

## “And Brewsters pay for smiles” Ray Bagley’s Alienated Verse

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### Article abstract

The verse of Ray Bagley, a progenitor of later «cowboy poets» in Alberta, reflects the industrial roots and character of the province, which was itself a product of the 20th century. «Cowboy culture» in Alberta is inextricably intertwined with the entertainment industry, particularly due to the presence of the Calgary Stampede, but in Bagley’s case to his connection to tourism in the Canadian Rockies. This article considers the attitudes towards history, nature, and gender expressed in Bagley’s collection of poems, *Those Other Days*.

## **“AND BREWSTERS PAY FOR SMILES”**

### **Ray Bagley’s Alienated Verse\***

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Ray Bagley, a predecessor of later, more prominent Alberta cowboy poets, was born in Iowa in 1880 and immigrated to Alberta with his family at the age of 12. (See Lyon 1991 and Marty 1989 for overviews of Alberta cowboy poetry.) Among his other occupations, Bagley worked as a dude wrangler (a horse worker employed in the tourist industry, preparing mounts for visitors to dude ranches, often leading them on trail rides, and providing local color for their vacation experience) for the Brewster family, outfitters of the holiday club, the Trail Riders of the Canadian Rockies.<sup>1</sup> Most of the poems collected in his 1960 anthology *Those Other Days* were written while he was active with the Trail Riders and reveal the alienation and contradictions at the intersection of tourism, entertainment, and everyday life where the image of the cowboy has been shaped and marketed.

Tourist and show business themes, rhetoric, and attitudes in Bagley’s verse make it arguably not folkloric, especially in the light of this observation by Roger deV. Renwick: “[M]odern folk poetry usually takes as its topics real people, institutions, places, and events from the shared environment that’s within daily experience and reach of both maker and audience. Folk poetry effectively passes its judgment on social matters of the indigenous, everyday, practical, *lived sort*” (1993: 55). This paper does not intend to challenge this

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\* Earlier versions of this paper were read at the *Canadian Cowboy Conference: New Perspectives on Ranching History* held at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, September 26-28, 1997, and at the Annual General Meeting of the Canadian Society for Traditional Music, Shawnigan Lake, British Columbia, November 28-30, 1997.

1. The Brewster corporation, which began as a family business of teamsters and tourist outfitters in 1892, remains prominent in the bus and tour industry in Alberta.

expectation of folk culture but assumes instead that such verse as Bagley's occurs at an intersection between folk and popular culture. The repetition of the term "intersection" from the previous paragraph is intentional; just as the meeting of industrial, imaginative, and quotidian activities produces contradiction and alienation, versifiers who lack the support of a tradition (be it folkloric, industrial, or academic) are by definition alienated.<sup>2</sup>

Bagley was not a learned writer and can hardly be considered representative of sophisticated culture, nor did he have access to technological, commercial means of production and distribution, so despite the influence from popular culture (greeting card verse, perhaps, as well as popular song and poetry) in his work, we cannot say that he was producing popular culture. Renwick's description assumes a monolithic folk community which may or may not be detectable in reality; how much Bagley spoke for a community is not clear. His verse generally avoids "everyday, practical, *lived*" concerns and echoes the romance and escapism of popular culture. There are, however, some formal elements of folk verse in his work, and whatever "topics" or "matters" Bagley chose to write about, his voice is certainly "indigenous." Indeed, his fascination with image, particularly that of the westerner, represents a provincial obsession.

The presence of cowboys in Alberta has been extremely useful for a variety of business and political enterprises in the province, the Trail Riders and other Brewster concerns among them, though ranching was only one of several formative Alberta industries (which include farming, mining, and petroleum, as well as tourism), and the number of persons occupied in it must never have been very large. Nevertheless, the cowboy is frequently presented as emblematic of the province.

