. There are no real barriers to this coming together, only pride and fear. They finally declare their true feelings at Mrs. Callender’s ball after Harry Garth corners Eileen. Harry wants her to keep quiet about their affair so his wife will not find out. Also, Eileen realizes that “The same simple, greedy snobbery that had made him hold to his engagement to the daughter of a wealthy father in spite of honour, now sent him creeping back soliciting the favour of the girl he had thrown aside, now she was important enough” (361-2). Ross rescues her from Harry’s badgering, just as he rescued her from the disgrace Harry left her in at the beginning of *The Shadow Riders*.

Eileen and Ross’s marriage is initially an East-West marriage of convenience and reflects the way that relations between the two parts of the young country established themselves in the beginning. Eileen is disenfranchised and in need of someone to rescue her. Ross initially holds all the power in their relationship; he is a man, and he is more than a decade older than her, in addition to being wealthy and successful. During the period in Alberta’s history described in *The Shadow Riders*, the East was the seat of power and held all the wealth and knowledge needed to develop the natural resources of the West. Finally, the East was also literally older than the West, having been first settled two hundred years before.

When Lesley and Chan come together, their union is a more ideal coming together of East and West because it is more equitable and they have allowed their relationship to develop naturally. Lesley realizes she loves Chan early on in their friendship but he remains oblivious to this. Their friendship is based on long talks they have when they rent horses from the livery stables and ride out onto the prairie. Theirs is a much more subtle courtship than Ross and Eileen's, based on mutual admiration and interests. In the first half of *The Shadow Riders*, they spend a lot of time together and develop a solid friendship. After Lesley finds out she will not be going to college, Chan lends her books to read and they discuss them afterwards. Lesley realizes early on that she is in love with Chan but he does not see her in the same way. At one point he actually kisses her but "He kissed her because she was a girl – not because she was a woman who drew him above all others. There are true kisses of consolation" (99). Chan's recognition of how important Lesley is to him does not come until the final chapters of the novel.

Lesley pulls away from Chan after she discovers the true nature of his relationship with Amy Cranston. However, Lesley does not stop caring about him and does all she can to ensure his success in the federal election. The lengths she goes to are kept hidden from him until years later. After the election she goes to the train station with Ross and Eileen to see the new M.P. off to Ottawa, "and . . . cried afterward in the kindly privacy of her room. For all she was such a Spartan pupil of adversity, she cried a long time before arising to arm her spirit for a quite fresh start" (327).

After Chan goes to Ottawa, Lesley resolves to forget him. We take up the story again after Chan has been away two or three years. Lesley has finally gotten the returns on her investment in the streetcar deal as well as a job offer from Cresswell in Chicago. She decides she needs to be free of Chan: "For the first time since he had gone East, a letter of his lay unanswered. She meant it should, as a sign. He must never take first place again. She was going to need a free mind now" (331). Lesley is free of him, as she realizes when she hears from Eileen that he will not return to Calgary over the summer: "She had said she would be free. She *was* free" (338). This declaration of independence is what sets Lesley and Chan's relationship apart from Ross and Eileen's. The Whittemores initially need each other for reasons that have nothing to do with love; they come together because they each have something the other lacks. They come together for the same reason Easterners and Westerners come together in business dealings. There is also a power imbalance in Eileen and Ross's relationship just as there is in the business relationships between East and West. In both cases, the party from the East has more economic and social power. In the Whittemores' relationship, the power imbalance is exacerbated because the partner from the East is also a man. However, Lesley and Chan's relationship is more equitable and is therefore the model for all East-West marriages. They come together independently because they love each other. Chan only recognizes his true feelings for Lesley after he sees her kiss Jack Addison at Mrs. Callender's ball. The next day he goes to her and sees her with "new eyes that saw the woman where the friend had been" (378).

Eileen, Ross, Lesley and Chan are all “shadow riders.” Lesley explains this expression to Chan when they are horseback riding early in the novel. She accuses Chan of being a shadow rider saying, “You watched your own shadow for a long time back there. If you did that on the rodeo, and the range-boss saw you – you’d be looking for a new job. It’s the lazy ones, the indifferent ones, do that” (78). She explains that, “Most of us get most of our pleasure . . . out of watching our own shadows, one way or another . . . I wonder how much of the real things we miss because of it?” (78-9). All of the characters “forget what . . . [they’re] riding after, the great objective, to watch . . . [their] own shadows” (79). Eileen and Ross are so absorbed in their own fears and problems that they cannot see each other or their situation as it is. Chan is also a shadow rider because he is so focused on his political career that he does not see Lesley as she really is or recognize his love for her.

The “shadow riders” expression is also a metaphor for Canada’s, especially the West’s, self-consciousness at this stage in history. The West was struggling to develop its resources, establish its cities and populate its vast prairies while also establishing a relationship with the East. At the national level, the reciprocity debate involved the whole country in a period of intense navel-gazing as Canada re-evaluated its relationship to both Britain and the United States. Canadians ceased to be shadow riders when World War I forced them to focus on a crisis taking place far beyond their borders.

*The Shadow Riders* ends with an embrace and a recognition that the characters are shadow riders no longer. Lesley decides to return Chan’s affections: “though her soul



quailed with fear that it might see too much sorrow, she dared" (379). World War I has begun and Chan is going off to fight. Both Lesley and the West are coming into their own and losing their innocence at the end of the novel. Many historians point to the first World War as the end of Canada's innocence as well<sup>15</sup>. Lesley is destined for Chicago, far away from the safety of her own city just as so many young men are being sent from the West off to war. *The Shadow Riders* portrays a much more confident, cosmopolitan prairie West than is usually seen in prairie novels written in the early twentieth century, at least according to established criticism. Typically, the West is thought to be portrayed as an agrarian hinterland struggling to see itself as anything other than a place of exile. However, in *The Shadow Riders* Lesley and Eileen are secure enough in their knowledge that the West is their "center of the real," and that they can go elsewhere and it will continue to remain so. Ross and Chan, the transplanted Easterners, have moved beyond seeing Alberta as a place of exile; it has become for them a place to return to and a place to build a life rather than a just a power plant. Eastern Canada and Western Canada are truly "married" at the end of Isabel Paterson's *The Shadow Riders*.

### Chapter Three: *The Magpie's Nest* and the New Frontier

"'My father is really to blame for my being here,' she said . . . 'He went as far as he could in one direction, and I am only exploring the back trail . . . He pursued the wilderness, and I am investigating civilisation.'" Isabel Paterson, *The Magpie's Nest*

"Romantic love, in the modern sense, is a love uniting or hoping to unite two displaced persons." John Berger, *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos*

Isabel Paterson's second novel, *The Magpie's Nest*, published in 1917, tells the story of one woman's search for happiness. The very title of the novel refers to this search. Hope Fielding, the main character, is told by her friend Mary Dark that she hopes one day Hope will "find the magpie's nest" (100). Mary explains, "the French say happiness is to be found in a magpie's nest. Because the magpie always builds out of reach!" (100). This bird is also an appropriate symbol for a story set in Alberta, where the magpie is ubiquitous and mockingly squawks at any one who gets too close to its nest.

*The Magpie's Nest* has many things in common with *The Shadow Riders*. Both novels have young female protagonists who search for love and meaningful work in the city after growing up on ranches in southern Alberta. However, Hope Fielding, the heroine of *The Magpie's Nest*, is much more the centre of the novel than Lesley Johns is in *The Shadow Riders* where she shares the stage with Eileen, Chan, and Ross.

*The Magpie's Nest* opens with Hope as a child lying in a field on her family's ranch: "Hope was apparently all alone in the centre of a vast unpeopled reach of yellow

grass and pale blue sky" (12). This opening scene is much closer to that of familiar prairie novels like *Who Has Seen the Wind* and *Settlers of the Marsh* than the first scene of *The Shadow Riders*, which focuses on a machine. Hope goes back to the house to find three visitors: an unnamed railroad official, a young man named Norris Carter, and an Eastern capitalist called Conroy Edgerton. Edgerton gives her a dollar and sends her a box of chocolates in the mail because she does not live close enough to a store to buy them herself. This first meeting between Hope and Edgerton is important because it establishes him as her future benefactor. This is especially interesting because Paterson replaces the prairie patriarch that environmentalist critics see as so important in prairie literature with a capitalist benefactor and would-be sugar daddy who is the main father figure. Edgerton is similar to Ross in *The Shadow Riders* who is much older than Eileen; Edgerton is old enough to be Hope's father. Unlike Ross, who marries Eileen to "give her back her possibilities" (229), Edgerton is not as successful at wooing Hope but he gives her gifts whenever he can to help her out. It is of no significance in the novel that Edgerton is an American, only that he is from the East.

*The Shadow Riders* portrays the courtship dance between East and West with the emphasis on the experiences of both parties when Easterners come West. However, in *The Magpie's Nest* a Westerner goes out to explore the East. While most prairie novels portray the experiences of pioneers who try to make their way on the Western frontier, Hope Fielding goes out to explore the city: the city is her frontier. *The Magpie's Nest* has themes similar to those of many canonical prairie novels: exploring new territory, moving

to new and unknown places, and adapting imaginatively to new surroundings, but it has an urban rather than a rural setting. Only two chapters of *The Magpie's Nest* have rural settings, the first and the last. The rural is a place of origin and a place to return to for periodic rejuvenation but it is not presented as a place where it is possible or desirable for Hope to live. It is a reference point and place of origin throughout the novel, but not a place that is yearned for. After the first chapter, which informs the reader about Hope's rural roots, the setting becomes urban. The second chapter finds Hope five years later at age seventeen, away from home and working at a hotel cleaning rooms. Edgerton stays at the hotel and they renew their acquaintance. Also, while working at the hotel she has her first boyfriend, Evan. Her initiation into the world of men continues when she learns about the dark side of male-female relationships from an encounter with Jim Sanderson, a hotel resident. Jim attacks her one night when he finds her alone in Evan's room and Hope smashes him over the head with the butt end of Evan's pistol to defend herself. This section introduces the important themes of marriage and romance in the novel, themes that, as we have seen, Paterson also employs in *The Shadow Riders*.

