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SOME INTERPRETATIONS OF
KROETSCH'S "DREAM OF ORIGINS" IN SEED CATALOGUE

by

Kenneth Donald McRae

B.A., University of British Columbia, 1949

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department

of

English

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Kenneth Donald McRae 1984

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ABSTRACT

A method for interpreting what Robert Kroetsch calls the "dream of origins" is evident in the technique of "amplification" devised by Karl Jung, and developed further by James Hillman. This technique for interpreting the content of dreams involves the act of "seeking the parallels" and "revolving around the matter under surveillance." In Seed Catalogue, Kroetsch uses "amplification" as a compositional method. The changes in perspective generated by this method account for the binary structure of the poem.

This structure permits the poet of Seed Catalogue to maintain a double sense of time. On the one hand, there is linear time, in which the poet begins his adventures as a callow youth and attains by experience a measure of self-realization or integration, though this wholeness is contingent and open to change. On the other hand, there is cyclical or revolving time, in which the poet in his local, temporal setting where other persons, places, and events are ostensibly separate, acts out those timeless archetypal patterns connecting him to his "dream of origins." The saying, "One man in his time plays many parts," holds true for the poet in Kroetsch's poem.

The central metaphor of Seed Catalogue, the seed-catalogue, implies that the poet functions as both gardener and garden. It poses two all-important questions for him which guide the movement of the poem: how can he become a poet? How can he prepare the soil/soul to nourish the seed? Behind these questions is the search for an authentic voice against inherited rhetoric, and the search for self-realization against outside authority.

Authentic voice and self-realization are the two main elements of the poet's vision, the former initiating the poetic quest, and the latter leading to the awareness that birth and death, though apparently separate and opposite, are in reality two aspects of the same process. Life and death are in

a symbiotic relationship. The seed must die to germinate. Thus in Seed
Catalogue the poet, through the act of composing his poem, discovers that his
self must "die" to be reborn.

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"The dream of origins is what interests me. . . . On the prairies the small town and farm are no longer real places for most people, they are dreamed places, remembered places. The memory of small towns is going to account for much of our art."

— Robert Kroetsch.

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Introduction

At the Weekend Conference/Festival, "The Coast is Only a Line," held at Simon Fraser University in 1981, Frank Davey, speaking on the contemporary long poem in Canada, had this to say about Seed Catalogue: "The seed catalogue is in some way the key to the door of the unconscious." ¹ The assumption that the seed catalogue is in some way the key to the unconscious proves to be useful in approaching the poem. As for a method, Kroetsch supplies that key term in the lines from Section 2 of Seed Catalogue:

Love is an amplification
by doing/over and over.*

The term "amplification" is indispensable to my interpretation of the structure, process, and imagery of Seed Catalogue. Although Kroetsch is not explicit about his use of this term, I believe that he has drawn substantially from depth-psychologists Jung and Hillman, for whom amplification is a key procedure in their clinical practices. Here is how Jung defines amplification, his method of discovering the symbolic content of dreams:

I adopt the method of the philologist and apply a principle which is called "amplification". It is simply that of seeking the parallels. For instance, in the case of a very rare word which you have never come across before, you try to find parallels in text passages, parallel applications perhaps, where that word also occurs, and then you try to put the formula you have established from the knowledge of other texts into the new text. If you make the new text a readable whole, you say, "Now, we can read it." That is how we learned to read hieroglyphics and cuneiform inscriptions and that is how we can read dreams. Now, how do I find the context? I simply follow the principle of the association experiment. In each case [of different responses to the same word] I know what tissue that word or image is embedded in. That is amplification. ²

And that is essentially the procedure I followed in arriving at my interpretation of Kroetsch's "dream of origins". Hillman elaborates on Jung's definition of amplification by comparing it to "the method of the arts and

humanities. By revolving around the matter under surveillance one amplifies a problem exhaustively. [It is] like a prolonged meditation or variations on a theme of music, or the patterns of dance or brush strokes." Amplification is a more useful tool than analysis, Hillman has found, for shaking up, or jarring loose, forgotten material embedded in the unconscious.

Hillman's comparison of amplification to meditation suggests a parallel in Seed Catalogue, since meditation is an integral part of the poetic process for Kroetsch, as the lines from Section 6 show:

no memory then
no meditation
no song (shit
we're up against it)

Robert Lecker, in one of the most useful studies of Kroetsch (along with Peter Thomas & Robert Kroetsch), puts it more politely, though not more succinctly, and elaborates on the process:

Kroetsch's belief is that true song must be a powerful combination of memory and meditation. Memory is seen as an act of creation--a willful re-ordering of events in which past moments become a beginning--the focussed rebirth of a sense of place which time has made uncertain. Kroetsch calls this "a dream of origins" and insists that "a local pride is where you've got to begin, and we didn't exist. Memory is identity. The search for original place is the search for original voice. . . ." In Seed Catalogue the search is existential--an involved recovery of authentic voice from smothering layers of false myth and speech. Finding a voice through memory calls for complex movements of unfinding (Kroetsch calls this "demythologizing," "uninventing," or "unnarrating") Only when this de-structuring activity has begun can meditation come into play, for the subject of meditation is the mystery produced in the act of "unhiding the hidden."

Corroboration of the seeking of parallels and the word association technique, that is, amplification, and Hillman's elaborations of it, comes from Kroetsch himself, although he tells it differently:

I wanted an endless series of crazy moments so I could write a continu-

ing poem. Worked on Seed Catalogue about a year, had a great number of notes. Then, . . . [separated from the notes], sat down and wrote, in effect from memory, a whole new draft right from Zero. A great experience in . . . memory and concentration. That version of dialectic (ellipses, horizontality, reverberations), it's kind of Canadian. We are almost in stasis so often, between opposing forces.

Kroetsch's "dialectic" corresponds to amplification and the word-association technique. The entries he selects from the seed catalogue provide the stimulus to the unconscious. For Kroetsch, intent on his quest for authentic voice and place, for identity, for wholeness, this psychological technique of amplification is both the pattern of his quest as wandering knight-errant-poet, and the pattern of the poem's structure. Voice and integration are inextricably intertwined, "revolving around" each other in this spiral structure that is the master plan of the universe, from the DNA double helix to the spiral nebulae. As in these, the progress of the poem reaches only a contingent conclusion.

Seed Catalogue is poem as process. It is organic, like life, amplifying itself, responding under control to its epigraphs, one to each section, relating its section to the one preceding it, pointing to the one ahead, unifying as well as guiding the poem in its development. For the reader, intent to understand, amplification is the way to follow the narrator through the maze, the labyrinth, the intertwining structure of his search through the abyss of his mental depths for origins. That is the method this paper will follow. Kroetsch always supplies clues, the key to the next move. The trick (for Kroetsch is a trickster) is to look for vernacular interpretations of the traditional rhetoric that he uses ironically. Amplification is a technique of depth psychology that, no more than psychoanalysis, accepts inherited rhetoric. It is designed to reveal the authentic, de-construct the artificial. That is why it is used here, for the quest is for authentic voice and soul. That this modern quest demands the age-old journey of the

wanderer into the abyss of the mind in search of salvation places Seed Catalogue in the epic tradition. The self-mockery is a cover-up of its essential seriousness. The poem is a covert operation, going underground to the buried past, to the unconscious, and to myth. Echoing, besides, sometimes ironically, all the traditionally greatest poets in the seed-catalogue of writers of English, it all but buries them, but rarely like "the woman who buried her husband with his ass sticking out of the ground so that every time she happened to walk by she could give it a swift kick" (Sec. 4).