Despite its rusticity, the cowboy image, from the days of Ned Buntline and Buffalo Bill, is a product of popular — that is, industrial and technological — culture. The Calgary Stampede (an annual rodeo which has come to include a variety of entertainments and which carries social, commercial, and political clout in this city analogous to that of the Mardi Gras Crewes of New Orleans) was founded by Guy Weadick, a professional entertainer with Hollywood connections (Livingstone 1996: 96-99). The Stampede affirms the

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2. Complaints about the lack of "quality" of these poets' work are thus perhaps irrelevant. What standards are appropriate to a writer who is not part of a tradition? How could she be expected to learn to apply them? The issues of tradition and position are dealt with in Michael Taft's consideration of Saskatchewan poet Walter Farewell (1992).

identification of the rodeo cowboy, a professional entertainer, with the working cowboy; this identification was also encouraged throughout much of the century by the prominence in Alberta of country singer Wilf Carter, a transplanted Nova Scotian who appeared in the rodeo as a young man (Lyon 1987).

The province of Alberta itself was created in 1905, when the industrial revolution was a *fait accompli* in Europe and North America, and the cultural, social, and political history of the province can be read as a local application of this international phenomenon. It is not surprising, in this light, that Calgary, home of the Stampede and the 1988 Winter Olympics, has twice elevated radio personalities, Don MacKay and Ralph Klein, to the mayor's office, nor that the latter went on to become arguably the most widely known Alberta premier. (MacKay was often pictured in a cowboy hat, and a fawning biography of Klein by Frank Dabbs was subtitled *A Maverick Life*.) Though supporters as well as detractors consider the rural fundamentalist community to be the base of the Social Credit/Reform lineage of power, neither "Bible Bill" Aberhart nor Preston Manning can be understood except as politicians operating from urban bases, who understood and were committed to the use of media and image.<sup>3</sup>

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3. William ("Bible Bill") Aberhart was Social Credit premier of Alberta from 1935 to 1943. His successor was Ernest C. Manning, who presided 1943-1968. Aberhart was an educator (both in the Calgary public schools and through his own Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute) and fundamentalist preacher, who began radio broadcasting in 1925, an activity he continued through his terms of office, mixing religious and political messages. Ernest Manning, also a religious broadcaster, was the first graduate of Aberhart's Institute. Manning's son, Preston, is the former leader of the Reform Party, the Official Opposition in the Canadian Parliament. Preston Manning carefully promoted the use of high-tech instruments (videos, interactive town halls, and so forth) within the Reform Party, though the manipulation of his own image occasionally raised eyebrows outside of the province; Manning's early insistence upon the grassroots significance of his casual dress, not to mention his determination not to move into Stornoway, traditional house for the Leader of the Opposition, led many to question his later conversion to fashionable suits and his move into the political mansion (Cernetig 1997:A1, A5).

Events have overtaken this paper, of course, and Manning's Reform Party is now the Canadian Alliance, still the official opposition, of which Manning is not the party leader. However, the activities of the Canadian Alliance have not veered from the reading I have given the Reform Party; note the insistence upon Stockwell Day's photogenic presentation.

The symbolic role of the cowboy, particularly in southern Alberta, can be demonstrated through a variety of resources. For instance, proclaiming 1998 "The Year of the Cowboy" in Calgary, Mayor Al Duerr made the following assertion: "We're leading the country in economic development and we're showing we can do it with being cowboy" (Dudley 1998: A1).<sup>4</sup> T.B. Rogers has located what may be the first occasion the cowboy image was produced to characterize Alberta to eastern Canada, when football fans from Calgary chartered a train to Toronto to attend the Grey Cup final games in 1949. Western wear, horses, and a degree of festivity not genuinely typical of Calgary's quotidian behavior were featured in an event Rogers sees as seminal in the city's self-definition (1988: 23; 1990: 234).

The title of Bagley's anthology, *Those Other Days*, evokes the symbolic importance of the western past; Bagley also announces in the prose introductions to the anthology that the past is his concern. He begins the "Foreward and Dedication," "I would tell you something of Alberta as the pioneers knew it before the 20th Century. Wide open country, no fences, no roads, only the trail from Calgary to Edmonton.... No cultivation of the soil, no run off, and every depression and creek held water as it fell.... This is as I saw it in 1892.... Read these poems word by word slowly. Try to visualize Alberta and the people, as they were in those days." An untitled autobiographical sketch following the "Foreward and Dedication" continues the themes of "pioneers" and historical authenticity, and Bagley declares, "These poems portray something of the spirit of the people and the life that gradually came to them through civilization."