*The Magpie's Nest* also portrays the life of early twentieth-century Calgary (unnamed, as it is in *The Shadow Riders*) in many of the same ways Paterson's first book does. The connections between business, politics, and polite society are all portrayed, although here they are not as important to the plot as they are in *The Shadow Riders*. The cultural landscape is also familiar. Hope has the same background of ranching culture that Lesley does. Unlike in *The Shadow Riders*, the reader actually sees Hope's family's ranch

and meets both of her parents. The movement and independence that characterizes ranching culture are personified in Hope's father Jared. The railway official who visits the ranch in chapter one tells Jared that when the railway comes it will make them all rich. Jared replies, "'You mean it will bring in a lot of fool farmers, and our range will be gone, and we'll have to go on again'" (13). These words reflect the historical antipathy between farmer and rancher identified by Ronald Rees. According to Rees,

To the rancher, the dryland farmer — who with Government encouragement began to invade the southwestern prairies after the completion of the C.P.R. — was a destructive and contemptible interloper whom he dismissed with the hard words "nester," "mossback," "landgrabber," and "sodbuster." Because they were the first Europeans in the southwest, and because they lived directly off the grasslands, ranchers saw themselves as the only authentic inhabitants of the prairie. (148)<sup>16</sup>

The narrator reveals that, in contrast to the farmers who will soon arrive, "Fielding was a pathmaker, not a moneymaker, a man whose life had been spent as a feather poised on the edge of a flood, ever ready to advance yet further ahead of the incoming tide of civilisation. In his youth he had loved solitudes, and desired breathing space. Now he felt the reluctance of middle age to innovation and change" (13). Hope inherits her father's desire for space and movement, which also characterizes ranching culture. However, instead of going ever westward in search of new frontiers like her father did, Hope turns to the city and the East. There she finds a different isolation than the kind her father craved, the isolation of the modern city. In the course of *The Magpie's Nest* Hope moves into increasingly larger urban centres and into more "Eastern" spaces (Seattle is technically further west than Calgary but it is more "Eastern" because it is

more settled and developed). At one point she explains her eastward movement to Nick, making the connection to her father's life explicit: "'My father is really to blame for my being here [in New York],'. . . 'He went as far as he could in one direction, and I am only exploring the back trail. I couldn't help it; we have to go and go – the Fieldings. He pursued the wilderness, and I am investigating civilisation'" (228).

The idea of a frontier being always advanced "ahead of the incoming tide of civilisation" (13) is much closer to the American model of Western settlement, proposed by Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, than it is to the Canadian model of Western settlement whereby the N.W.M.P. and railroad were already in place when the first settlers arrived in the West to "colonize" it (Harrison, *Unnamed Country* 74). This may be attributed to two things. First of all, many of the settlers who came to the Canadian West in the early twentieth century were Americans. American farmers, along with western Europeans, were deliberately targeted by Canadian immigration campaigns under the Laurier government as the "most desirable" immigrants (Francis 108). These people were in fact trying to move into less populated areas to farm, finding things too crowded in American states further east. For example, Isabel Paterson's family moved westward, from Ontario to Michigan and Utah before finally settling in Alberta (still the Northwest Territory when the Bowlers arrived in the late 1880's).

The second reason Turner's thesis appears in *The Magpie's Nest* is that ranchers did arrive before the "incoming tide of civilisation" and the order and infrastructure supplied by the C.P.R. and the Northwest Mounted Police. Ronald Rees states that

"Pioneer ranchers were adventurers who, arriving before the homesteaders, either valued isolation or were not particularly frightened by it" (151).

Just as the pioneer ranchers, like her father, did not fear isolation, Hope does not fear the isolation of the city frontier. Hope's investigation of this urban frontier is one of the major themes of *The Magpie's Nest*. The "investigation of civilisation" overshadows the political and business concerns that dominate the plot of *The Shadow Riders*, but they are present in a more muted form. Politics and business are, after all, part of civilisation. When we see her again, Hope is almost twenty-one and living in Calgary. She left the hotel to go to the city to attend normal school and now she works as an art teacher. She has two close female friends, Mary Dark and Lisbeth Patten, as well as a "weedy collection of half-baked admirers" (56). She spends time with Ned Angell, a bank clerk, and Allen Kirby, Con Edgerton's chauffeur. Edgerton himself soon appears. He is in town working on a deal, and Hope begins to take drives with him in the evenings.

The landscape of early Calgary is vividly described in *The Magpie's Nest*, just as it is in *The Shadow Riders*: "The town lay in a cup of the hills, where the river wound a lazy half circle. At the edge, just beginning to climb the slopes, hovered a fringe of skeleton dwellings still building. Then, abruptly, without even a sown field to frame it all, the prairie began" (46). Hope meets a man named Tony Yorke at a society dance that Ned escorts her to. They are immediately taken with one another and he soon begins to call on Hope at her home. In due course Tony proposes, but they keep their engagement a secret because Tony says that he is not yet in a financial position to marry. Tony is involved

with a local business deal that the participants hope to convince Edgerton to join so they can all become rich.

The business dealings in *The Magpie's Nest* centre on Con Edgerton. When we first see him on the Fielding ranch in chapter one we are told, "He had come [West] on his own business, land speculation" (14). The central business deal in the novel is concerned with land speculation just as is the case in Paterson's first novel. When Edgerton appears in Calgary, he has "organised the Golden West Development Company" (59), "a big new firm of land promoters" (55). The name of Edgerton's company, "Golden West Development," reflects the prevailing view of the West at the time as a place of "golden opportunity" ripe for development.

Like Ross Whittemore in *The Shadow Riders*, Edgerton is a wealthy Easterner who could "command money enough to dam the Bow [River] with silver if he chose" (106). Also like Ross, he is shown to be much more sophisticated than the locals in Calgary. Mary, who works for Edgerton, tells Hope, "These alleged business men here are babes in arms compared to him. None of them ever really made any money, as he has. They simply sat still till it grew up round them. He has the gift" (120). The "alleged business men" in Calgary need Edgerton's money to finance a deal to develop the fictional Kenatchee Falls. They also need his know-how because they have no real experience developing large projects. Tony Yorke is one of the local men involved in the deal, along with a man named Shane whose wife, Cora Shane, is an important local socialite and minor character. Tony was born into wealth and spent most of his money



playing during and after college. He made the “mistake . . . [of] coming West, lured by the fabulous tales of equally fabulous wealth to be picked up over night” (107).

As in *The Shadow Riders*, there is no question in *The Magpie's Nest* about the appropriateness of an Easterner (and an American at that) developing the West's resources. Edgerton is clearly the best person to do so because he has the knowledge, talent and resources. Even when he destroys the original Kenatchee Falls deal the locals have put together, out of pique over the fact that Tony dumped Hope and tried to woo his daughter Emily, Edgerton is not villainized. The only hint that the activities of the Golden West Development Company might be unsavoury comes from Mary. At one point she tells Hope she is restless and feeling guilty because of her job: “I'm tired of setting springes for woodcocks. Every time I write a new rhapsody to lure some unsuspecting farmer into our toils I have to go out and tell the absolute truth to some of my best friends to square my conscience” (120). Mary's comments reveal that Edgerton's company manipulates farmers, perhaps convincing them to sell their land so that Golden West Development can make a profit from it. However, these activities are still treated as necessary for the development of the West in that they are questioned but not condemned.

As in *The Shadow Riders*, here business dealings are connected to politics. The local businessmen have included provincial politicians in the Kenatchee Falls deal, making it urgent that the financing be obtained before the next election. The reader learns that

The franchise was already granted, passed but a few weeks before by a gratified Assembly at Edmonton. A provincial election impended within

another twelvemonth, with a threat of an overturned government. The fear of that undesirable consummation had forced even the secret shareholders of the company, who sat in the Assembly, to assent to an obnoxious rider to the bill calling for certain work upon the power plant to be completed within the year – expensive work. There were ways, certainly, to obtain a postponement, but they were also somewhat expensive. They would be doubly so with a new provincial cabinet, hungry from enforced abstinence, to appease. (106)

When Edgerton eventually leaves to run away with Hope after learning the truth about Tony, “He . . . left death and destruction behind him, in a sense; Mary had seen him calmly tear down all the hopes of the men who had built on the Kenatchee Falls transaction, and had gathered from his manner that he felt a certain satisfaction in it” (153). When he is organizing the new company, Edgerton is overheard on the phone saying, “Hell, no; don’t get Shane; his crowd is out of it . . . business is business.’ He was not conscious of any irony” (152).

Of course, in *The Magpie’s Nest*, just as in *The Shadow Riders*, the business and political dealings are closely tied to the workings of polite society. During his secret engagement to Hope, Tony hears nasty rumours about her from Jim Sanderson and Cora Shane. He ends the engagement and pursues Emily, Edgerton’s daughter. After this happens, Hope tells Edgerton, “Con, I must do something. I’m going away. This town is full of emptiness” (147). Edgerton asks Hope to elope with him and she almost does but is intercepted in Banff by Mary Dark, who knows the relationship would be doomed. Unfortunately, after Mary leaves to find Edgerton, Hope remains in Banff where she runs into Ned Angell. They end up getting married because “They were both rather mad, and it was night, and spring” (162). As soon as Hope and Ned return to Calgary, they realize

they have made a mistake. To her horror, Hope learns that her friend Lisbeth is in love with Ned. She leaves Alberta shortly after on a train bound for Seattle.

*The Magpie's Nest* is a bildungsroman and a quest novel. Hope Fielding travels from innocence to maturity while searching for happiness. The first half of the novel is titled "The Cockle-Shell" because in this section Hope is adrift and vulnerable in the frail craft of her innocence. In Part I, Hope loses her illusions about society and her place in it as well as her innocence about men, marriage and romance. Hope Fielding's name is symbolic of this innocence. Her first name literally represents "hope," and it is her hope that allows her to remain optimistic and resilient throughout the novel. Her last name, "Fielding" reflects the fact that she has rural roots. Symbolically, at the end of Part I Hope loses her last name and the last vestiges of her innocence when she becomes "Mrs. Angell," a name literally more angular and with sharper edges than the soft, earthy "Fielding." The second half of *The Magpie's Nest* is titled, "The Forty-Sixth Latitude," a reference to a quotation from the nineteenth-century French writer Prosper Mérimée. It opens with Mary visiting Hope in Seattle after three years have passed. Hope has been working as an illustrator for newspapers and has made no "real friends" in Seattle. She informs Mary that she is going to live in New York.

Once in New York, she gets newspaper work and is very lonely until she meets Evelyn Curtis, an impoverished freelance journalist. The two dine together in Hope's room and Hope shows her some cartoon drawings of the "Moon Babies" that she does in her spare time. Evelyn leaves New York and shortly afterward Hope meets Norris (Nick)

Carter for the second time at a horse race she is covering for the paper. They begin to spend time together and fall in love. Hope gets sick and her illness is lengthened when she falls down a flight of stairs and breaks her collarbone. Nick cares for her throughout the ordeal and they decide to get married as soon as Hope can divorce Ned.