Generally, the seed catalogue items provoke ribald or at least ironic responses. That is among the delights in reading the poem, though not for me the greatest--which is in "dis-covering" the hidden meanings that reveal an amazing underworld text. Several times, as unsuspected revelations came to light, I echoed Kroetsch's "I can't believe my eyes" (The Ledger). The comic vision is usually Kroetsch's best weapon against framework and grid, inherited rhetoric, and any other obstructions to authentic voice. His humour de-constructs these absurdities and transforms them into authentic, though ^{fictive}, voice. Seed Catalogue is rich in humour, usually wry, rueful, sardonic, self-mocking, often hidden in allusion; outrageous puns, tall tales, anecdotes, often left unfinished for the reader to complete, involve the reader in the process; comic diminution of the hero-narrator in his various personae of cabbage, badger, magpie, vine and brome grass--to name only some of the guides that reflect him on his quest--can usually be expected. In this poem as process, the humour tapers off as the rhetoric of the seed-catalogue is progressively de-constructed; the tone becomes quieter, more serious as the opposites become inter-related, reconciled, integrated.

Keats's "Ode to Psyche", the first of his great Odes, may be thought of as the dawning of modern consciousness. While apparently echoing the Psyche/Eros story and Keats's discussion of it with the Ode, Kroetsch in

Seed Catalogue's introspective amplification technique seems to have drawn also from the depth psychologist James Hillman, who bases his elucidation of his soul-making theory on the story.

How to place Seed Catalogue in the continuing poem, Field Notes, involves identifying Kroetsch's concerns and techniques. The Ledger, for instance, introduces the binary structure of the debit-credit account that has been carried forward in Seed Catalogue, so that placement on the page furnishes clues as to whether the experience has been worthwhile. Moreover, that binary structure becomes an important component of amplification; "revolving around the matter under surveillance," as defined by Hillman implies changing perspectives somewhat as a profit and loss account does. This way of looking is itself a soul-making process, and examples will be pointed out in the text where ordinary rational judgement of an experience would seem to require a "debit" rating, yet that experience is placed on the "credit" side. The point is that integration of the personality, the great quest of the poem, requires this reconciliation of opposites, this balancing of the account.

Another aspect of The Ledger to be developed in Seed Catalogue derives from the imperative "You must marry the Terror", the real lesson in life contained in the humorous account of Kroetsch's great-grandmother's three marriages with men who, though struck with terror of her, nevertheless proposed to her. For Seed Catalogue's narrator, quailing before the imperious demands of his "horse" of erotic-creative power and therefore managing to fall from it (as Dis, the hired man of death, discerns), must somehow acquire the courage too to "marry the terror", to accept the responsibility of the challenges that confront his ambition.

Typical of Seed Catalogue is this turning of "everything into metaphor" (Lecker's phrase from the source in Note 4). Related to the "Marry the

terror", episode are the riches of the ancestral past held in the precious accounts of the poet's forebears, not only in the written Ledger, and the "letter from Aunt Dorothy" with its humorous juxtapositions, but also in the oral traditions sometimes forgotten, with tragic results, and mourned for, as in Section 9. Everything is grist to this poet's mill, but not for nothing does The Ledger end with "You must marry the Terror", capitalized, centred on the page, and central in the poet's message to Seed Catalogue.

This sense of history as a continuum that many share inheres strongly in "Stone Hammer Poem" (FN, p. 13):

I have to/I want
to know (not know)
?WHAT HAPPENED

The poem moves along in a series of images of "the thing itself" to speculation as to the events in which it figured, but always it is at the centre of the passing scene. By the time it reaches #7, "The poem/is the stone", and the poet becomes as it were the unknown maker, moving into myth and metaphor: "Sometimes I write/my poems for that/stone hammer." The stone has become a talisman, providing the dynamic for other poems. For Seed Catalogue? Yes, in the sense that as poem, as "his-story," Seed Catalogue has been hammered out of a life experienced and shaped to that purpose.*

"How I Joined the Seal Herd" may be seen as a dream or fantasy of the

*(I too happen to have a stone hammer, flattened at each end and double-grooved for thonging to a handle. I plowed it up not much over a year ago. As with the numerous stone knives, pestles and net weights from the same pit-house site on "the land I think is mine," I sometimes entertain conjecture of a time when other hands selected, shaped, and used it, perhaps to drive down fish weir stakes into the gumbo of the bed of the Fraser River loop that once passed through this land. When Simon Fraser came down the river in 1805, I wonder, did the people of the place paddle out to the main river to watch, perhaps throwing "my" stone hammer aside in their excitement, for me to plow up out of the foot-thick deposit of silt that covered everything since their time here?)

narrator's, related to Seed Catalogue's narrator's name change to "Nature" via Rudy Wiebe. His initiation into the Seal tribe of Nature generates a good deal of self-mockery, which invites the reader to laugh heartily at the tentative explorations of the new body. The ears, naturally enough for the poet who listens a lot, register his first awareness of the change. But, as in Seed Catalogue again, the sexual fumbling: "Where, exactly, is--" tickles male risibility most, probably because it strikes at masculine vulnerability where it is most sensitive, sexual security.

As in Seed Catalogue, self-mocking covers serious concern: to get away from the human bondage of his self-consciousness, of his ineluctable disastrous relationships with his lovers. To wash his mind of its landness drives him to the sea, to that old mother, eternal symbol of primal life and the unconscious mind. Where the seals are at home, there he would be also. It is to gain new perspectives on his troubled sex life that the setting he provides for this dream or fantasy includes a seal herd in breeding season, and that he demonstrates his prowess as a successful "bull". That his success immediately shifts to his experience in "America," which comes off second-best to the consummation with the young cow seal, confirms the rightness of his orientation to Nature that solved the narrator's crisis in Seed Catalogue. He "returns" to man-being willingly, re-assured or hopeful that "my children (ours, I corrected myself)," that is, what "I" write as a result of "our" joint efforts, will be ear-perfect, with an authentic voice based on animal as well as spiritual values. We can see in such imagery the inextricable relationship of the erotic/poetic that is manifest in the horses in Seed Catalogue. They, including Cindy and the seal contribute, or perhaps underscore, the purely physical element in eroticism, through their animality. But where Cindy is distanced somewhat by Amie, whom I have interpreted as the narrator's anima in his masturbation fantasy, the young

cow seal, a fantasy sex partner too, directly participates in the sex act fantasy. From the points of view of Jung's "active imagination" therapy and Hillman's "fantasy-making" as a soul-making process, this direct participation represents an increase of consciousness and of soul, respectively.