The "Dedication," however, leads us in a significantly different direction: "I dedicate these poems to Bill [his son] and The Trail Riders of the Canadian Rockies." The Trail Riders and their associated club, the Skyline Hikers of the Canadian Rockies, were founded in 1924 (and 1933) by John Murray Gibbon, who as publicity director for the Canadian Pacific Railway was attempting to drum up business for the C.P.R. hotels at Banff and Lake Louise. C.P.R.

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4. Some years earlier, Duerr had spoken less enthusiastically about the dominance of the cowboy image, however; in an article *The Globe and Mail* entitled "Calgary seeks to dispel redneck, cowboy image in bid to woo easterners," he was quoted, "'Yes, cowboys and cow punching are an important tradition for Canada and the West.'... But after the Stampede, 'a lot of the cowboy boots are put away and the Giorgio Armani suits go on'" (Cernetig 1990:A11).

sponsorship of the clubs continued until 1961.<sup>5</sup> The Hikers seem to have included from the beginning a larger proportion of locals as members than did the Riders; indeed, it was a requisite for membership that one had already hiked 25 miles (Goldstrom 1982: 1). The Trail Riders were more likely to be tourists — Sid Marty refers to them as the “mink and manure set” and notes that in 1925, more bridal paths were requested by the Banff Advisory Council, “... for the use of the ‘wealthy classes’ which ‘form so great a portion of our summer visitors’” (1984: 111).

The Rockies, where these two clubs met to play, provide a complicated combination of imaginative themes, many of which parallel the themes of the Olympics and the Stampede: pioneer days, exoticism (wildlife, cowboys, and Indians), and strenuous, healthy, and morally good (granting some ambiguity regarding amorous escapades and the use of alcohol and other drugs) exercise. These Alberta institutions — the landscape as well as the cultural structures in its shadow — are romantic in every sense of the word and are suitable backgrounds for erotic adventure, a significant selling point for the mink and manure set.

Twenty-five of the 45 poems in *Those Other Days* deal with love affairs, usually broken and generally conducted in the setting of the Rockies. The obvious point to be made about the romantic world of Bagley's poetry is that he simultaneously idealizes and constricts women and censures them for being unable to live up to his sentiment.<sup>6</sup> The poems generally present flowery tributes to love objects (often quite literally as the mountain rose), who generally prove false (and occasionally die). Most poems are spoken by a male narrator, though several are ambiguous, and two are clearly spoken by women. Though women break only a few more than half of the affairs (it's not uncommon for the male speaker to admit to words spoken in haste and regretted, though what this refers to is not clear), Bagley more than once claims “...the female of the species / Is more deadly than the male.”<sup>7</sup>

5. See McNaughton 1981 for a discussion of Gibbon's role in the creation of folk festivals for the C.P.R. Significantly for the industrial theme of this paper, Gibbon first worked for the C.P.R. as Supervisor for European Propaganda, encouraging immigration, rather than tourism.
6. Reading an earlier draft of this paper, Pauline Greenhill noted that the frequent use of second-person pronouns (“you” instead of “she”), as well as a few figurative devices, would permit readings of at least some poems that are not heterosexual.
7. Greenhill reminds us, “...we don't need to view ... every informant as intrinsically good ... nor every traditional text as a charter for a better world” (1993:7).

However, Bagley does not immediately disclose the centrality of this romantic theme. Following the book's introductory material, one poem develops the historical theme he has promised. "Twas Thus Alberta Grew" shows Bagley's U.S. roots rather clearly, though it was not written by the boy accompanying his family to Alberta, nor, likely, by the young man who grew with the province.

Behind each stump an Injun lurked,  
A scalp lock for his gain,  
And woe betide the one who strayed  
Far from the wagon train.

Neither "stumps" or "wagon trains" typify the settlement of Alberta, nor was open warfare with the Native People the western Canadian method of appropriation of the land. But Bagley does not belabor this point; his emphasis is on twentieth-century prosperity.