They prepare to leave New York for Chicago where Nick has been offered a new job. He tells her he is going to say goodbye to the people in his office and to his cousin Grace. Unbeknownst to Hope, Nick gets into a car accident and ends up in bed at Grace's house with a serious concussion. Hope does not know where he is and Grace, who is secretly in love with Nick, tells Hope he has sailed for Europe when she calls.

With only sixty-five cents to her name, Hope gets a job cleaning rooms at the hotel she first stayed in when she came to New York. One day she gets a letter from Evelyn Curtis who says she has shown Hope's "Moon Baby" pictures to a publisher who wants to buy them. After selling the "Moon Babies," Hope goes home for a visit. She learns from Mary that Ned has died and she is no longer married. She also learns that Mary and Edgerton are engaged. In the last pages of the novel, the reader learns that Nick is on his way to find Hope and she will soon have everything she has hoped for, both professionally and personally. *The Magpie's Nest* ends with Hope once again lying in the grass at the Fielding ranch. She sees a train approaching in the distance. Nick, who has recovered from his concussion and seen Hope's "Moon Baby" books, is on it.

Hope's adventurous spirit is connected to her romantic outlook as well as her rural roots. The "Westering" impulse in North America is based on romantic assumptions,

whether the “Westering” takes place in Canada or the United States. One romantic Westering myth is that Western [European] culture is inherently superior to other cultures and that the history of the Western world is one of constant advancement and progress. Therefore, the process of spreading civilization and order westward in North America is a great and noble project undertaken by either empire or nation.

The second North American westering myth is that the West is a land of possibility, a place to go to move away from the constraints of civilization and live freely and independently. This second myth is the one that underlies cowboy or ranching culture in both Canada and the United States. It is also a myth that Canadians have been reluctant to acknowledge as a part of our culture. Even though we do not question that recent immigrants are attracted to Canada because it is viewed as a place of greater freedom and independence, we are slow to accept that the same motivations were shared by the first settlers in the Canadian West.

The Western romantic and adventurous spirit motivates Hope to leave home in search of meaningful paid work and romantic fulfilment with men. Unfortunately, she runs into the harsh realities of the cruelty of polite society, the loneliness of the life of a single working woman in the city, and the dangers of romantic relationships and marriage, which turn out to be traps more often than fairy tales. While romantically searching for adventure, Hope behaves in ways that leave her vulnerable to people who understand the workings of polite society better than she does.

Hope's interest in romance appears early in *The Magpie's Nest*. In the opening chapters of the novel, Hope has romantic notions about love and the world. The title of the section, "The Cockle-Shell," draws attention to her romantic outlook because it evokes the image of Hope as a very small creature, such as one might find in a fairy tale, riding in a seashell. Hope's romantic notions remain intact only for the duration of Part I. The title of Part II, "The Forty-Sixth Latitude," comes from Prosper Mérimée who Mary quotes to Hope in Seattle:

You have troubles of the mind, pleasures of the mind, but the viscera called heart is developed at 25 years of age only, in the forty-sixth latitude. When you shall have a heart for good . . . you shall regret the good old days when you were living only by the mind, and you shall see that the evils which make you suffer now are only pinpricks in comparison with the stabs which shall rain on you when the days of passion come! (185)<sup>17</sup>

Part II contains none of the insubstantial romantic notions of Part I but Hope does experience true passion and suffering and finally she becomes fully developed as an adult.

When the reader first meets Hope as a child of twelve she is reading a book about Mary Stuart, and "Out of it, like a magic casket, she brought strange treasure of rich tapestries and bright brocaded velvets, lovely and too-much-loved ladies and brave gentlemen with jewel-hilted swords – all the worn trappings of romance, which to her were still fresh and untarnished" (10). When Edgerton sends her a box of chocolates, it also gives her a sense of the romantic possibilities of the world: "It meant that life might be lavish, unexpected and wonderful, like a fairy-tale" (18).

But while some fairy tales hold out the promise of sweetness and happiness in marriage for a beautiful princess and a handsome prince, many do not. Hope's first boyfriend, Evan Hardy, makes a reference to the story of Bluebeard when he reflects on her naïveté: "No doubt, he reflected, someone would put the key of the Bluebeard's chamber in her hands, and soon, but it was not for him" (23). In "Bluebeard" as it appears in the Grimms' tales, a young bride is given the keys to every room in the castle by her new husband and told she can open all of them except one secret chamber. When her husband goes away she cannot resist opening the forbidden chamber and discovers the corpses of women whom he has killed.

In the context of *The Magpie's Nest*, Evan's reference to the Bluebeard story reveals that Hope does not yet know the horrors men are capable of inflicting on women. While working at the hotel where she meets Evan, Hope asks her friend Agnes why women are told to fear men: "'Why mustn't we – I –' She floundered hopelessly, and Agnes did not help her. 'I don't like him [Jim Sanderson]; I never want to see him. But he – no one could hurt me, could they? . . . Why can't we go where we please? Why can't they leave us alone?'" (30-1). Agnes tells her that men are different and asks, "'Didn't you ever see one go off his head?' She spoke in the detached manner of an entomologist discussing the habits of some rare and curious insect at first, but Hope noticed a little shudder run over her as she finished, and her lip curled back in distaste" (31). Agnes's descriptions can only go so far but Hope finds out shortly from Jim Sanderson what lies inside Bluebeard's chamber. After Jim attacks her and she hits him over the head to

defend herself, Hope reflects, "Why should she, Agnes, any girl, be hunted like that? They harmed no one; they earned their bread. Those lurking, whispering, ogling creatures needed what he had got" (42). For young single women like Hope and Agnes, earning their bread means moving in the world of men and becoming vulnerable to the attacks of men like Jim Sanderson.

The romance of an "adventurous" life in the city is also diminished for Hope when she experiences how cruel urban society can be to outsiders. *The Shadow Riders* depicts the ridiculous aspects of society after Eileen makes her triumphant return and ultimately downplays the viciousness that drove her out of Alberta because she becomes friends with its established members. However, *The Magpie's Nest* paints a much darker picture of society where "[a] little outsider" (115) like Hope, who does not play by the rules, is in danger of being destroyed.

When we see Hope at the time of her twenty-first birthday, she is quite oblivious to the expectations of society. She decided at age seventeen after her altercation with Jim Sanderson that "After having the half of a principality to run over at large when a child, she would not let maturity bar her into one little room" (42). In Calgary, she does as she pleases. To Lisbeth's horror, Hope gets herself "talked about" by going out in cars with men. It does not bother her that Allen Kirby is "just" a chauffeur because "Class distinctions meant no more to her than a pterodactyl" (50). At one point the narrator makes Hope's ignorance of society's mores explicit: "Of the arbitrary and rigid nature of formal social connections she had no conception. The claims of family, of money, of



prestige, meant nothing to her. She had no feeling for the clan; not even a realisation of it. All her distinctions were personal; she had morally the eye of the artist, to whom clothes and appanages are drapery and ornament, not insignia" (54). This ignorance can be attributed to her ranching background. In the milieu she grew up in, hard work and integrity were valued more than appearances and social connections.

Hope is introduced into society when she attends the Tennis dance with Ned Angell. As a bank clerk, Ned is part of the "in" crowd. At the dance "the patronesses, who represented every shade of the town's evolution toward 'society,'" (80) appraise Hope and find her lacking. At the same dance, she meets Tony Yorke, who is a fixture in Calgary society. They fall in love but the fact that Hope is poor and on the outside of things soon begins to matter very much to him. Despite learning at seventeen about the dark side of the fairy tale, Hope still believes in romance. When she meets Tony at the Tennis dance, "She dragged from the recesses of her soul all the garments of romance that had been hidden there for almost all the years of her life, and in the space of one evening neatly cut and fitted them to his outward measure and hung them about him willy-nilly" (83). For his part, Tony falls for Hope because he sees her in a hazy dream of domesticity. The day he proposes,

He found Hope a little dishevelled and fatigued, in a ruffled print house-frock, holding the Hamilton baby on her knee and telling him stories, with a slightly absent air . . . The geranium glistened from a late watering, sitting in the window where it caught the last daylight. The baby, with an expression of serious rapture, repeated after her such phrases of the story as caught his ear. (92)

He tells her how domestic she looks and she agrees that she is “horribly domestic” (93). Shortly afterward Tony takes her in his arms and “he knew she had sounded the deeps of his nature – shallow waters all, but all of him” (94).

The most romanticised notion Tony has is that he can put aside his shallow value system that prizes money and position over true worth and be happy with Hope. Basically, Tony first notices Hope because of the value other people place on her. After seeing her with Edgerton, Tony reflects that “Edgerton’s interest in Hope – whatever nature it partook of – invested her with a sort of value, a speculative value, one might say” (81). Tony’s interest is sparked in the same way as it would be if he were to discover a piece of land Edgerton thinks is worth investing in. This is, in a sense, the way society as a whole functions, new people are introduced to the circle by people of established social value. It is then assumed that the new people will recognize the value of the established members and signal their acceptance of the established order by deferring to custom and prescribed codes of conduct. The only requirements for entrance into Calgary society in *The Magpie’s Nest* are therefore an introduction, an acceptable occupation (be it wife, schoolteacher, or clerk), and deference to the status quo. Very wealthy people like Con Edgerton and his daughter Emily are exceptions to these rules and admitted solely on the basis of their money.

Unfortunately, Hope does not defer to the established order and standards of behaviour, accordingly she remains an outsider. Tony eventually allows gossip to poison him against Hope. To begin with, Hope does not play by the rules of society and

announce her engagement. In her ignorance she tells Mary, "No one would be interested, except maybe you and Lisbeth. And I don't want to be served up with the sandwiches at every afternoon tea from now till next year" (99). She also continues to have many male callers, even after she begins seeing Tony. This is not portrayed as immoral in the novel, but as unwise because it makes Hope the subject of gossip and vulnerable to social scrutiny. The things that are said about Hope become more and more dangerous to her: "Gossip that builds up slowly, like accretions to a coral reef, is more dangerous and difficult than a rumour that runs like sudden flame in dry grass. That will burn itself out, and new grass grow. But the other remains, fetters its hapless object" (101). Cora Shane has Tony over for tea and arranges for him to run into Emily. After Emily leaves, Cora tells him that he and Emily would be a good match. She then insinuates that there is something "going on" with Hope and Edgerton: "'Oh, you know what people are saying. A man in his position too! Men are all fools'" (113).