While we shall perceive in Seed Catalogue the quest for integration and voice achieved, a residue of pain from lost innocence of love will demand some further effort to balance accounts. The Sad Phoenician, where the narrator is a trader in love and words, seems to be about such an endeavor. Once again, a binary structure keeps the balance, this time by conjunctive/disjunctive alternation of "and . . . but". A dialectic results, with the balance contained in the pairings. Of some correspondence to the sections and epigraphs of Seed Catalogue are the 26 letters of an alphabet that seem to be for the most part artist's renderings of the Phoenician, ancestral to our own. From them we perceive that the quest runs the gamut of A to Z, or, as the narrator's submarine lover cautions his manifestation, a Ulysses-like figure: "but keep an ear cocked for sirens, you one eyed mariner/and the pole star pointing you in, fresh from the coast/of Ampersand, a cargo to Upsilon bound . . ." This Odyssey is punctuated with a series of encounters with lovers--women who have initiated the end of the relationship with the "hero" and who appear to be metaphors for the narrator's passions for words. For instance, the woman from Nanaimo "let us call her A," who lives in a submarine, probably is a metaphor for his passionate search for the submerged meanings of words. As language study, looking for original meanings is a good way to start. That "she is hung up on clams" suggests the fascination of words that resist opening up to meaning. "I am dwarf to her needments" says the narrator, echoing Spenser's "Behind her far away a Dwarf did lag"⁶ suggesting that she, like Una (Truth), searches for truth, not helped much by the Dwarf (Commonsense). "But I'm afflicted with common sense", he admits.

The "Dwarf" metaphor shows him a divided and reduced man, which is the reason for his quest in Seed Catalogue, and here too, despite the disclaimer: "a quest for a woman who/might be satisfied, the holy grail nothing, poor old/ Who?him gets it into his brief case, he puts out to sea/so to speak, for himself" (FN, p. 84). This last phrase proves the point: integration of the self is the quest; he speaks from a point outside himself.

The Sad Phoenician ends with the narrator having experienced, psychologically, hierosgamos--marriage with the god. He has become integrated with his real love, through a process of elimination of his willful, worldly loves. Through him the godhead can now express itself, and its expression will be in the vernacular. The similarities with Seed Catalogue are numerous: the quest for integration and voice; the binary structure, though arranged differently; the self-mocking style of the self-styled loser at love; the sardonic, wry humor; the outrageous puns; the vernacular diction; the fragments of stories, unfinished proverbs; echoes from a rich literary background--these are only the more obvious.

Seed Catalogue, of all those in the long continuing poem that is Field Notes, is the most complex, ambiguous, puzzling, and demanding. But it is also the most rewarding for close reading. Owing only its binary structure to its main predecessor, The Ledger, it incorporates an astounding variety of devices for co-opting what skills (chiefly listening) the reader possesses. The reader cannot stay outside this poem; if he does, he gets very little. He must cast off all conventional restrictions on his imagination, and prepare to entertain and welcome, and let his mind play with, the hints that come his way. They will, because Kroetsch always supplies them. Seed Catalogue has been called the "discovery poem" of the series, probably because the poet dis-covers and re-traces the route of his quest for integration and authentic voice. It's also because the reader must discover

so much for himself. But the clues are there.

The master clue is "amplification", and Kroetsch defines love in its terms, partly perhaps for the reader's benefit. For, to love this poem, one must amplify: "doing over and over" as he says, "seeking the parallels" as Jung says, "revolving around the matter under surveillance" as Hillman says, and to do this is to alter perspective, change one's way of seeing, build soul. Said Pythagoras: "All things are changing; nothing dies; the spirit wanders, comes now here, now there and occupies whatever frame it pleases."⁷ That is one of the reasons the sad Phoenician gave this name to his own animating spirit. One can only try to follow, with all "vibrissae" out, as the narrator in "How I Joined the Seal Herd", tried. One can really do little else, in Seed Catalogue.

Section 1

The poem begins with the narrator as child, with a cabbage-head layering of rhetoric enveloping his soul. It's the end of winter and time to begin life anew. Off with the storm windows, let the sunlight into the house; get the hotbed of life going with the greenhouse effect of the storm windows on it, not forgetting the efficacy of the storms of life to generate energy for change. Open the seed-catalogue to:

No. 176--Copenhagen Market Cabbage: 'This new introduction, strictly speaking, is in every respect a thoroughbred [only racehorses qualify as, strictly speaking], a cabbage of highest pedigree, and is creating considerable flurry among professional gardeners all over the world.'

This imposing dream-figurehead of exotic background, impeccable breeding and elegance--rather like the ad-man's peanut in evening dress, spats, top-hat, and monocle--nevertheless, only a cabbage, signals a warning to the ambitious boy it guides and reflects; the italicised words delineate an

ironic description of his dream of origins. The glowing testimonial letter which follows, with its formal, stilted beginning, "I wish to say," ends in the outburst of vernacular: "Cabbage were dandy." The signature, "WW Lyon," recalls the winged, lion-headed god Aion,⁸ who holds the key to the underworld, that is, to the unconscious, that is, "South Junction, Man." The key for the narrator, the message is clear from the god himself, is that this kind of change, from rhetoric to vernacular, is the way to follow, by way of the underworld route. The descent involves both the sense of using the "low" vernacular instead of the "elevated" rhetoric, and the sense of plumbing the unconscious mind for repressed or forgotten memories that relate to the quest for integration. The quest is two-fold and intertwined, the goals are inter-related, and the underworld holds the answer to both. The body of the letter invites amplification at a deeper level too: "Seed purchased/of you," with its "of" instead of "off", and its slash separation, gives the formulaic "seed of you"; and "sweet corn" lends itself to the vernacular "corny" for trite or hackneyed or otherwise outworn language. The inherited rhetoric of the letter is undercut, de-constructed, by the vernacular meanings under it which reverse the paean of praise intended. This ironic reversal of intended meaning is typical of the poem's style of narration. It implies a startling and extreme condemnation of inherited rhetoric: that such rhetoric is really saying just the opposite of what it intends to say. Its users are unconsciously speaking with forked tongues,¹ its hearers are unconsciously picking up the vernacular meanings, because these are universally understood at a deeper level than those acceptable to polite society. The consequence becomes increasingly ominous, as Seed Catalogue goes on to show. This is the imperative and the dynamic of the radical change to authentic language that Kroetsch, by implication, is proposing.

The mother's voice saying "Did you wash your ears?" picks up and

continues the movement to the vernacular. She is a Demeter figure, middle-aged, loving in a non-sexual way, caring for the garden in a way that reflects her guidance of the son in preparing for his great quest. "You could grow cabbages in those ears" is a time-honoured scathing of dirty-eared sons, but under the scathing is the placing of responsibility for listening to and distinguishing the real from the rhetoric squarely on her son. As a metaphor for intensified listening, the cabbage is a sort of amplified ear, a proliferation of ear folds to enhance listening power. Since perception is a mental function as well, the cabbage as 'head, cabbage-head,' or 'head of cabbage', all carry in varying degree an unflattering mental attribution.

The narrative continues with the account of harrowing the garden. Harrowing in the context of tillage is the act of breaking up, refining the lumps of clay in order to release their potential to protect the seed and nourish the growing plant. In the context of the preparation of a would-be poet, harrowing is a metaphor of painful though necessary preparation for receptivity to increasingly challenging ideas. The echo of Christ Harrowing Hell amplifies the sense of unconscious and spiritual processes. A signal of something crucial in the context of growth comes with "You've got to understand this." Then come the short simple sentences, as one would use to a child, or when it is imperative to be understood: "I was sitting on the horse./ The horse was standing still./ I fell off." To appreciate the level of a farm boy's searing shame to fall off a harnessed horse "standing still", and then look for a deeper level of metaphor and symbol, we can listen to Kroetsch on horses: "You could . . . spend the rest of your life studying the significance of the horse in art and literature. It's got power, it's beautiful, it's creative, it's dangerous. It represents the unconscious in certain ways, because of its relationship with freedom. Men and the horse have a long and peculiar relationship of inter-dependence, as Don Quixote

would remind us."⁹ All this and more is relevant to the narrator's horse, the last sentence particularly, since the horse appears throughout the poem at what we must believe are critical points in the narrator's progress, which is also the poem's process, of attaining poetic voice. When the horse is standing still, the narrator's poetic power is stalled. When the rider is falling, he is losing that power. Fallen, his power is "dead". An erotic component resides in the horse, and "fallen" means sexual "death" too. Very embarrassing, even traumatic, when it happens before the sexual act, when "the horse is standing still" or still standing, that is, sexually ready. This is what "you've got to understand." Impotence, both creative and erotic, is at the root of the narrator's difficulty.