They had their dreams, these pioneers  
Of better things in store,  
Nor thought their lives were sacrificed  
When death was at the door.  
We, who reaped the heritage,  
Would they be proud to know?  
Would they deem us weaklings  
Because we grumble so.

Little towns with growing pains  
Bursting at the seams,  
[N]ow pay the debts of yesterday  
And finance tomorrow's dreams.

Men of vision guard the trust,  
This land so much desired  
To whom much is given  
The more will be required.  
God gave stout hearts to the pioneers,  
Their legacy to you,  
Change and progress, hand in hand,  
Twas thus Alberta grew.

The contradiction between love of the past and love of change creates tension; understandably one wished for progress, but this brought "fences, roads, and run off," as well as "weaklings." This is not a tension that interests Bagley much in his verse, though it may have weighed heavily in his

conversation as he grew older, and following "'Twas Thus Alberta Grew," there are only a few poems on historical themes.

At cowboy poetry "gatherings" and similar events, the claim is commonly heard that cowboy poetry is unique, as are claims for the uniqueness of the cowboy's lifestyle. In fact, the sources for this poetry are not difficult to discover; in addition to the material documented by John Lomax (1934), Jack Thorp (1966), and those who followed after, cowboys and their followers have used the popular poetry tradition of Edgar Guest and dozens of others (represented on the prairies primarily by Edna Jaques and in parody by Sarah Binks).<sup>8</sup> One prominent contemporary Alberta cowboy poetry performer, Don Wudel, has constructed his repertoire primarily of gleanings from old anthologies, a fact which he has not made explicit when I have seen him read, though he has readily acknowledged it in conversation.<sup>9</sup> Many items from Bagley's book would have been comfortable in the collections of sentimental verse from the last century which Wudel collects, at least after a little refining.

Although I don't know how Bagley's poems were shared before their collection in this volume, it is difficult not to suppose that they were at least sometimes recited for tourists. "Last Night I Dreamed," for example, seems stereotypically suitable for female visitors to the Rockies. The opening stanzas rehearse the natural attractions of the province's Bow River, establishing the absence of the person addressed:

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8. Edna Jaques, born in Ontario but largely raised in Saskatchewan, wrote a series of volumes which were published throughout the 1940s by Thomas Allen, Ltd., a Toronto publisher. Her popularity among her contemporaries can be estimated by the frequency with which the books now appear in used book stores in prairie cities. "Sarah Binks" was the fictional creation of Paul Hiebert, a chemistry professor in Winnipeg, whose first account of her was published by McClelland and Stewart, a major trade publisher in Canada, in 1947. Binks may have been modelled on Jaques. See Greenhill (1989:5-7) for a discussion of the fashion to deride vernacular poets.
  9. Greenhill (1989:4-5; 7-10), comments on "appropriate discourse" in folk poetry of Ontario; she punningly connects "appropriate" in the sense of suitable to a group and "appropriate," an act which members of the group may perform upon an item from another subculture. Souvenir programs for the Calgary Stampede in its first two years featured a variety of poems including examples from the American poet Wallace D. Coburn (a friend of Montana painter Charlie Russell) and Greenwich Village poet Mary Carolyn Davies (a self-consciously bohemian writer), and well-known cowboy songs such as "The Dying Cowboy" and "The Zebra Dun."



Last night I dreamed I heard your voice  
 In the Valley of the Bow  
 It was the west wind calling  
 As it cleared away the snow.

The lover addressed, then, is identified with nature and with spring.

It brought the songbirds back again  
 The flowers back to me  
 Alberta's hills were carpeted  
 As green as they could be.

I dream'd the streams had slipped their leash  
 Unfettered and free  
 Came plunging o'er the slippery rocks  
 Sucking greedily  
 At the pine and willow roots  
 That straggled the shore,  
 I the sentinel of the ford  
 To see you safely across once more.