Ironically, the reason Tony first noticed Hope was because she was seen with Edgerton and Hope and Edgerton's relationship only begins to bother Tony when other people talk about it. Cora also reports that another woman, Mrs. Travers, is planning a dance and cannot decide if Hope should be invited because "Jim Sanderson has some story; says he used to know her -" (113). Tony eventually talks to Sanderson who makes up lies about Hope to pay her back for rejecting him and bashing him over the head with Evan's gun.

Cora Shane plants seeds of bad faith in Tony because Hope is "A little outsider. That was her grievance, crystallised" (115). Cora feels that "Tony belonged to her set – to her" (115). She is jealous of Hope's unconcerned freedom, which does not set out to serve the needs of society. Hope is a true Westerner and an individualist while many of the other characters are not. Edgerton is also an individualist but he is wealthy and a man and can do as he pleases. In fact, Edgerton's individualism is, along with his unique gift for making money, the source of his wealth. Individualism is also considered more acceptable and desirable in men than it is in women. The narrator reveals that "The very security of such as Cora Shane, their livelihood, is menaced by those others [independent women]. Have they not given up the right to their own flag for an assurance of their own menkind, and all that rests on their menkind, the whole foundation of their lives?" (115).

To Cora, Hope is a potentially subversive force. The kind of power Cora Shane has depends on her husband's financial and social position and her ability to control polite society. In this way, she has much in common with Eileen in *The Shadow Riders*. By contrast, the kind of power Hope has is related to personal autonomy and an attitude that she can do as she pleases. In this way, she has more in common with Lesley from *The Shadow Riders* than she does with Cora Shane or Eileen. However, unlike Lesley, who aggressively pursues what she wants and exercises power by writing newspaper editorials, Hope is not sophisticated enough to make full use of the power she does possess. After behaving more like a traditional man by moving about fearlessly and spending time with whomever she chooses, Hope becomes quite passive after she

becomes engaged to Tony, thus adopting a more traditionally feminine posture. Allen Kirby notices the change that has taken place when he comes to visit Hope: "She was 'away off,' indeed. It was not the same girl who received him in a trailing gown and offered him chocolate in a fragile little cup as she who came flying out in short skirt and jersey, to scramble into the big car and crowd the engine to the limit of its capacity through the adventurous dark" (91-2). Hope has literally given up her freedom of movement, opting for the "trailing gown," which will impede her movements, instead of the "skirt and jersey" that allowed her to run and move freely.

However, she does not at this point utilize the traditionally feminine forms of social manipulation that women like Cora Shane employ. Hope gives up one form of power but does not use the form that is now available to her. For example, when Hope goes to the theatre with Mary, Tony, and the Edgertons, the subject of marriage comes up. Hope says she does not think it will ever happen to her: "She avoided Tony's glance as she spoke. Another woman would have looked at him with coquettish denial of her words" (103). She also passively accepts that Tony is delaying their nuptials because he is "worried over his business affairs" (126). The reader knows that "She should have been haughty, and exacting. So she would have fared much better" (126). Tony begins to take Cora's words to heart. He realizes that "He had let Hope into his very heart, and she was an outsider still! A horrible miscalculation, somewhere" (116). He feels, like Cora, that Hope is a "greater individualist . . . than he" (116) and this threatens the established social order on which he depends.

The only woman in *The Magpie's Nest* who is able to exercise power in society without allowing it to define her is Mary Dark. In this way, Mary has much more in common with Lesley in *The Shadow Riders* than she does with Hope. Like Lesley, Mary's identity is connected primarily to her work, not to her relationships with men. This is also true of Hope for much of the novel, but it is not true after she becomes engaged to Tony. Mary tries to guide Hope through society but the younger woman does not heed her advice. However, she is successful at thwarting Tony's attempt to woo Emily Edgerton. Mary tells Con Edgerton that Tony is not good enough for his daughter and then takes Emily out for lunch the next day: "Mary . . . [did] what she had to do. When she ended, there was no more Tony. They left the debris of him on the luncheon table, with the cold coffee cups" (154). Mary is able to manage things smoothly because she sees society clearly, recognizing its inherent hypocrisy and ridiculous aspects while at the same time understanding that her position is owed in part to her family connections. At one point she tells Lisbeth,

As long as my uncle is Minister of Mines at Ottawa I can afford seven scandals a week. If the Government doesn't fall before the next Birthday he'll have a nice shiny knighthood, and I can afford a dozen. I do like the British system we've taken over with the Birthday Honours of being inalienably respectable once established, unless we get into the newspapers. (127)

The society that Mary navigates so successfully and Hope is crushed by is, in a sense, a "garrison" culture. According to Northrop Frye, a garrison mentality develops in

Small and isolated communities surrounded with a physical or psychological 'frontier,' separated from one another and from their American and British cultural sources: communities that provide all that

their members have in the way of distinctly human values, and that are compelled to feel a great respect for the law and order that holds them together, yet confronted with a huge, unthinking, menacing, and formidable physical setting. (225)

In the case of Calgary as it is depicted in *The Magpie's Nest*, the social mores that everyone except Hope follows are the laws that hold polite society together. Frye also notes that, in garrison communities, "real terror comes when the individual feels himself becoming an individual, pulling away from the group, losing the sense of driving power that the group gives him" (226). This is the fear that grips Tony when he realizes that Hope is not part of the group and that marrying her will separate him from it.

Hope, on the other hand, is never afflicted with a garrison mentality because of her ranching cultural background that favours frontiers over garrisons. Instead of being afraid of frontier spaces outside of garrison walls, she craves them. In Part II of *The Magpie's Nest* the story diverges greatly from the economic, political, and social life of early Calgary that it shares with *The Shadow Riders* as it becomes centred around Hope's experiences in the (to her) unknown frontier of New York City.

After Hope and Tony's relationship ends, the fairy tale and romantic elements of the novel disappear from *The Magpie's Nest* for most of Part II. However, they return when Nick gets into a car accident and disappears the day before he and Hope are supposed to leave to start a new life together in Chicago. For a time Nick is insensible with a concussion, a kind of Sleeping Beauty figure. His cousin Grace plays the part of the wicked queen who wants to keep Nick away from his true bride and marry him herself. There are several parallels between Grace and Cora Shane. Both women conspire

to manipulate things to keep Hope away from the object of her affection. Both women are also wealthy and try to keep Hope, who comes from a lower class than they do, away from men from well-off families. However, their motivations are different: Grace acts out of jealous love while Cora's jealousy is more malicious and based on class biases. Near the end of Part II, Nick finally awakens from his slumber and goes out to find Hope.

Part of Hope's education is to learn about the dangers of romance and the danger of putting "all the garments of romance" (83) on someone whom they do not fit. Related to the danger of romance is the danger inherent in marriage. Just as in *The Shadow Riders*, marriage is portrayed as a potential trap in *The Magpie's Nest*. As in Paterson's first novel, the landscape of *The Magpie's Nest* is littered with broken marriages and infidelities and the spectre of divorce looms over the whole scene.

In *The Shadow Riders* many characters undertake relationships for economic gain and social advancement. Eileen and Ross's marriage, for example, begins as one of convenience. In *The Magpie's Nest*, Tony is originally attracted to Hope because he sees her with a rich man. When Tony realizes she will not use her friendship with Edgerton to guarantee him the Kenatchee Falls deal, she can no longer help him economically so he begins to pursue Emily, whose speculative value is more stable because she is Edgerton's daughter. Hope and Tony's relationship therefore resembles Eileen and Harry's in *The Shadow Riders*.

Hope herself almost runs off with Edgerton despite the fact that she does not love him. He promises her "I'll buy the world for you, and you can kick it around" (150). The



destructive potential of their proposed union is symbolized by the prairie fire they almost start while trying to fix Edgerton's stalled car after he asks her to go away with him. At this point in the novel Edgerton's marriage to Emily's mother is failing badly and his chauffeur has revealed earlier that he has "girls" in different cities.

After Mary saves Hope and Edgerton from themselves – their relationship, like their prairie fire, is extinguished just in time – Hope rashly decides to marry Ned. Hope accepts Ned's proposal in part because "Marriage meant the end of the old order, a beginning of new things . . . It was a solution to hand; . . . And it would make Ned happy! In fact, it was a sacrifice on the altar of happiness; it was neither for herself nor for Ned, but for the sake of happiness itself" (163). Ned proposes because he is swept away by impulse and the romance of the moment after he learns Hope has narrowly missed eloping with another man.

Unfortunately, when they return from Banff, the romance of the moment is gone and they are linked until death parts them. Romantic notions are revealed to be illusions and these illusions can be very dangerous for women who are often defined by the men they marry. To make things worse, on what a reviewer called a "very modern note," Hope realizes that Ned and Lisbeth had a romantic relationship "and both women rise on the accident to the heights of good breeding" (Hopkins). After she learns the truth and Lisbeth leaves, "Instantly Hope was aware that of the two who but now had been before her [Ned and Lisbeth], the one she loved most was gone!" (170-1): the romantic love was an illusion, the real love that exists is between Hope and her friend. Hope also realizes at

this moment that she has made a terrible mistake but she cannot escape the marriage because she and Ned are neither wealthy nor well connected enough to get a divorce. She lives for the remainder of the novel as "Mrs. Angell," even though she never sees Ned again after leaving Alberta. For his part, Ned learns about "the vast gulf yawning between the requirements of a man's own soul and of society; he had never known before that such a discrepancy was possible" (171). He is confused because "Had he not performed a man's duty – married?" (171). Marriage, which society regards as the only legitimate form of relationship between men and women, becomes a trap for both of them.

Later, Hope reflects on "the essential brutality of the rigid system that tried to compel all unhappy creatures in like bonds to her own to look only on death for help. How it must corrode even the finest natures; and under what strange masks morality has been miscalled and defamed" (296). Society recognizes only legal bonds, however far they may be from reflecting the hearts of those who are so joined. Even after Hope and Nick have decided to join their lives together, she is regarded as a criminal by society because she is still married to Ned. A man who lives in Hope's building follows them to the seashore and tries to blackmail them. Nick realizes, "There was a hint of the world's hostility toward the individual as such in the affair, the meaningless cruelty of an ordered scheme of things toward all things not orderly. He did not like to think he had put Hope in the position of an outlaw" (261).