Dis, or Pluto, ruler of Hades, Death, whose rape of Persephone caused her mother Demeter all that pain, is figured in the mocking "hired man". Death, when personified, is commonly perceived as mocking at human attempts to keep death at bay. In Biblical myth, death enters the world only when Adam and Eve, tempted by Satan in serpent form, eat of the fruit of the forbidden tree of knowledge. Loss of innocence or naturalness is the corollary, and with it, self-consciousness and guilt, then sexual "death", a situation well represented in psycho-therapy. Death is a "hired" killer because in the original state of nature, life/death were as one experience. Separating nature from spirit introduced death. Now, here, after the "fall", Death taunts the narrator, laughing:

how
in hell did you manage to
fall off a horse that was
standing still?

Beneath the vernacular "how/in hell" is the sense of the narrator's having thus consigned himself to hell, which we may understand as a psychological torment at a deeper level than that occasioned by merely falling off a

literal horse. "Manage" suggests the falling off was intended, as if some deep trauma, such as sexual-guilt for transgression of God's law, as was suffered by the archetypal Adam, "killed" his erotic/poetic power. The italicised "standing still" hints at an even deeper level of meaning that amplification of imagery further along in the poem will reveal. The "how/in hell" image, in terms of the Psyche/Eros myth that is archetypal for the soul's integration with love, represents a necessary sojourn in hell for the narrator. Psyche, to appease Aphrodite for attracting Eros away from the goddess of worldly love and beauty to her own greater beauty, must fetch from the Underworld the box containing the knowledge of the beauty of death. Psyche must herself "die" before she can be re-united with Eros. Kroetsch's narrator must die to the love of worldly beauty, before he, an Eros figure himself, can be re-united with the greater beauty of Psyche, that is, be psychologically integrated. He must search for his soul in hell, even as Eros is represented as seeking, with his torch held high, in Hades for Psyche. What is the narrator's "torch" but Persephone's creative life-fire, the pure flame of authentic voice? This is the dual goal of his quest, and the two are inextricably intertwined, like the spiral torch of the wandering lover, in the master pattern of the universe: the double helix of the DNA, of the spiral nebulae, of the structure of this poem, of amplification that structured it so, "like meditation, revolving under the matter under surveillance". Death, as "the hired man", is a wise guide, in spite of his unprepossessing exterior.

Torch-shaped too is the radish (from the Latin radix, root), and a spiral structure, amplifying in concentric circles, and "boring" into the ground. The Demeter-mother's whispered "Bring me the radish seeds", under her literal diversion to allay his embarrassment, underlines, as for Psyche, the necessity of bringing back from the underworld the knowledge of the

beauty of death, of the buried past, where his deep roots are, and where he can find his soul. The radish, from whose Latin root comes our "radical", exemplifies the radical nature of the values the poem supports. The great quest, integration, wholeness, is implied in "a winter proposition" that follows "Into the dark of January/the seed catalogue bloomed . . . with illustrations" of its promise. January is the month of Janus, the god that looks both ways: behind to darkness and death, and ahead to beginnings, light, and rebirth. Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind", parodied here in "if spring should come, then . . ." calls for storms to clear away the exhausted, the dead, ideas, to make room for the rebirth of the new. The parody, with its implied completion "Can winter be far behind?" places a greater importance on winter, with its "proposition" (a sexual component is implied in its vernacular) that death holds the promise of integration and voice. The ringing conclusion of Shelley's great ode is de-constructed in the process. The theme of rebirth after death is similar in both poets, but where Shelley despairs of his own efforts, hoping only that someone somewhere will take fire from them, Kroetsch's narrator is positing a psychological change in himself that will, while it gives him a new identity, by the same process give him a new voice. The prospect of death is welcome to both poets, but for different reasons: Romantic death vs. post-modern survival through transformation.

Shelley's "trumpét of a prophecy" is rudely de-constructed, in absentia, as the prophecy itself was in the foregoing, by the rhyme that follows the description of "No. 25--McKenzie's Improved Golden Wax Bean: 'THE MOST PRIZED OF ALL BEANS. Virtue is its own reward. We have had many expressions from keen discriminating gardeners extolling our seed and this variety.'" Here is a moral Bean, almost a human Being, who asks nothing more than to live a modest virtuous life, despite the paeans of gardeners of keen discriminating judgement who insist upon extolling its virtues. The rude rhyme that follows

parodies the sounding extollers, including the stentorian opening salvo in capitals, and makes of its virtue, not a trumpet fanfare from above, but a bombast from below. The anthropomorphic bean, an ordinary guy, gets its revenge, deflating the inflated rhetoric of its promoters.

In contrast to the ridiculous rhetoric above that reaps its own reward of comic diminution, but in keeping with the rude rhyme that pricks the puffery, is the ordinary authentic language that describes the mother's actions. With her "binder twine, stretched/between two pegs", she is a figure of the love that stretches between life and death, binding the two together in an inextricable intertwining structure that is the master plan of the universe. Her Demeter/Mary Mother image of love and her real relationship as mother to the narrator make the garden in which she is "marking the first row" a metaphor of the narrator as poet ready for the first seeds of his poetic growth. That the space for those first seeds is marked out with homely indigenous materials by loving hands means that as poet he should be grounded in his prairie space and use the materials indigenous to it. "Fair seed-time had my soul," sang Wordsworth, "and I grew up/Fostered alike by beauty and by fear."¹⁰ Kroetsch's narrator is also learning, from a loving Demeter/mother, where beauty lies. What of the fear? Fear is on the spot too, in the figure of death the hired man makes. What might he learn from his laughing comment, "just about planted the little bugger./Cover him up and see what grows"? Terror, certainly. Adults like the hired man don't realize, or if they do, don't care or sadistically exult, that children assimilate such jests literally. Raised a Roman Catholic (as Kroetsch was, the oldest of five children and the only boy), Kroetsch or his narrator could expect to be buried, but only after he had died and his soul had gone to heaven. The grave as a return to the mother for rebirth is an idea of great antiquity, important in both the planting and the hunting cultures, which are echoed in

Seed Catalogue by the gardening mother and the shotgun-toting father respectively. Salvation, resurrection and eternal life were not, from the evidence of this poem, so vivid as the sufferings in Hell reserved for the sinner, especially the sexual transgressors. The priest saw to that. The Garden of Eden had its pitfalls and so had life on earth, the boy realized. "My father had intense Edenic recollection of a lost home (Ontario)," Kroetsch told (see¹²) Peter Thomas. And a correspondingly keen nose for sexual guilt, we may speculate, was related to that recollection.