Followers of Brooks and Penn Warren may be annoyed that the streams make a tropic shift from something free (and presumably mature) to a feeding infant.<sup>10</sup> I am more interested in considering the identification of the streams as “free.” This is not a necessary observation, after all, since the movement of water is dictated by gravity and directed by geologic strata. It is, in fact, not surprising that these metaphors are mixed here. My assumption — that which is free will likely be mature — may not have been Bagley's. I have encountered Albertans, particularly older ones, who identify “freedom” with “nature” (which includes “Indians,” and sometimes “cowboys”). This freedom often seems to be particularly from work, by which European Canadian males stereotypically defined themselves.<sup>11</sup> “Indians,” children, and other creatures of nature are said not to work. So to Bagley, it may not have been a stretch to see a “free” stream as a “child.”

The poem's third stanza tells us that the speaker relives in dreams pleasant moments with the beloved and wonders briefly how dreams come about. In

10. See their scathing comments on “Trees” (287-89).

11. I was first struck by this in 1974, while teaching a creative writing class in Calgary. Twice I found myself in conflict with an older student, who'd been a farmer and was insistent that neither Indians nor animals “worked.”

the fourth stanza, he takes leave of the beloved without suggesting that he'd really like her to return.

What ere [*sic*] they are, leave me my dreams,  
More than you'll ever know  
They hold so very much of you  
When the night winds blow.  
I know not where you are tonight  
Though far beyond my ken  
May the good Lord guide and keep you  
Till we meet again.

The casual assumption at the end that the two will meet precludes the necessity for action to bring the reunion about. A tourist, returned to her home city, could imagine a wistful cowboy dreaming of her, but she needn't feel guilty that she'd really hurt him or worry that he might show up, spurs a-jingling, to lasso her from her typewriter or vacuum cleaner and carry her off to the Bow Corridor.

If Indians, children, and animals properly exist outside of the workaday world in bourgeois culture, the status of women is somewhat more complicated. In rural cultures, certainly, it may not be easy to pretend that women do not work, though the marginalized areas in which they are allowed to perform might lack creativity or intellectual challenge. Even so, one may assume that the imagery from cultural centres remained in place at frontier or hinterland, and the vision of the enchantress or whore, always prominent in the patriarchal imagination, does not include washboards and butter churns. Eroticism occurs outside the workplace, as Bagley's poems demonstrate. "Cowboys" may be laborers, but this fact is hidden in both their childish title and the image — dude wranglers are even a further step removed from the workaday world, at least in image.<sup>12</sup>

Bagley's poems include relatively little about quotidian reality, but this is not unusual. As Tom Wayman noted about more "sophisticated" poetry, work, which typically occupies 50% of one's daily activity, is barely to be found in

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12. Who can be counted as a cowboy at all is a vexed issue, on which cowboy poets frequently line up to support "working" or "rodeo" cowboys (or both) as authentic. I've encountered few, if any, cowboy poets who have announced themselves as dude wranglers.

Bagley's work (1983: 9); instead, we encounter the familiar trilogy, "love, death, and nature." Love, which is a dream and an interlude in Bagley's world, is identified with "freedom," which is childish, natural, and not really available to working white men. Sometimes it is woman's faithlessness that removes love, sometimes it is death.

We see work only rarely in these poems. "Ranchman's Life" deals with a hard winter, a recurring theme in Alberta vernacular verse; many poems were written about the disastrous winter of 1905. "The Brewster Cayuse" comments on the abuse that outfitters' horses suffer from ignorant tourists. This theme is made even more pointed in "An Old White Horse," in which a visiting schoolteacher is thrown by a gentle horse which has been legitimately spooked by hornets; she claims that the horse maliciously bucked her. Though the boss of the outfit studies the ground and recognizes what has occurred, and so speaks kindly to the temporarily-retired horse, he does not attempt to disabuse the woman of her anger. The customer, of course, is always right. (That the dudes are customers ought also to be kept in mind when the cowboys of the mountains are involved erotically with them.)

"An Old White Horse" is one of the milder poems in which women are seen to be dangerous; "Muskeg Joe" shows a thoughtlessly promiscuous woman, and the wife of "The Inebriate" kills her foolish husband with a frying pan, though his acquaintances consider this suicide because he'd foolishly let her suppose that he'd been unfaithful. The only poem in which a woman is seen to work is repugnantly satirical: "The Bulgy Squaw."

She was only a squaw from the lake reserve,  
Bulgy and round and fat,  
But she packed the water and cut the wood,  
And she sure could skin a rat.