Lisbeth Patten is also a "Mrs" but we never hear anything about her husband. Hope's other close friend, Mary Dark, is also married, something Hope does not know

until Mary tells her she is getting divorced. “‘Why, Mary!’ Hope almost shrieked, ‘I never knew you were married!’” (187). Mary replies, “‘No?’ . . . ‘I suppose I forgot I had left all that behind me in the East . . . You ought to get a divorce yourself. No family should be without one’” (187). Mary is able to obtain her divorce because her uncle, who “is Minister of Mines at Ottawa” (127), is both paying for it and ensuring there will be no publicity. The fact that Hope never knew Mary had a husband despite the fact there was gossip about her shows that it was not considered a very remarkable piece of gossip. Edgerton also gets divorced in *The Magpie's Nest*, which comes as a surprise to no one, but his divorce is not seen as scandalous because he is a wealthy man. Hope too plans to divorce Ned near the end of the novel, until she learns he has died.

After her experiences with Tony and Ned in Calgary, Hope stops consciously looking for love in the urban frontier: “She . . . vowed to leave men out of her life; to take her happiness by the day; to build nothing on promises” (258). She explains to Evelyn Curtis that “Since I left home I have walked a long, long road, like a Devonshire lane, between solid hedges and banks of men. Making one’s own living means entering a world of men. It was my sad mistake to take them seriously” (200). She becomes jaded enough about romance and marriage to be able to joke about it with Nick when he says he never expects to marry: “‘I don’t see how you knew without trying it . . . ‘I assure you nothing could induce me to marry you. I am much more ‘sot’ against it than you. I have the best reasons.’ She went off into a burst of merriment that lasted minutes and made her wipe her eyes” (223).

Hope becomes very cynical about marriage and romance – or at least the social system that traps people in ill-conceived unions unless they are wealthy and well-connected like Mary and Edgerton. However, the novel is ultimately not cynical about love and the possibility of finding happiness. *The Magpie's Nest* proposes a different kind of romantic union, one that is more about partnership than fairy tales. When she meets Nick in Part II, Hope is no longer interested in the hazy dreams of domesticity and romance that drew her to Tony or the idea that one must sacrifice oneself on the altar of love that prompted her to marry Ned. Although she is wary, she does not let her fears keep her from Nick: "The blood flowed hotly to her heart. The prudence that would draw back and bargain now, when she had been so lavish for the tinsel imitation, struck her as contemptible. For she knew she had found her unknown good" (235). Instead of hardening her heart, "She held out both her hands to him, and to life, seizing her immortal moment without fear" (235).

Hope and Nick's relationship is solid and real instead of being built upon the insubstantial stuff of romance. Instead of seeing Hope as an "angel in the house" like Tony does, Nick sees her with the eyes of a "true husband."<sup>18</sup> When he shows Hope's picture to Grace he realizes

it was not a lover's vision of her he had, something to be rhymed and sung and flaunted with the bravery of inexperience in the eye of an envious world. It was the husband's tender, more homely portrait, which he carries next to his heart . . . The lover may fancy his lady's perfections so obvious that none can miss them, short of imbecility; but every true husband knows that only himself can see his wife as she deserves to be seen. (287)

The novel reveals that although romance is not a serious business, love should be taken seriously: "All love stories are sublimely silly; but love never is" (287). Despite the fact that romance is rejected as insubstantial in *The Magpie's Nest*, destiny, itself a romantic notion, is shown to be at work. Hope and Nick are clearly destined to be together as they first meet in Chapter I and are reunited twelve years and thousands of miles later. Mary and Edgerton are also destined to be united although they are ultimately brought together less by blind chance than by Mary's "fine sense of the fitness of things" (296). Destiny is much more determined when it comes to bringing Nick to Hope at the end of the novel: "Destiny, having wearied perhaps of attending her wilful, stumbling course, was bringing her heart's desire to her" (303). Destiny is explained in the final chapter as standing "always by one's side, so that one went neither to it nor from it, but with it" (301). Hope knows that "It walked with her here, on his wide stretch of golden grassy plain, as it had gone with her through the thronged streets and brought her to the one among five million she should choose to love" (301).

As destiny walks with Hope to bring her to the man who is "her heart's desire," it also drives her to search for new frontiers throughout the novel. Her comment that she is "investigating civilisation" the same way her father "pursued the wilderness" captures the essence of what she is doing throughout *The Magpie's Nest* (228). When the reader first meets Hope in the field, she sees that "Very far off and dim were the mountains. She meant some day to go and see what was beyond them" (12). This adventurous spirit takes her as far away from home as Calgary but makes her restless again by the time she is

twenty-one: "Do you know that somewhere people are doing things – inventing, exploring, writing, thinking. They've found the North Pole, and discovered X-rays, and built aeroplanes. We sit here, like chickens in a coop. Mentally, we're in the Dark Ages. I want to go and crowd in, to be part of it all – understand it. Things are happening, and I'm not there!" (47). People are not "doing things" that are adventurous and creative in the young prairie city because they remain inside the garrison of polite society. Only a few people, notably Hope and Edgerton, attempt to live as individualists outside the garrison's walls.

One of the ways Hope tries to satisfy her adventurous spirit in dusty garrisoned Calgary is by going for car rides. She is attracted to automobiles by their speed, which gives her a sense of freedom. Allen Kirby often takes her out when his boss is not using the car and sometimes even lets Hope drive:

It streamed through the night like a wandering earth-bound star; the pale-grey, dusty road rushed into its devouring radius of light and was instantly swallowed again by the dark, endlessly, a delight and a fascination to Hope. She was at the wheel, and Allen, beside her, kept a ready hand to correct the errors of her fearful joy. (74)

In this passage, the speed of the car is described as something inevitable and unstoppable like the movement of a star through the universe. Hope feels the same drive toward inevitable movement in her own life. Further, this passage describes Hope's delight and fascination with the way the car appears to devour the road. Hope wants to consume life in just this way. At one point she tells Mary, "I wish the world were an orange and I could eat it –" (98). In *The Magpie's Nest* the car is a symbol of sexuality. This is

revealed the first time Hope goes out in Edgerton's car with Allen. She and Mary are walking down the street when she sees him: "Look, there's a naughty-mobile. I want a ride. Oh!" (48). Cars are "naughty" because they provide a space where men and women can be alone together away from the restrictions of society. Cars are uncontrollable spaces because they have freedom of movement, and social restrictions on sexuality cannot be enforced in cars. It is widely assumed that because Hope "goes out in Edgerton's car" (113) she is having a sexual relationship with him. Hope is attracted to cars because of their movement and because of a desire for sexual experimentation, a desire that she cannot literally indulge because it would be too dangerous in a society that condemns women who have sex outside of marriage. By driving Edgerton's car, itself a symbol of sexuality, she is also permitted to hold in her hands and control a force equal to her sexual desires. By driving the car she is almost, but not quite, out of control.

Hope also satisfies her "turmoil of wild yearnings for things impossible and nebulous, for the edge of the skyline, and space, and action" (56) by going horseback riding at night. Like the car, the horse is a symbol of sexuality and, like the car, Hope has the horse she rides barely under control. She is out riding a "half-broken horse" (56) one night when she comes upon Allen Kirby and Edgerton: "her mount stood sixteen hands and weighed fourteen hundred and fifty. When he promptly stood on his hind legs she leaned forward until she could have kissed him between the ears, but she did not" (57). Hope is able to control the horse (which, from the description, is much too big for a small person to be riding) but the situation is still risky because the weather is bad: "It was no

kind of weather to be riding, which was one reason why Hope had gone. It suited her to ride in the dark, in the rain, in any kind of weather or at any time of day – if it suited her” (56-7). If adventure does not come to her, Hope goes out looking for it even if danger is involved.

The other way Hope fulfils her desire for exploring new frontiers is through her relationships with other people. Unfortunately, when these other people are men, this activity is at odds with how society wants her to act and she “gets herself talked about.” When Mary chides her about all the men she spends time with, Hope explains how they are her portals to adventure:

‘When I hear of a strange country, I long to be there immediately,’ Hope pursued resolutely. ‘To read of some new discovery makes me wish I were at the inventor’s elbow; to hear of a big adventure fills me with an awful longing to have experienced it. And I’d like to be a man; but I’d like to be a woman, too. Of course I can’t have any of those things. But Ned and Allen and Con Edgerton and all of them’ . . . ‘they’re my foreign countries, my other lives. I explore them and watch them; I take some of their lives from them. (98-9)

After her disastrous marriage to Ned, Hope stops looking to men for adventure. Instead, she leaves the garrisoned city of Calgary and goes to Seattle to “look at the sea” (175). Interestingly, there is no recognition in *The Magpie’s Nest* of the fact that Hope moves to a different country. There is no reference to crossing the Canada-U.S. border within the action of the novel, we simply learn that Hope got on the train and “went alone, as she had come” (176). She then re-appears at the beginning of the next chapter after three years in Seattle. Hope actually crosses more than one “border” in the course of the novel: she shifts from a rural to an urban location and from there into increasingly



urban spaces. She also crosses a gender barrier as she enters the world of paid work. She leaves jobs that traditionally were done by women, teaching and cleaning, and takes newspaper jobs which were traditionally performed by men. The novel as a whole is very much preoccupied with travel and movement. However, no significance is given to the fact that Hope moves to another country. This is because Paterson herself and her main character, Hope, do not share the turn of the twenty-first century Canadian obsession with Canadian nationalism.

There is no awareness of differences between North and South in *The Magpie's Nest*, only those between East and West and the wilderness and civilisation. When Hope first meets Nick, she tells him that she comes "from a very far country," . . . 'the Northwest'" (208). This vague designation encompasses the northwestern part of North America as a whole rather than indicating the Canadian West specifically. Hope sees herself as a citizen of the West rather than one of a specific country. Although Hope says she wants to see foreign countries, she does not think she is in one when she moves to the United States. Instead, the new cities she explores are her "foreign countries."

In Seattle, Hope tells Mary, she sees new things while exploring the waterfront:

Sometimes I go down to the docks and mouse around for hours, sniffing at bales of stuff in tea-matting and piles of square timber – smells of spices and cedar and the salt water – and Chinamen and bilges . . . There are weird shops down there, too, and yellowfaced people, and big tall turbaned men with black beards – Sikhs. And lumberjacks and sailormen. (180)

Therefore, Seattle is not a foreign country but its docks give her a glimpse of far away places. However, Hope does not find what she is looking for in the Pacific Northwest so

she heads off to New York, the centre of the publishing industry and one of North America's cultural hubs.

When Hope leaves Seattle, she does so "with neither joy nor interest, but merely urged by something iron in her own soul that refused to be still and rust" (188). At this point, Hope stops being the mere observer of life as she is in Seattle. She hopes to become a conqueror. New York is a true frontier that she knows has to be faced aggressively. Paterson uses the language of conquest to describe Hope's mood on her first morning in the city: "when the persistent daylight at last crept under her eyelids she merely turned and dragged another pillow over as a bulwark. New York was waiting for her to come out and conquer it, but at least it could not break into her hotel room and demand to be conquered immediately" (189). At the end of *The Magpie's Nest*, Hope is still determined to conquer New York, even though she has endured many hard times there. While visiting her family, Hope decides: "She would go back and claim from her glittering city some of its promise, go on with her life, still follow the unknown as her father had" (302).