The father's name was Paul, and he may echo in some ways that Paul of the Acts of the Apostles, who, as Saul the tax-collector, persecuted the Christians. Then, as Saul journeyed to Damascus, "suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." The last is a fairly literal, vernacular description of what Paul Kroetsch may have done. The narrator follows the hired man's jest with "My father didn't laugh./He was puzzled/by any garden that was smaller than a quarter-section of wheat and summerfallow." As a figure of the archetypal hunter used to wide-ranging hunting spaces, he would be puzzled by the notion of a garden being in any way meaningful to his son's growth; 160 acres of wheat or summerfallow was different: his son could really grow a profitable crop there, take over the farm some day as his only son should. The garden was too little for "Saul"; he felt more at home with his tax-collector jargon: "the home place: **NE** 17-42-16 W4th Meridian." The last word deserves our attention because it is the only one capitalized with a large letter; "**NE**" is in small caps. One of the many meanings of "meridian" is "a place or situation with its own distinctive character." Another is "south." Another is the apogee of

maturity: time to break with the past, with traditional authority. Together they define the home place as one of considerable promise for growth. A few lines further, the narrator wonders, "How do you grow a gardener?" As a parallel for the home place, the Garden of Eden, from what the priest, the voice of traditional authority, had said of its ban on unrestricted sexual freedom, suggests that the narrator's fall from the horse has to do with his sexual "transgressions". We'll see this suggestion borne out by amplification of further material in the poem.

The second description of the home-place is such as the mother might give to a prospective visitor unfamiliar with the locality. But from her Demeter/Mary Mother perspective, its "correction line road" and its "west", then "south" from "Heisler", it is rich in favourable prognoses for the narrator. "West" is death, as in the vernacular "going West", but death only precedes return to mother earth for rebirth in the primitive myth, integration and rebirth of love in the Psyche/Eros myth, and Resurrection in the Christian. Death is inextricably intertwined with life in the Demeter/Mary-Mother's bindertwine, stretched by love between the opposite pegs of life and death in the garden that is the narrator. But Persephone is bound to the upper world two-thirds of the year, and life thus transcends death. Death implies a "correction", both in the Catholic Purgatory and in the Psyche/Eros myth where it is necessary to "die" before integration of the soul is possible. "Heisler" has a parallel in Hades, since, while it names a real place, in typical German fashion the name may combine the German heissen, to name, and heiz, heat; thus, a hot place. As Hades, it is the underworld where Eros must go, torch in hand, to look for his lost Psyche. As the underworld of the unconscious, it is where all the burrowing and digging in the mental depths goes on, where the harrowing is done, the rows marked out, and the seeds sown; where the horse stands still, or still stands, and where it

is housed in Uncle Freddie's perfectly designed barns. It is finally, the "hotbed" where new life quickens, and transformation of what is dead or deconstructed into art takes place; where the great quest begins and ends with a poet "dying" to his worldly loves and being reborn to love of the earthy, simple, and indigenous, his salvation having been vouchsafed to him by their "natural grace".

One can see lines of conflict forming between father as a Saul "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord (Acts XI:1) and putting to an erotic/poetic death his son, and mother as Demeter/Mary Mother loving in a non-sexual way and somehow understanding his needs and potential and guiding him to fulfill them.¹² But the father has a positive part to play in his son's redemption: "For he is a chosen vessel unto me," the Lord said, "for I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" (Acts IX: 15,16). Who can doubt that Paul Kroetsch did also suffer for his son's sake? That Kroetsch's relationship with his father troubled them both we can see in this excerpt from a poem entitled "Projected Visit":

But what if my
great tall
father
his eyes
forgiving
an errant son
does not stoop
from the grave to
love me home?¹³

In spite of the anxious doubt expressed in the words and in their placement, Kroetsch has none in attributing his fondness for the tall tale to the influence of his father as a famous story-teller, and to his growing up in a strong oral tradition. In the long run, even the father's opposition may have given some impetus to the son's efforts. The kite needs the wind to

rise against; the knife needs the stone to sharpen it.

But at the time, the frustrated narrator's sense of the home place was bleak in the extreme:

No trees
around the house.
Only the wind.
Only the January snow.
Only the summer sun.
The home place:
A terrible symmetry.

Each short bleak image is pounded down with a period. The parallel "Only. . . ." phrases toll like mournful bells. The echo of Blake's vision of the "fearful symmetry" in the tiger suggests the duality of hate/love which the place means for the narrator of Seed Catalogue, and which is focussed in the parents' conflicting attitudes towards him. Yet, "the January snow" and "the summer sun", which reflect those attitudes, are metaphors of death and life, whose inextricable intertwining alone can bring about transformation of the destroyed, the de-constructed, into art. It is the process of the poem; its dead rhetoric is progressively de-constructed by the living vernacular and transformed into art. At the same time it is the process or progress of the poet toward integration. "Dead," he moves toward being alive when he transforms his worldly loves into the love of that which is more beautiful, Psyche, the soul. By the end of the poem, he has come close to that goal; the image of the home place is repeated except for the last two lines. By replacing the period after "house" with a comma and removing the capital from the first "Only", he conveys the sense that the remaining two emphasize the value of the death/life sequence. It is a remarkable shift in tone from despair to hope, but the poem has prepared us for it. The change is not sudden, only a progressive movement of de-construction and re-creation throughout; death, then life; January snows imply summer suns. The symmetry, terrible no more,

is then not merely acceptable, but propitious.

"How do you grow a gardener?" follows naturally from the hidden hints of growth in the home-place descriptions, and from the hired man's "Cover him up and see what grows." The language that presents the "show" of vegetables (with our narrator as "Early Snowcap Cauliflower") sets up an interplay between the outward literal fact of their "vegetableness" and whatever inner symbolic imagery of grandeur or grotesquerie each cherishes of itself. A parallel exists in the carnival "Witches' Sabbath" atmosphere of Walpurgisnacht which supposedly honors St. Walpurga, a 7th Century missionary sent to help St. Boniface set up his monastery that became the leading centre of civilization in Germany. Participants in the annual carnival cast off their ordinariness; they dress and behave in ways quite contrary to their everyday selves, but quite in keeping with their inner, unconscious selves. The experience is revelatory; the effect may be regenerative and lead to self-realization and great worth, or perhaps to destruction. Our narrator, moving toward self-realization, is conscious of the pitfalls. His dream or vision of these costumed vegetables, a puppet show of his own making, reflects his fears. The metaphor mocks the human propensity for seeking only outward transformation; the vegetables are only coated with particularity, not changed within; there, they are still, by nature, vegetables. So with man: even one of potential greatness may fare poorly.. For that, Macbeth is the model: having sinned against nature, in the end "Now does he feel his title/ Hang loose, about him, like a giant's robe/ Upon a dwarfish thief." ¹⁴

Yet the mistress of Macbeth's equivocating witches was Hecate, a psychopompic deity, one of the leaders of the initiates into the underworld mysteries. He should have been in safe hands, then, and would have been, had not the witches acted on their own (and drawn Hecate's wrath for thereby spoiling her plans: for his transformation, perhaps?) The uncertainty of

life is the point, one that concerns our narrator and that he takes up again, in Section 9. For modern man must discriminate among the myriad voices that assail him from outside and within. 'Macbeth's were within at first, and when his wife added hers, the combination proved his undoing. Seed Catalogue places great importance upon listening; the mother's whisper is a recurring motif, which, as in music, centers the composition. Amplification, as Hillman defined it, is like variations on a theme of music. It is to function in that way now.