The narrator is a trapper, and the rats referred to are muskrats. This is one of the few long-term relationships in the collection, and the description of their winter together is not precisely appealing.

Just a sittin', markin' time,  
Waiting for the thaw,  
We was fairly comfortable,  
Me and my bulgy squaw.

He wakes one morning when spring thaw has arrived, with a "premonition" that something has happened to his squaw, based upon his observation that the fire is dead and breakfast has not been prepared. The squaw has apparently

fallen through thin ice and drowned, presumably because she is overweight. Once again the narrator experiences love, if that is the word, in the past tense:

Still in my dreams I see her,  
Out there, a-cuttin' wood,  
But I miss her most of all  
When the rats is runnin' good.

It is of course axiomatic that interracial relationships are doomed; Bagley's Bulgy Squaw cannot live long enough to enjoy the partnership, certainly not to reproduce (if this had happened, the offspring would have been the genetically inferior halfbreed of stereotype), and the speaker is not willing even to acknowledge at the end his sexual or affectionate interest in her. In another poem, "Scar Face Joe," written in ersatz Indian rhythm and dialect, natives are chastised for the stereotypical cultural rule that women walk behind men, and the bulgy squaw is risible because she has not been put on the patriarchal pedestal, where her only chore would be to keep her weight down.

One might argue that Bagley is manifesting an older sexual esthetic, according to which fat women are admired, but the context of her obesity in the poem, her function as laborer rather than sex object, makes that reading less supportable. Another poem of lost and nearly regained love, "Sweet Annabelle," suggests that Bagley was not enticed by the Renoiresque. The speaker returns to an old haunt and reminisces of a childhood sweetheart, then looks across the barroom:

Who is that neath yonder light  
Blowing smoke rings through her hair  
Annabelle? — not Annabelle  
With hips that fill the chair.  
Environment changes all of us  
On the table dropped a tear  
And he held his finger up  
For another beer.

If the bulgy squaw loses erotic cachet because of her workaday bulk, there are many instances of romance as getaway in *Those Other Days*. From "My Wild Prairie Rose," for instance:

I dream of days I wandered  
With my wild prairie Rose  
I dream of days we squandered  
On the shore.

“Where Poppies Bloom and Blow” similarly portrays love as tourist enchantment.

In a pocket in a valley  
 High above the river Bow  
 Lies the beautiful Lake Louise  
 And the grey walled chateau.  
 How oft we rode the pine clad shore  
 Rocky ramparts high above  
 How oft we rode the highline trail  
 And talked and dreamed of love.

Hair of gold as the noon day sun  
 Emerald green were her eyes  
 Emerald green as the Lake Louise  
 Where snow capped mountains rise.  
 Her voice was like a rippling stream  
 A melody to me  
 A wistful smile that seemed to say  
 How great such love could be.

Bagley presents an ideal world, in which love “could be great”; would it be so in a less fantastic setting? Despite the natural wonders of the parkland setting, the poet reminds us frequently that we are not in nature, nor in the everyday world, but in an imaginary construction, a poem: the opening lines recall the well known folk song, “My Darling Clementine,” and the inverted “river Bow” supports the rhyming “chateau” but also reinforces that this is an esthetic construction, not a “natural” effusion of emotion, as does the poetic “oft” and other devices in the poem.

In “A Mountain Rose,” the idyll is again set during a holiday.

The nights we danced, you held me close  
 What did we know of care  
 Content to be within your arms  
 Content to have me there.  
 The trails we rode, the steep, steep trails  
 Where the Rockies touch the sky  
 Scorning the thought that we should part  
 Happy you and I.

Love in these verses is most often written in the past tense, as memories of a vacation romance, broken, typically, by the woman’s return to the city, which may or may not occasion bitterness in the male narrator.

"I Wonder" rings a slight variation on this theme. The male narrator is sitting by the campfire and reminiscing about "the girl of yesteryear." He wonders whether she ever married or whether she waits yet for him to return, which he'd planned to do once he'd made his fortune. "But," he notes, "fortune's so elusive / On me it did not smile," which was certainly the reality for many of those cowboys who crossed o'er whatever plains took their fancies. The poem ends wistfully.