The biggest challenge Hope faces in the unknown urban frontiers she explores is isolation. Her isolation begins when she leaves home and sets sail in her cockle-shell alone without the protection of her family. At the hotel where she holds her first job, Hope's major sources of information and guidance are the people she works with, young women not much older than herself. Her isolation increases as she moves to increasingly larger urban centres. In Calgary she has two close friends and a number of suitors, but

nobody takes much notice of her until the Tennis dance. After a couple of years in the city, she imagines that when she first arrived "She had dropped into her new environment without a ripple, and lay there like a pebble at the bottom of a brook, with the clear, invisible current of life still flowing by in merely mechanical contact" (53). Although she is introduced into polite society Hope remains an isolated outsider and when she leaves Calgary she leaves alone. In Seattle she does not make any friends. She tells Mary, she has "Acquaintances – some agreeable people. I can't seem to put anyone in the place you and the others occupied. Oh, I have been so lonely, but I didn't want new people" (180).

In New York, "a human sea, which washes out a footprint almost sooner than the maker is out of sight around a corner" (263), she is almost completely alone. During her first days in the city she speaks to no one except Mrs. Merrick, the housekeeper's assistant at the hotel where she stays. Two weeks after she begins working for a newspaper, Hope finally makes a friend: "When Hope met Evelyn Curtis, she saw her with an eye sharpened by loneliness; here was another like herself" (195).

Evelyn Curtis is a freelance writer and through her Paterson illustrates the dangers inherent in women going to the city to look for paid work as journalists. First of all, Evelyn is desperately poor and lives in a downtown room. She tells Hope, "I have no heat, and the window looks on a blank wall" (196). In a poignant illustration of the desperation of her situation Evelyn says, "'Newspapers are useful to keep off the cold; I wear them under my blouse.' She put her hand to her meagre breast, and Hope heard a slight rustling to the pressure" (197).

*The Magpie's Nest* realistically portrays the lives of early women journalists.

Mary, Hope, and Evelyn all work as journalists at different times in the novel. Journalism was one of the only employment avenues open to educated women in the early twentieth century (Lang 87). One of the other professions open to women was teaching (Lang 73). Both Hope and Evelyn worked as teachers before they became newspaperwomen. According to Marjory Lang in *Women Who Made the News* (1999), this is typical of early women journalists who "Almost to a woman, . . . were fugitives from teaching" (73). The reader does not learn much about Hope's teaching job in Calgary: it is evidently of little importance to her. However, we are told why Evelyn left teaching to toil as a freelance scribe in New York: "Materially she had been very comfortable as a school-teacher, but the mental drudgery of it had grown more than she could bear; and the Philistinism of her native city was equally intolerable" (197). When Hope first goes to work at the newspaper in New York she describes the vibrant atmosphere it provides, making it obvious why women would prefer journalism to teaching: "Hope knew and liked the atmosphere of a newspaper office; it suited her temperament; nowhere else in the world do men and women work together with such brusque friendliness, so little consciousness of sex; it is a workshop above everything, and those in it like their work or they would not be there" (194).

However, newspaper work left women, who were paid less than their male counterparts, financially vulnerable (Lang 112). Evelyn Curtis ends up going home for the winter, probably so she will not have to endure the cold in her unheated room. When

Hope gets sick, she is extremely lucky that she has Nick to support her after her financial reserves are drained and she has pawned her jewelry. Marjory Lang reports that the Canadian Women's Press Club had an emergency "Beneficiary Fund" to help out members who were either too ill or too elderly to work (132). According to Lang, illnesses like the one Hope suffers from could be brought on by the demands of the profession: "The constant scramble after stories, the fevered pursuit of one lead after another, too often petered out into destitution as health and strength ebbed away" (132).

Although she is able to make a living as an illustrator, Hope knows she is not a great artistic talent. She turns down Edgerton's offer to send her to college to study art because she knows she has "no genius. Only a trifling talent, a trick" (62). The illustrations she does for newspapers are not where her true talents lie. Just before she falls ill in New York, Hope knows that her editor "had been thinking her work unsatisfactory; and equally sure that she had not yet struck the right note" (238). Hope ultimately finds what she is searching for professionally when Evelyn finds a publisher for her Moon Baby pictures. Her true calling is not as a newspaper illustrator but as a writer and illustrator of books for children.

One of the ways Hope's exploration of civilisation is described metaphorically in the novel is as an ocean voyage that she has to make alone. This is illustrated in Part I by the title of the section, "The Cockle-Shell." Hope sets out on her quest for life and adventure in a state of innocence and sailing a metaphorical cockleshell. Edgerton observes this when he meets her at the hotel where she works. He recognizes her

vulnerability even if she does not: “she was so very small – and the world looked suddenly terrifying to him. She was adrift in a little cockleshell on the ocean, and himself on the deck of a big liner, looking down. How could he throw her a line? Her frail craft would be swamped in the very wash of the big boat” (33). Just as Hope often finds herself isolated in cities where she is actually surrounded by people that she cannot connect with, there are other boats sailing on the ocean but they cannot help her. During her time in Calgary, Hope bemoans the fact that she is like a rock at the bottom of a brook. She longs “to be a little boat riding the stream, making headway toward the sea” (53). The sea is a more dangerous place than the bottom of a brook but she at least wants to be riding the “current of life” (53). The sea here represents the great unknown, the great adventure that she wants to pursue. After she has become successful with the publication of her *Moon Babies* books, she no longer pilots her cockle-shell: “she had her passage booked for the big liner whence Edgerton had once surveyed her cockle-shell making for the open sea” (293).

For Hope, the literal sea (as opposed to the metaphorical one) is a place of possibility and renewal. For example, after her marriage ends she leaves Calgary to “go and look at the sea. It was so powerful, so old, so always new, so beautiful and without pity” (175). In New York she goes to the seashore for relief from “investigating civilisation”: “The wilderness is gone, so I come down to the sea; the sea doesn’t change” (228). The sea presents the same kind of blank slate that the wilderness once provided for her parents. The seashore also becomes the site of personal renewal for Hope because it is

where she and Nick first make themselves vulnerable to each other. They tell each other their "little" names and she reveals that they first met when he was at her family's ranch (228). The pair also goes swimming in the cold October water as a kind of baptism. The water cleanses them both of their old fears of relationships and they emerge ready to begin a new life together. While they are swimming, an undertow begins to carry Hope out to sea: "She was not terrified, but she felt immensely insignificant, and curiously exalted, as if she were a part of the encompassing flood, and for a moment, forgetting that she was not alone, there was a strange temptation to yield herself to the strength of the tide, to go with it as far as it would take her" (230). As she surrenders to the ocean, she also submits emotionally to Nick, trustingly putting her hand on his shoulder so he can tow her back to shore.

Although the sea is metaphorically important in *The Magpie's Nest*, the central landscape is the Western landscape Hope grows up in. Interestingly, even though it contains far fewer people than the urban frontiers she explores, she does not feel isolated there and uses it as a reference point with which to interpret the new landscapes she encounters. The novel opens with a description of the Alberta foothills: "In a hollow sheltered under the brow of one of the million hills which undulate away from the dark flanks of the Northern Rockies, couched in the yellow grass like a hare in its form, a girl child lay with her chin propped on her hands, and stared at the rippled surface of the slough below her" (9). The reader's focus is directed shortly afterward to the vastness of the prairie landscape: "There is no visible horizon on the prairies. Earth and sky melt

together with a suggestion of infinity" (10). This Western landscape remains Hope's imaginative touchstone, her "center of the real," throughout *The Magpie's Nest* just as it does for Lesley and Eileen in *The Shadow Riders*.

Much has been written about the difficulty that new settlers to the West had imaginatively interpreting their surroundings. According to Ronald Rees, people on the prairies tried to make the "barren" landscape more familiar by planting gardens and shelterbelts (123). They saw their new surroundings through the lens of the landscape they had grown up with in eastern North America or Europe, a landscape which was much more pastoral. Early immigrants' interpretation of the prairie landscape as barren and unwelcoming is reflected in prairie literature when writers, particularly the prairie realists, depict "the hostile face of the plains," (Harrison, *Unnamed Country* x). However, by the time *The Magpie's Nest* was written, a whole generation of children had grown up on the prairies and no longer saw them as either terrifying or barren. Isabel Paterson and her character Hope Fielding are both part of this new generation.

A reversal takes place in this novel, whereby instead of an Easterner looking at the West and comparing it to "civilisation," a Westerner looks at the East and compares it to the West. When Hope first arrives in New York, "The vast city, mile on mile of brick and stone, filled her with mingled admiration, horror, and a sense of her own insignificance" (191). The vastness of the city affects her the same way the vast prairies affected so many new settlers: by filling her with a sense of her own insignificance. The people who live in this environment seem alien to Hope:



the glitter and lightness of it, the marvellous windows and the dainty women who went by like artificial lilies of the field, were a magnificent show, useless, perishable, but infinitely costly and so remote from the common soil, so far from the strong roots of the world on which they flourished like rare parasites on the top of great tree, as to carry a suggestion of the utter unreality of fairyland. (191-2)

The “common soil” that the New Yorkers are so far from is what Hope knows best because she grew up with it. She is literally “rooted” in it from the opening chapter where she is lying on the grass. No matter how far away from this landscape Hope travels, she always remains a “Fielding.” Hope orients herself in New York by reading the cityscape as if it were a prairie landscape: “‘It is big,’ she conceded, and for a long time pondered of what it reminded her, waking with a start to the conscious recollection of those endless reaches of soft dun-coloured landscape that had been her childish world” (192). Hope reads the New York landscape with the eyes of a Westerner. Once she is able to do this, the city becomes more imaginatively real to her and she no longer views it as an alien fairyland. This is similar to the process new settlers to the West used to deal with the prairie; they would read it in terms of their old world.