The "mother's wake" naturally follows the murder of the mother-language (in naming the vegetables thus), the earthy vernacular basis of the King's English. The unreal world of the "World Series"--the teams are American--impinges on the real. But the "rain" of that real world suggests rebirth, and the line, "the road to the graveyard was barely passable", hints that the mother-language is not to be buried easily. "The horse was standing still", but at least it was still standing, waiting. The mother's whispered "Bring me the radish seeds," suggesting a voice in the mind, supplies just what the narrator needs to get him back on the right road. "Wake" is ambiguous, although amplification of the image strongly suggests that the mother is waking her wandering son to his real job, his quest. A parallel exists in James Joyce's Finnegans Wake ('Finn-again wake'), also a dream book.¹⁵

Section 2

In Section 2, the quest for the "radish seeds" renews. The badger and magpie reflect the narrator in his relations with his father "all summer", an image that suggests a period of rapid development of erotic-poetic power. Not without burgeoning opposition, however: the opening words, "My father was mad at the badger", is understandable even when the badger is seen as the badgering son "digging" for ancestral roots in the underworld of his

labyrinthine mental depths, instead of, say, as the only son, preparing to take over the farm. We wonder at the intensity of the father's anger because we suspect that "mad" suggests a depth of anger greater than its usual meaning. A shotgun is not a metaphor for ordinary anger. Its shattering destructiveness suggests a high emotional charge of the literal meaning of "mad". It recalls the father as a Saul figure "breathing out threatenings and slaughters" against the Christians, then the Lord's voice, concluding "it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." Saul had been blinded by the great light a moment before that signalled a revelation, had heard the voice of the Lord, and was instantly converted, to become an indefatigable preacher of the Gospel to many lands. As Paul, he has come down to us as a stern figure of sexual morality: "If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly" (Titus I: 6). He is perhaps the more rigorous in his morality because, as he confesses: "For we ourselves also were sometime foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another" (Titus II: 3). Nor would Paul be the sort to laugh at the hired man's mocking laughter: "just/about planted the little bugger./Cover him up and see what grows." Death is too serious and grand a matter to laugh at, as he reasons: "But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but God giveth . . . to every seed his own body" (I Corinthians XV: 36-38).

So now, Paul, the narrator's father (with the other Saul/Paul strong within him), "took the double-barrelled shotgun out into the potato patch and waited" for the badger, trying to puzzle it out. "Why, my father asked himself--Why would so fine a fellow live under the ground?" He spoke in terms

of the badger who "looked like a little man" (the homunculus of the medieval alchemists' art, brought into being from the prima materia supplied by nature, and, before that, the primitives' initiatory rite of passage from the childhood of the mothers' world to the man's estate of the fathers'; in Seed Catalogue, transformation-in-process of the narrator's psyche). He thought of his son's persistent interest in the buried past, then of his poetic/erotic "transgressions", and then of the "burial" the hired man was laughing at. He hazarded answers, prompted by the voices within: "Just for the cool of roots?", thinking of cooling a burning curiosity about the ancestral past, then of the cooling of sexual passion following orgasm, and then of the cooling of death. "The solace of dark tunnels?" he went on, thinking of the consolation of exploring subterranean passages of the buried past and of the psychic depths, then of the consolation of penetrating the hidden vagina, and then of the consolation of the darkness of the tomb. "The blood of gophers?" he concluded, thinking of finding insignificant relatives, "go-fers", in the family tree, then of the blood of the pierced maidenhead, and then of the blood of Christ flowing from his spear-pierced side, which bought the Resurrection. Naturally, he could not shoot the "badger"; it was his son. "He uncocked the shotgun", which, further amplification will reveal, means that he effectively discouraged future "sexual transgressions."

The counterpointing lyric defining love in terms of the badger/son occupies the "credit" side of the "account", if we think of the binary structure that at critical episodes indicates the "balance", with, as in The Ledger, "debit" side on the left. (Its parallel movement should remind us of the poem's intertwining structure, which we have allied with amplification, defined earlier as "revolving around the matter under surveillance", a matter of changing perspective. Soul is a way of seeing, according to Hillman.) In spite of what we have interpreted as angry opposition, then, the narrator

seems to see from the episode a net gain to his quest for integration and voice. At any rate, defining love in terms of the badger's actions reflects the actions of the narrator as poet, lover, and Christ figure: "Doing/over and over" reflects the poet's working routine on a poem, the lover's sexual act leading to orgasm, and the Christ figure's eternally-renewed promise of the Resurrection. "Standing up to the loaded gun" reflects one's standing up for one's convictions under the gun of neglect or devastating criticism, describes an erect phallus responding to "loaded" testicles (the shotgun is double-barrelled), and, because of the Resurrection, defies death, the hired killer who in effect holds a gun to our heads. "Burrowing" reflects the poet's digging in the buried past and in his own mental depths; in sexual terms, penetration to the point of being buried; and in the Christian context, the humble and slow progress to triumph on the model of Christ's burro (donkey) ride into the city.

The poem is working toward a reconciliation of opposites, which is how the left and right side of the binary structure probably should be regarded, rather than as "debit" and "credit" sides respectively, as they were in The Ledger. There is a "left-hand way--an approach to spirit through Nature. Such an approach was the capital heresy of Giordano Bruno, burned alive at the stake on February 16, 1600 A.D. He was himself an incarnation of that 'coincidence of opposites' of which he wrote: 'All of God is in all things . . . because just as Divinity descends . . . to the extent that one communicates with Nature, so one ascends to a Divinity through Nature, as by means of a life resplendent in natural things one rises to the life that presides over them'. The left-hand path is . . . by way of the senses--the eyes, the heart and spontaneity of the body--to a realization and manifestation 'at the still point of the turning world', in act and experience on earth, of the radiance, harmony, bounty, and joy of nature . . ." (CM, pp.265-266, much

abridged). From this, it becomes evident that Seed Catalogue's narrator inclines more to this "left-hand way" in which God is immanent in all things, than to the "right-hand way" (of the Church authorities that burned Bruno) in which God, as transcendent, is separate from his Creation, "out there" somewhere. Yet the poem's intertwining binary structure seeks a balance, a reconciliation of these opposites, a "middle way". There is such a way, and Kroetsch, digging in his ancestral past, discovers it in the German biographical epics of Medieval Romance, of which more later.

The stark narrative of the father's attempts to shoot the badger contrasts sharply to the rich complex of inter-related allusions in the lyric's definitions of love. Perhaps the father's unconscious sympathy with the badger prevented him from hitting it. Instead, "he killed the magpie that was pecking away at a horse turd about fifty feet beyond and to the right of the spot where the badger had been standing." It was not likely an accident. As a bird form or metamorphosis of the shaman-trickster in Montana Blackfoot legend, with which Kroetsch would almost certainly be familiar, the magpie serves as interpreter or intermediary between man and the powers behind the veil of Nature; on behalf of a ~~girl~~-wife, he is searching among the remains of her buffalo-husband, pulverized by angry fellow-buffalo, for the fragment of bone that will regenerate him.¹⁶ The magpie "pecking away at a horse turd" echoes the legend, although the horse of the narrator's erotic/poetic power has diminished to an even less promising residue than the buffalo's. The magpie's position in relation to the badger is analogous to that of Christ's to God, as described by Stephen:

Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit . . . And Saul was consenting to his death (Acts VIII: 1).