It seems t'was only yesterday  
And now I'm growing old  
Love's embers burned to ashes  
And ashes soon are cold.

In "The Trail to Mexico," a cowboy classic which is at least thematically a predecessor to this poem, the narrator assumes that the girl he left behind will wait for him until his necessary adventuring has passed. When she does not, he doesn't regret his decision, as does Bagley's narrator, but is instead angered at hers. This attitude is found in a significant proportion of western folksongs: "Joe Bowers," "The Girl I Left Behind," and "Lord Lovel," to name three. Whatever we might conclude about Bagley's conceptualization of women, we ought to credit him with a degree of sexual fairness that is not always found in the folkloric canon of North America.

This is not to say that Bagley's sense of sexuality involves a great deal of companionship or commitment. When one partner has not deserted the other, one has frequently died. Even "A Mother's Prayer" ends on a note that reminds us that the experience of love is impermanent:

Childhood days with mother  
Whatever may befall  
I would have her remember  
As the happiest of all.

Love is experienced primarily as long term commitment in "What Does One Do?" and "Firelight Pictures of Memory," which close the book. Both of these poems presuppose long and satisfactory marriages, first from the man's point of view, then from the woman's. Again, of course, Bagley portrays widowed spouses, but at least on this occasion the couples have been permitted to live through complete family lives.

Interestingly, the only *in medias res* statement of commitment, a commitment which seems likely to continue for a significant period of time,

is made in the most folk-like poem (and I think one might also argue that it is the most successfully crafted item in the volume — certainly it's the one most guaranteed to please a modernist reader), a variant on the broken-token theme, "Fiddle Footed Cowboy." As is usual in the broken-token ballads, the commitment is made by the woman, and it's the woman's lack of commitment that is worried over; the only reason given for the fidelity the man promises is racist:

"Don't reckon I would fancy  
No China doll," he said.

Despite Bagley's claims for the authenticity of the Alberta pioneers, the Alberta he presents us is a land of image. The recurrent Rockies, invoked so often as symbol of essential, natural reality, are necessary only as a backdrop to the theatrics of romance. The Rockies are the narrator's location for work, but that work is an imitation of play, a game, in fact, which does not always turn out happily for the workers:

Them dudes they kinda come in droves  
And Brewsters pay for smiles  
A cowboy just ain't fire proofed  
Agin a woman's wiles.

The cowboys perform their smiles, as well as their authentic, natural western sturdiness, for the dudes, but the dudes also perform for the cowboys. Perhaps the need to invoke authenticity is strongest when the players don't wish to acknowledge the drama — or contest. The smile is the primary tool of politician and entertainer and other sorts of business people. It is proverbial now that tourism breeds alienation; Bagley's quatrain embodies that alienation in the purchased smile.<sup>13</sup> Alienation is encountered in Bagley's verse in several forms.

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13. See MacCannell 1976 for a discussion of this concern. The smile is, of course, also a primary tool of the boosters, whose activities in Alberta I previously discussed in relation to rural folk poetry, noting then that other homesteaders countered the booster mythology, in which the cowboy is a central symbol, with their own carefully constructed image of "the pioneer." As I wrote then, "Regardless of the boosters, the popular writers, and the Calgary Stampede, Alberta folk poets clearly know that their ancestors were farmers, not cowboys, even if it has become difficult to distinguish one from the other in an era when both do much of their work from pickup trucks, when both wear baseball caps as often as Resistols or Stetsons, and jeans and cowboy boots are common work wear throughout the region" (1993:39). See also Voisey *passim* for more discussion of the boosters.

The persona of these poems is alienated from the provincial history which he claims to mean so much to him, from a concept of the value of work integrated with life's other activities, and from committed and companionate romantic relationships, though if we take the poems at face value, he spent a great deal of time among women. This article cannot demonstrate that the climate described by Bagley's poems necessarily produced MacKay, Aberhart, Manning, or Klein, but an attentive reader of *Those Other Days* would not be surprised at the success of those political figures, who learned so well how to manipulate images, to deliver smiles.



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