It takes some time before Hope is able to look at the city without superimposing another landscape on it. She is able to appreciate New York for itself after she has lived there several months and begins to feel more at home. One night when she and Nick go out they come across this scene:

It was dusk when they returned, by way of Riverside Drive. Leaving it gave them one of those lovely vignettes sometimes to be seen momentarily framed in a cross street that looks to the river. A slender tree, the delicate twigs etching with black the faintly suffused western sky, on one side; the other straightly framed by a wall; and a street lamp hanging in the

branches like some marvellous fruit, a globe of the palest frosty violet light. The distant Palisades balanced the picture with their solid masses. (256)

Instead of seeing the city as a big place “of enchantment and terror and paradox” (192) that can only be comprehended by comparing it to the West, Hope can now appreciate the street scene in terms of specifics related to New York. She is able to name Riverside Drive and the Palisades and appreciate the interplay between trees and a street lamp. The act of naming is important for her, just as it was important for new settlers to the West.

The way that the narrative circles back on itself at the end of the novel emphasizes that the West remains her “center of the real” and that her present is inextricably tied to her past. Up until the last chapters, Hope is in the process of moving ever farther away from home. After Nick disappears leaving her homeless and penniless, Hope goes to work as a maid in a hotel, just as she did for her first job. Undressing in front of the mirror after work one day,

she stopped suddenly and looked, long and curiously, at the slim black figure imaged there, white aproned, capped even. She pulled off the cap hastily. ‘I didn’t wear a cap then,’ she reflected whimsically. ‘This is the badge of civilisation, which means servitude. Now is it all the same? I wonder if I’ve dreamed all the rest, and this is not New York, and I am seventeen . . . How the wheel turned; it made me dizzy, I suppose. Full circle. (267)

Hope goes even further back in time and space when she returns home for a visit. She gets a train ticket with her first Moon Babies cheque and “then she was half across the world again, and talking to Mary . . . When the wheel of life did begin to spin for her, it went at breathless speed” (292). *The Maggie’s Nest* ends as it begins: with Hope lying

on the grass on the Fielding ranch, "arraigning her soul and weighing her life" (300). She gets up when she sees a train approaching in the distance, unknowingly going toward the ranch house to meet Nick, just as she did in the beginning.

Hope's trip home at the end of the novel is more than just the prodigal child's triumphant return after conquering the city frontier and making her fortune as a children's author. She must return to the West to "arraign her soul and weigh her life" because it is her home and her centre and even after many years away it is the only place where she can truly make sense of her life. Her family's ranch in Alberta is the beginning and end of all things for Hope, her touchstone and homeplace. Imaginatively, Hope always circles back to the West even though the frontiers she is driven to explore are elsewhere. At the end of the novel when she returns to the West, she is doing physically what she has done all along psychologically.

The fact that the West remains Hope's "center of the real" is what makes *The Magpie's Nest* a prairie novel. It is also what differentiates the novel from other prairie fiction where the "center of the real" remains in an Eastern elsewhere for the characters. The West portrayed in *The Magpie's Nest* is not the harsh, hostile prairie that established criticism maintains is the dominant literary mode of Western Canada. Instead, the West of *The Magpie's Nest* is a place where the frontier is already settled. The West is not a harsh unknown land to Hope but a place that has already exhausted its possibilities for adventure. Rather, she is driven to explore "civilisation" in the East. Instead of the East exploring the West, the time has come for the West to explore the East.

## Conclusion

At the end of *The Magpie's Nest*, when Hope returns to the West to centre herself, it appears at first glance that she is returning to the landscape. If this were true, Isabel Paterson would be revealed as just as preoccupied with landscape as the environmentalist critics say all prairie writers are. Perhaps *The Shadow Riders* and *The Magpie's Nest* could then be judged as failed prairie novels, really preoccupied with the prairie landscape but in denial of this fact because Paterson is unwisely trying to move the setting to the city and deal with politics and society.

In actuality, Paterson's first two novels present the forgotten face of the prairies. For Paterson's characters, by the beginning of World War I the wilderness was already gone. For them, the frontier was settled by their parents. They grew up in the West and for them the landscape holds neither mystery nor menace. The West portrayed in *The Shadow Riders* and *The Magpie's Nest* already has young cities with rapidly growing populations. When Lesley, Eileen and Hope leave their rural homes to explore the city, the West remains their "center of the real." However, their relationship with this centre is complex, for it is as much about culture as it is about landscape.

According to Dick Harrison, culture was an extremely important factor in the development of prairie literature. Although the people who came to settle the West came from many cultures, the "dominant minority" was Anglo-Saxon and these English speaking immigrants wrote most of the early prairie literature (*Unnamed Country* xiv).

Culture was important to their writing because their "center of the real" remained in the East or Europe.

As valuable as Harrison's insights are, he does not consider the possibility that the culture of the early West was multiple, even within the "dominant minority" of immigrants from the British Isles. In *The Shadow Riders* and *The Magpie's Nest* the Western cities are largely populated by characters who look East for their cultural touchstones. However, Hope and Lesley are characters from the rural West whose cultural touchstones are not Eastern. As has been demonstrated in this thesis, Paterson's heroines are the product of a ranching culture that is distinctly different from the culture that is represented in most canonized prairie literature. Ranching culture is characterized by the drive toward ever farther frontiers. This frontier spirit drives Hope and Lesley just as it did their parents, but they end up going to the city because the rural frontier is gone.

Environmentalists critics of prairie literature would no doubt take issue with using the frontier thesis to analyze a Canadian novel. However, it is more useful to view the frontier thesis when it appears in Canadian literature not as a misguided product of American influence but as the expression of one particular view of the West that existed on both sides of the border but was more prevalent on the American side. A Canadian author whose characters are moved to explore "frontiers" does not necessarily have an inauthentic view of what it means to be Western, merely a different one than is usually found in Canadian literature.

As we saw in chapter one, the plains/prairies critics would support this point of view to the extent that they see the literature of the West as straddling the border (though they would not view ranching literature as being from the true plains/prairies). In Paterson's Alberta novels, the West is a region that incorporates no distinction between Canada and the United States, the important distinctions are between the East and the West.

Why should the student of prairie literature be interested in this lost face of the prairie, this different view of what it means to be Western Canadian? First of all, the way Paterson's characters see the West is probably closer to the way Westerners, particularly Albertans, see themselves than the picture provided by the prairie realists. Prairie realists write about how prairie farmers had their romantic illusions shattered by the reality of the harsh prairie. As far as literature about ranching goes, writers such as Wallace Stegner in *Wolf Willow* do portray the hardships ranchers faced. Stegner writes about the winters of 1906-1907 that devastated the cattle industry in southern Alberta and Saskatchewan, while Lesley in *The Shadow Riders* lived in a sod hut as a child. However, Western Canadians no longer harbour any romantic illusions about farming on the bald prairie. By contrast, the romantic myth of the cowboy is still intact and celebrated annually at events such as the Calgary Stampede and the myriad rodeos held every summer in small communities throughout the West.

What is actually the most resonant myth here and why do literary critics insist on perpetuating one and not the other? Why is the prairie realist view of the prairie experience treated as authentic while the ranching experience is treated as inauthentic?

An appropriately Western response to this question would be to say that the view of the West presented in established criticism was written by Easterners who are most comfortable thinking about Westerners as "simple folk learning to suffer on the barren prairie" (Tefs 46). However, this is too simplistic a judgment, particularly because many critics writing about prairie literature are Westerners themselves.

Probably the simple answer is that not enough re-reading and re-examining has taken place. While contemporary criticism embraces the multiplicity of contemporary prairie writers, it is slower to accept that multiplicity on a smaller scale is also a part of our literary past. The literary worlds Isabel Paterson creates in *The Shadow Riders* and *The Magpie's Nest* deserve to be preserved, not only despite the fact that they do not precisely fit into established paradigms of what prairie literature is but precisely because they do not. Hope Fielding and Lesley Johns live in a rapidly urbanizing prairie West. This urban West is more sophisticated than the West usually attributed to prairie literature but it is nevertheless an authentic vision. In the Calgary of *The Shadow Riders*, the reader sees in embryo many of the tensions between East and West that still exist today. More than 80 years after Paterson's first novel appeared, Western Canadians are still struggling with their "marriage" to the East, unsure of how closely they should be tied together by business dealings and the central government.

Both novels, but particularly *The Shadow Riders*, are extremely concerned with politics and fill one of the “surprising gaps” that Edward McCourt said were to be found in the early literature of the West (181). Paterson’s novels also fill an obvious gender gap in the canon of early prairie writers; among the best-known early prairie authors, the only woman is Martha Ostenso. Paterson is merely one of a great number of women writers who have been “lost” as the result of a critical process that undervalued them.<sup>19</sup>

Paterson was not the only woman on the early prairies to write about ranching culture or to employ urban settings and make politics an important part of the plot. Winnifred Eaton, who published most of her novels under the pen name Onoto Watanna, set two novels published in the early 1920s on ranches: *Cattle* (1923) and *His Royal Nibs* (1925). Eaton accurately describes the ranching country west of Calgary near the town of Cochrane where she herself lived for several years. The cast of characters features Nettie, an innocent young prairie woman, and Bull, the brutish cattle rancher who rapes her after hiring her to care for his invalid wife. Nettie is rescued from Bull by Angella, a woman viewed as very eccentric by the community because she runs her farm alone and dresses like a man. Both Bull and Angella are “types” that can be readily found in the folklore of the West. Similarly, in *His Royal Nibs* Eaton’s main character is an English remittance-man, another popular character from Western folklore.

Like Paterson, Eaton portrays the unique culture of the ranching communities in the prairie West. *Cattle* and *His Royal Nibs* are not as sophisticated from a literary point of view as *The Shadow Riders* and *The Magpie’s Nest* but they are evidence that



Paterson's use of ranching culture in her earliest two novels is part of a trend that points to greater diversity in prairie writing than has been acknowledged by critics.

*The Shadow Riders* and *The Magpie's Nest* can also be compared to Nellie McClung's *Purple Springs* (1921). McClung does not write about ranching culture but she does intertwine political and romantic elements in the plot, just as Paterson does in *The Shadow Riders*. Like Lesley, Pearl Watson in *Purple Springs* seeks to influence the outcome of an election even though, as a woman, she cannot vote. Whereas Lesley ghost writes newspaper editorials, Pearl plays the part of the female premier in a theatrical production called "Women's Parliament" that satirizes the Manitoba government's refusal to grant women the right to vote. Part of *Purple Springs* is set in Winnipeg, although McClung does not use the city as her primary setting as Paterson does.