Despite its apparent damage to the already tarnished image of Saul, this passage leaves some hope for the narrator, a Stephen figure in this Christian context, "a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost" (Acts VI: 5). If the father could bring himself reluctantly to countenance the ancestral searches of his badgering son, he drew the line at his son's interest and perhaps participation in the procedures by which supernatural powers became accessible to the shaman-trickster. "He killed the magpie."

However, the magpie, "jumping around" preparing for his flight to catch the dead man's soul, must in his own right and as a "heathen" counterpart to Christ also "die" to do so, and the shotgun takes care of that. (Paul is revealed as the "Lord's vessel" by his act). Thus the magpie, to the right of the badger/God, stands ready to receive the "dead" narrator's soul, as Jesus was to receive Stephen's. (All these shifting identities are possible because of the "left-hand" way that perceives "all of God is in all things", a way that did not die with Bruno). Resurrection is the hope for the narrator in this combination of Christian myth and Plains Indian legend, and even Paul comes through as the Lord's vessel. "They're harder to kill than snakes" he brags, a reference to the power of the spirit over sexual temptation represented by snakes, and perhaps to some Gnostic sects' serpent worship. It is a typical Pauline theme: savage your sexual desires. "They eat robins' eggs", he declared virtuously, probably a denunciation of the heathen magpie/shaman's focus on death and the spirits, instead of the Christian promise of the Resurrection suggested by the robins' eggs. His change of story the following week with the magpie as his intended target all along has a basis in language: one definition of "magpie" in the OED is that it is the next to the outermost ring round the bullseye. Paul did not miss the target entirely then, when he hit the magpie; he only manipulated the definitions, probably a greater sin in the narrator's language-oriented view.

All his rationalizations for the switch of target must be seen as just that; the truth is likely to be that he perceived a greater sin in what the magpie reflected of his son's sexual transgressions, as we shall see..

Paul's defence of "robins' eggs" reflects an attitude counter to that of the narrator/son, who puts death first as a necessity for life. The reversal suggests an important parallel in Chaucer: "The Knight's Tale" has Duke Theseus settling the irreconcilable rivalry between Arcite, a devotee of Mars, and Palamon, of Venus, for the fair Emily, by having them meet in tournament, each attended by a hundred of their finest. Arcite, after a long struggle between the opposing factions, is declared the victor. But Saturn, having promised his daughter Venus otherwise, sends a mini-cyclone that envelops only Arcite and his horse in its whirling dust. His horse panics, Arcite falls on the saddle horn and dies. Everyone is thrown into an uproar of grief (the style is mock epic). Theseus silences the crowd and emphasizes the point that since everything created must die, it is wise to regard death as desirable. "Thanne is it wysdom, as it thinketh me/To maken vertu of necessitee."¹⁷ His speech is outside the general mock epic style, and is unique as the only place in Chaucer where this "good pagan" view is expressed. In Seed Catalogue the idea is echoed ironically in Section 1's rude bean rhyme: ". . . the more you eat/the more you virtue." Eaten, beans create their own necessity. The style that describes the bean is also mock epic. The point being made is that this style backfires (ha! pun) on its subject. For the narrator, to whom death is a necessity for rebirth, for art, death is a virtue, and the point that Theseus makes supports his own. The allusion has triple force: it scores against the mock-epic style of the seed-catalogue rhetoric, for which Arcite's mourners supply a parallel, and it scores a point for death as a virtue. The Chaucer model also has Palamon, the devotee of Love and Beauty personified by Venus, triumphing in the end

over the aggressive, war-like Arcite (whose name echoes the bean's "virtue"), and winning the fair Emily, who, ironically, does not care much either way. On the whole, as a worshipper of Diana, she would prefer to remain a virgin-- which suggests that man can choose: love or war; no innate compulsion drives him to either. Hence the importance of love in soul-building as a counter strategy to war. Love completes the trinity. (We shall encounter Diana again, or rather, our Grail knight will encounter her earthly model.) It is fitting that Chaucer, "the father of the English language", should provide such a rich source of inspiration for Kroetsch's song. Demeter and the mother language have been well served.

Section 3

The angry opposition of the father to shamanistic flights of song echoes in "No. 1248--Hubbard Squash", with the magpie lyric inserted midway in the description and caught, as it were, in the crossfire. The doubling of digits in "No. 1248" warns us not only of ambiguous meaning, but also of proliferating opposition: from the single case of a well-meaning father's attempt to squash his son's poetic flights to the wholesale destruction and world conflagration by superbombs. The notion of Nature acting in accordance with mankind's foibles by giving him a "matchless variety" of "squash" has multiple associations of horror. With the narrator's double meanings we know enough now to look for vernacular meanings under the inherited ones. The word "squash," for instance, with its vernacular meaning of "destruction", provides a clue for reading the vernacular meaning of the entry, especially the italicised words. The deeper, hidden meaning of the entry then emerges: "mankind", ironically, is not "kind" when its fondness for "squash" has had the result that "Nature", that is, human and natural resources, appears to have "especially provided" this "matchless" variety of "superlative flavor".

We know only too well that a special theory of relativity made possible the hydrogen super bomb detonated by atomic fission. "Matchless" indeed; it needs no match and has none.

Like the badger lyric that follows the episode dominated by the shotgun, the magpie lyric defines love under the threat of death. Where the first is on the right side in the binary structure, the magpie lyric is in the middle, perhaps foreshadowing death. It celebrates life/death in a dance of erotic joy:

Love is a leaping up
and down.

For behind it lives the Plains Indian myth of the magpie searching in the remains of the buffalo-husband for the remnant of bone that will regenerate the original. For the narrator, it means the restoration of his erotic/poetic power if the horse can be regenerated from his turd. Not much hope, one might think, even allowing for Kroetsch's ever-present self-mocking. Yet, in medieval alchemy, excrement was the 'prima materia' for the transformative process. And the magpie must die, as Christ had to die, in order to receive the soul of the dead (who must of course also have "died" in order to be reborn):

Love
is a beak in the warm flesh

The hesitancy in the long space between "Love" and its definition suggests wonder, or reluctance to acknowledge, that love resides still in that image of death, whether in Christian resurrection, or in shamanistic flight to find the dead man's soul, or in a father's fear-filled fury to destroy the shamanistic flight of song to which the son aspires. Worse, the definition of love is a generalization, and therefore has universal application: "Nature appears to have expecially provided" it, this squash, this rough love that

kills. It is an inescapable part of our nature then, and it behooves us to be cognizant of that fact in order to deal with it, both in ourselves and in others. For it can be dealt with: the fair Emily that dwells within us is a virgin Diana and favours neither Mars nor Venus, neither Arcite nor Palamon; our souls can go either way. Predestination implants the potential for either; free will gives us the choice. But, when those who sit in the seats of the mighty choose power, the rest of us are especially vulnerable. The "beak in the warm flesh" is a repulsive image of predatory power wreaked upon a helpless warm-blooded creature whose only fault was that it had a lively love of life, and, in this case, an inclination to poetic flight.

