

I See by Your Outfit: B Westerns and Some
Recent Texts about Cowboys.

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Perry Nodelman

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

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Perry Nodelman (bio)

Bayle, B. J. *Shadow Riders*. Toronto: Dundurn, 2010. 250 pp. \$12.99 pb. ISBN 978-1-55488-724-8. Print.

Bruins, David. *The Legend of Ninja Cowboy Bear*. Illus. Hilary Leung. Toronto: Kids Can, 2009. 31 pp. \$16.95 hc. ISBN 978-1-55453-486-9. Print.

Bruins, David. *Ninja Cowboy Bear Presents The Call of the Cowboy*. Illus. Hilary Leung. Toronto: Kids Can, 2011. 41 pp. \$16.95 hc. ISBN 978-1-55453-748-8. Print.

Bruins, David. *Ninja Cowboy Bear Presents The Way of the Ninja*. Illus. Hilary Leung. Toronto: Kids Can, 2010. 26 pp. \$16.95 hc. ISBN 978-1-55453-615-3. Print.

Citra, Becky. *Sam's Ride*. Victoria: Orca, 2009. 64 pp. \$6.95 pb. ISBN 978-1-55469-160-9. Print.

Danneberg, Julie. *Cowboy Slim*. Illus. Margot Apple. Watertown: Charlesbridge, 2009. 30 pp. \$7.95 pb. ISBN 978-1-58089-199-8. Print.

Dueck, Adele. *Racing Home*. Regina: Coteau, 2011. 186 pp. \$8.95 pb. ISBN 978-1-55050-450-7. Print. [End Page 141]

Heartland. 70 episodes to date. CBC. 2007-. Television.

McGillis, Roderick. *He Was Some Kind of a Man: Masculinities in the B Western*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2009. 232 pp. \$32.95 pb. ISBN 978-1-55458-059-0. Print.

Peterson, Lois. *The Ballad of Knuckles McGraw*. Victoria: Orca, 2010. 105 pp. \$7.95 pb. ISBN 978-1-55469-203-3. Print.

Toy Story 3. Dir. Lee Unkrich. Disney Pixar. 2010. Film.

Van Lente, Fred, Andrew Foley, et al. *Cowboys and Aliens*. 2006. New York: It, 2011. 112 pp. \$24.99. ISBN 978-0-06-164665-2. Print.

Wagner, Elaine. *Racin' Jason*. Penticton: Theytus, 2009. 50 pp. \$12.95 pb. ISBN 978-1-894778-73-2. Print.

"Sputnik. Once the astronauts went up, children only wanted to play with space toys."

—Stinky Pete, in *Toy Story 2*

This is Stinky Pete the Prospector's explanation, in Disney Pixar's *Toy Story 2*, of why, after many decades, the long-term obsession with cowboys and the Wild West in American culture suffered a rapid decline from the mid-1950s onward. Since then, as Stinky Pete suggests, space toys and space stories have been far more prominent. But in the 1940s and 1950s, there were cowboys everywhere from lunch boxes and colouring books to Saturday morning TV series. A child of that time (as I was), Roderick McGillis has especially fond memories of the B westerns

produced by lesser Hollywood studios from the 1930s on through the 1950s, memories he explores in his fine book *He Was Some Kind of a Man*.

Without ever removing the rose-coloured glasses of nostalgia, McGillis views B westerns with the steely-eyed gaze of a tough-minded cultural critic. "I have no desire to return to a childhood past that I remember as troubled and difficult," he writes. "If nostalgia is a feeling of loss and a desire to restore or renovate what is lost, then I have no nostalgia for my own past. And I certainly have no intention to lament the passing of the cowboys that are my subject" (45). Instead, borrowing a term from literary scholar Svetlana Boym, he indulges in what he calls "reflective nostalgia": "The past is of use when we use it to reflect upon the present and future" (47).

For McGillis, the cowboy is doubly evocative—the **[End Page 142]**hero in a fantasy world that he feels nostalgia for and that is in itself inherently nostalgic: "no boy aspiring to become the hero he desires to emulate can accomplish such becoming because the hero is always a man of the past, always already out of touch with changing times, always a figure of regression, and paradoxically always already old even though he never ages. . . . He is, in short, a fantasy" (4). He is specifically a wish-fulfilling role model, a version of psychoanalytical theorist Jacques Lacan's "ideal-I" for young viewers.

He is also an ideal of masculinity in particular. As McGillis notes, the heroes of B westerns are "steadfast, independent, resourceful, self-reliant, aggressive, rational and controlling" (1). They...

△ **Reviews** ▣



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