Paterson may have been the only writer of her time to combine ranching culture, politics and an urban setting<sup>20</sup> but, after the publication of *The Magpie's Nest*, Paterson stopped writing novels set primarily in the Canadian West. However there are many continuities between her Alberta novels and her later works. In Paterson's three historical novels; *The Singing Season* (1924), *The Fourth Queen* (1926), and *The Road of the Gods* (1930), the story in each case centres around the fortunes of a pair of young lovers. *The Singing Season* and *The Fourth Queen* are filled with political intrigues, just as *The Shadow Riders* is. Both of these novels also have characters who are wealthy merchants, akin to Ross in *The Shadow Riders* and Con Edgerton in *The Magpie's Nest*. Similar characters also appear in *Never Ask the End* (1933), *The Golden Vanity* (1934), and *If it*

*Prove Fair Weather* (1940). The presence of the capitalists and merchants in Paterson's novels reflects her belief in the importance of the individual to the economic well-being of society. This idea is found in Paterson's non-fiction writings as well, particularly in *The God of the Machine* (1943). Capitalists and merchants all have the same frontier spirit as Paterson's first protagonists, Lesley and Hope. Paterson's belief in individualism may have its roots in her ranching background, just as her characters in *The Shadow Riders* and *The Magpie's Nest* get their frontier spirit from their ranching background.

There is some evidence that Isabel Paterson, like Lesley and Hope in her first two novels, never completely left the West in an imaginative sense. In addition to the occasional references to her Western childhood that she made in her "Turns With a Bookworm" column, in *Never Ask the End* Paterson created a character that could be a middle-aged version of Hope Fielding. Like Hope, Marta is an illustrator who lives in New York but is originally from the West. Marta returns imaginatively to the West in the course of *Never Ask the End* in long descriptive passages about her Western childhood. At one point, Marta describes part of her family's journey west from Ontario, a journey perhaps similar to the one Paterson made with her family as a child:

Prairie dogs stood upright beside their burrows, squeaked curiously and vanished. In the Bad Lands there were long stretches rough with broken lava, and a horned toad under a sage-bush. It was delicious to splash through a creek; that was what the gravel of the restaurant terraces [in Europe] brought back, the feel of the pebble fords, with the water riffing by her ankles. (166)

She also reminisces about her time in a prairie city after she left the family ranch as a young woman. Therefore, there is a natural progression from Lesley and Hope in Paterson's earliest novels to the characters she constructs in later works of fiction.

*The Shadow Riders* and *The Magpie's Nest* tell the full story of what it meant to be young, female and independent in the prairie West. Paterson's heroines navigate through a society in which women could not vote or work in any profession they might choose. In this society, marriage is both a prerequisite for respectability and sexual expression, and a potential trap that one could only be extricated from by death or an act of parliament.

Hope and Lesley also face the isolation and alienation that comes from the movement that has characterized the twentieth century in North America. This sense of isolation is also the biggest link between Paterson's novels and the canonized works of early prairie fiction. While established criticism reveals that characters in prairie realist novels feel alienated and isolated because they have found themselves in a hostile and unfamiliar rural landscape, Paterson's characters find themselves isolated in cities. However, Paterson's characters do not long for the home place or "center of the real" the way early immigrants to the prairies did. Instead, they carry the West inside them as a point of reference as they continue to move across the continent. For Paterson's characters, there is a sense that this movement is inevitable. They are children of the twentieth century, a century that John Berger has described as a century of banishment.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Paterson was by no means the first Canadian woman writer to use the city as her primary setting. Isabel Ecclestone MacKay (*Mist of Morning*, 1919), Sara Jeannette Duncan (*The Imperialist*, 1904), Margaret Adeline Brown (*My Lady of the Snows*, 1908), Kate Carr (*Cupid and the Candidate*, 1906), and Agnes C. Laut (*The New Dawn*, 1913) were other early writers who used urban settings for their works. Like Paterson, all of these women (with the exception of Duncan) receive scant critical attention today. The *Literary History of Canada* notes that women writers were the first to use the urban setting: "The earliest stories of the city scene were by women writing in the sensational society fiction vein of Mrs. Fleming or Mrs. Sadlier. They sketch a fantasy world of 'society' in which their characters intrigue and contend" (308). However, the urban novel still took longer to appear in Canada than it did in the United States. This may have been because Canada had fewer and smaller cities than its neighbour to the south. It may also have been because Canadians continually compared the culture of their urban centres to that of Britain and found it lacking in comparison. However, if Canadians felt their urban society inferior to the mother country's, their wild spaces were unique and therefore more marketable.

<sup>2</sup> She also wrote two unpublished novels. The first was an early effort which does not survive. The second was *Joyous Gard*, written after her retirement from the *Herald Tribune*, which she was unable to sell "to a publishing world that considered her both annoying and pass—[sic, should read passé]" (Cox, Introduction xxix).

<sup>3</sup> Paterson's Alberta novels are mentioned briefly in *The Literary History of Canada* (1976), Bruce Peel's *Bibliography of the Prairie Provinces* (1973), and Clara Thomas's *Canadian Novelists 1920-1945* (1946). However, even in these brief references errors appear, indicating that the research conducted on Paterson was of a cursory nature. In Volume 2 of the *Literary History of Canada* Desmond Pacey writes, "Isabel M. Paterson . . . in *The Singing Season* (1924) and other novels dealt with the history of Old Spain" (172). In fact, only *The Singing Season* was set in Old Spain, *The Fourth Queen* is set in Elizabethan England and *The Road of the Gods* is set in Germany before the Romans invaded under Octavius. Thomas makes another error when she writes in 1946 that Paterson "has not written any fiction in many years" (97), despite the fact that *If It Prove Fair Weather* appeared in 1940.

<sup>4</sup> For an extended discussion, see chapter five of Dick Harrison's *Unnamed Country*, "Archetypes of Ruin: The Failure of Imagination."

<sup>5</sup> See Douglas R. Francis, Ronald Rees and others.

<sup>6</sup> Turner first outlined the "frontier thesis," an extremely important theory of American historical development, in his essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893). In his introduction Turner writes, "American development has exhibited not merely advance along a single line, but a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line, and a new development for that area. American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character. The true point of view in the history of this nation is not the Atlantic coast, it is the Great West" (2-3).

<sup>7</sup> *The Shadow Riders* was published a year before *The Magpie's Nest* but the latter book was "completed somewhat earlier (certainly by late 1914)" (Cox xiv).

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<sup>8</sup> See Max Foran, *Calgary: An Illustrated History* 88.

<sup>9</sup> In terms of Isabel Paterson, I postulate that many of her political views on individualism and enlightened self-interest, best articulated in *The God of the Machine*, can be traced back to the ranching culture she grew up in on her family's ranch near Mountain View, Alberta.

<sup>10</sup> I will use the term "society" as Leonore Davidoff does in *The Best Circles: Women and Society in Victorian England* (1973) taking her definition from the *Oxford English Dictionary*: "meaning 'the aggregate of leisured, cultured or fashionable persons regarded as forming a distinct class or body'" (103).

<sup>11</sup> The Belle Claire Company is a fictional creation but Paterson may have taken her inspiration from the Eau Claire Lumber Company, which was located on the Bow River in about the same spot as the fictional power plant (Dempsey 76).

<sup>12</sup> See *Henderson's Calgary Directory*, 1910.

<sup>13</sup> Max Foran records McArthur's initials as 'J.A.,' which makes a connection between him and 'Jack Addison' all the more tantalizing (*Frontier Calgary* 210).

<sup>14</sup> The term "exotic Other" is taken from the ideas of Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978) and Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1953). Chan views Lesley as exotic, just as Said writes that the West (Europe and North America) has long viewed the East (Asia) as exotic. According to Said, "The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (1). This is similar to how Eastern Canadians and Europeans (particularly the British) viewed Western Canada. They saw the West as an exotic locale filled with romance and adventure. The Western woman is doubly exotic because she is also the Other to the male Subject. On the subject of the female Other, de Beauvoir writes, "For him she is sex — absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute — she is the Other" (xvi).

<sup>15</sup> Desmond Morton writes that, by the end of the war in 1914, "The Canadians had lost 60,661 dead; as many more would return hopelessly mutilated in mind or body. During the autumn of 1918, almost as many Canadians may have died from a strange, virulent influenza epidemic. Both tolls had taken the young and the talented. For the survivors, nothing would ever be quite the same again" (177).

<sup>16</sup> Rees also note that in order to survive on the prairie, ranchers adopted many of the survival strategies of the *real* authentic inhabitants of the West, the native peoples: "The first open range cattlemen in Saskatchewan and Alberta lived a life similar to the life of the Plains Indians. They were mounted and semi-nomadic, and their one-storey mud and log shacks weren't much more elaborate than the Indian's teepee" (142). Ranchers also followed old Indian and buffalo trails and used Indian camp sites (142). Despite these connections, "Ranchers seem to have been no more sympathetic to the condition of the Indians than were other settlers, but there is an occasional suggestion of a sense of affinity with Indian ways of life" (142).

<sup>17</sup> The quotation is from a love letter Mérimée wrote to an unknown woman. All of Mérimée's letters to this woman were translated into English and published in *Letters to an Unknown* (1897). The quotation Paterson includes in *The Magpie's Nest* is probably adapted from Henri Pène du Bois' 1897 translation: "You have troubles of the mind, pleasures of the mind; but the viscera named heart is developed at twenty-five years of age only, in the forty-sixth degree of latitude. You will knit your beautiful and black eyebrows

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and say: 'The impudent man doubts that I have a heart,' for that is the great pretension nowadays. Since so many novels and poems of passion, so-called, have been written, all women pretend to have a heart. Wait a little. When you shall have a heart for good, you shall tell me about it. You shall regret the good old days when you were living only by the mind, and you shall see that the evils which make you suffer now are only pin-pricks in comparison with the stabs which shall rain on you when the days of passion come" (23-24).

<sup>18</sup> The term "angel in the house" was originated by Coventry Patmore in 1854. Patmore was a Victorian poet who wrote a long poem in tribute to his wife Emily, whom he regarded as an ideal domestic helpmeet. "Throughout *The Angel in the House*, which grew more popular as the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed, the narrator intersperses details of his courtship and marriage with moral calls for women's purity" (Coventry Patmore).

<sup>19</sup> A few of these lost and undervalued early women writers include: Agnes Deans Cameron (*The New North*, 1909), Francis Marion Beynon (*Aleta Dey*, 1919), Lily Dougall (*What Necessity Knows*, 1893), Sui Sin Far (*Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, 1912), Agnes C. Laut (*Lords of the North*, 1900), J.G. Sime (*Sister Woman*, 1919), Nell W. Parsons (*The Curlew Cried*, 1947), Winnifred Eaton (*Cattle*, 1923), and Flos Jewell Williams (*New Furrows*, 1926).

<sup>20</sup> The early Canadian novel that is most similar to Paterson's two prairie novels is Douglas Durkin's *The Magpie* (1923), which is set in Winnipeg during the General Strike of 1919.

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