The description of the squash conceals, as always in Seed Catalogue, the real beneath the rhetoric. The real person should come closest to the description that completes the squash entry: "As a cooker, it heads the list for wanted squash. . . ." (The italics, as always, signal the need for special attention). The likeliest candidate for this unflattering sketch, we may speculate (while affirming that we all have the basic qualification and tend to follow the "voice" that caters to our secret sins) would be, during the gestation of Seed Catalogue while Kroetsch was employed in the U.S.A., President Nixon. Appalling revelations of his misuse of power came to light. Watergate was indeed revealing his "warts", and they were many. It was then seen as astonishingly ironic that during his campaign he had let it be known that he wanted to be revealed "warts and all". He had cooked evidence in plenty in preparation for the investigation and, both as president and as chief conspirator of his colleagues in crimes, with their secret lists, he "headed the list for wanted squash". In Spiro Agnew (whose first name suggests the spiralling growth of the squash "vines") he had a "strong running" mate for Vice-President. Among the "fruits" of victory in the election was the occupation of the Oval Office of the chief executive, and the Green Room

used for state receptions, "olive-shaped, of a deep rich green color" respectively. Under his hail-fellow-well-met exterior, the inner man, his "rind", we might say, was "smooth" enough. What even an admirer, Theodore H. White, wrote about him makes Nixon antithetical to Kroetsch: "There was no poetry in Richard Nixon. The liberal tradition had heroes running back through Lincoln to Jefferson. The conservative tradition, of which Nixon came, had no ancestor heroes; his mind had to pick its way awkwardly through the facts, the realities, with no governing code, no inherited dream"¹⁸ (emphasis added).

Yet White's observations need qualification. Nixon may never have had poetry in him in the narrow sense, although even that is doubtful. He was touched with the fire early in life; he did have musical talent and at one time considered a career in music. But he was one of those, who, as Oscar Wilde wrote in The Ballad of Reading Gaol, "kills the thing he loves." For Nixon seems to have killed that within himself which could have saved him and his country from the fierce psychic trauma that convulsed them both. He is perhaps the prime example in our time of the destruction inherent in yielding to the temptation of power that resides in us all, implied in "Nature seems to have especially provided it. . . ." What concerns Seed Catalogue is the search for integration of the other half of man, his despised and deposed other half, for then the poet can discover in the whole man the source of authentic voice.

Nor may Canada be exempted. A case could be made that the description of the squash fits John Diefenbaker, surely the prime Canadian perpetrator of inherited rhetoric during the gestation of Seed Catalogue and a notable "cooker" of a lukewarm issue to the boiling point of outrage. The strong influence of his wife Olive, a former Toronto schools supervisor with a reputation for strong will, and therefore no clinging "vine", but a "strong running" mate, could well have resulted in the "fruits" of the administration

being "olive-shaped." One of those "fruits", Lake Diefenbaker, a 100 mile lake created by a large dam on the South Saskatchewan River during his administration, can be "of a deep rich green color," when viewed in a certain light. Beneath the bristling crustiness of the political man must have subsisted a convivial "rind", for his participation in publicity hi-jinks was easy and "smooth", in contrast, say, to the embarrassed awkwardness of his chief rival, Lester Pearson. Yet his inability to delegate power, and a suspicion, amounting at times to paranoia, even of his underlings, alienated him in the end from his party. Nor, with his emotional attachment to the monarchy, was his administration a fruitful time for the development of a national identity, or for experiment in the arts, which might have furthered that development. All this emotional baggage with its negative results, and perhaps particularly his inherited political demagoguery, could scarcely fail to impress Kroetsch as evidence of another good man gone wrong in succumbing to the temptation of power, and sacrificing to it the warm loving man known only to the chosen few. Diefenbaker's Bill of Rights, his defiance of U.S. pressure to arm the Bomarc missile, and his floating of the notion of a peace-keeping force abroad--all of which worthy efforts he hoped would win him a Nobel peace prize, could do little to alter that impression.

That the national leaders of the English-speaking majority on the continent should be inimical to their own full development, and, by extension, to that of their countrymen, is an interpretation as alarming as it is radical. It should be unbelievable. It would not be unbelievable to artists and their supporters in both countries, who generally deplore their governments' niggardly support of the arts. The Nixons and the Diefenbakers are the norms, the Kennedys and the Trudeaus the exceptions, in English-speaking North America. As yet, the transformation that will recognize and welcome the badger and the magpie has touched too few, both among the rulers and the ruled.

Mostly, these figures of love get short shrift, as here. The authentic voice sought can only find its antithesis in the strange new language of the Watergate conspirators, and in the exhausted inherited rhetoric of Diefenbaker. The men of power are his father, amplified.

"But how do you grow a lover?" links the tragedy of the magpie/shaman capering in his dance of death between twin horrors of our time to the narrator's first sexual experience. Frustrated, and disappointed in his father's angry opposition to his first tentative explorations into the buried past of history and legend, myth and ritual, the narrator encounters more of the same in the priest's admonitions concerning sexual love: "You'll go to hell/and burn forever (with illustrations)" for "playing dirty." Fear and guilt are imprinted on the beginner in erotic love, on this, the second day of catechism. "Germaine" has, as a name, seeding and "growth" connotations: seeds germinate, grow into plants. But what germinates from the seeds of this experience? Poor stuff, and some wry humor, as narrations of early sexual experiences usually do, from this sort of preparation of the ground. The experience is germane to the matter of erotic love, how one handles one's sexuality thereafter, after the priest's lurid lessons. "Let's do it just one last time/and quit" suggests postponement, indefinitely, of the quitting. But the fear and guilt are not to be postponed so easily, nor is the "quitting" always voluntary.

"This is the God's own truth" becomes the prelude to the whopper, the big lie, the story of Adam and Eve. From the priest's choice of language in his warning lessons the narrator perceives the story as "Adam and Eve got caught/playing dirty." It is de-mythologizing with a vengeance, and the sexual union of the archetypal pair is reduced to something "dirty." No wonder that the authentic essence of beauty is lost in the language, buried in the dirt. Before that happened, here is the beauty, as the narrator, with

his simple "This is the truth", tells of the wonder and the power and the glory of his first erotic ~~experience~~:

We climbed up into a granary
full of wheat to the gunny sacks
the binder twine was shipped in--

we spread the paper from the sacks
smooth sheets on the soft wheat
Germaine and I we were like/one

The granary, the wheat, the gunny sacks, are all powerfully symbolic of the sexual seed so soon to be released. The binder twine suggests the intertwining of the human bodies soon to come, of the twin sexual powers of male and female mingling, fertilizing, and binding together in that double helix structure of the DNA molecule that is itself the master pattern of our body structure. On that pattern too, which is also the pattern of amplification, "revolving around the matter under surveillance," Seed Catalogue takes shape, written as it were on the "smooth sheets" on which the sexual act is performed. Insofar as its dynamic is sexuality, the poem becomes a ~~sexual~~ act, the binary structure of lines 2, 5 and 6 (the mid-space creating twin parts of each line) corresponding to the separate human bodies, the separate spiralling coils of the DNA, before intertwining into one structure. Thus the narrator and Germaine "were like/one," the slash (/) suggesting two-as-one, although not actually one, no more than binder twine or the DNA is one, but two intertwining into one. The priest spoiled everything. Note how his words in the lines below unravel the strands as the lines separate into the original binary structure again:

we had discovered, don't ask me
how, where--but when the priest said
playing dirty we knew--well--
he had named it he had named
our world out of existence
(the horse was standing still)

The two who had been innocent follow their great archetypes out of the Garden. With the loss of innocence comes guilt and with it the loss of erotic/poetic power, symbolized by the immobilized horse. The sense of loss and pain of that loss are strong, and the question, "But how--", ends only in pain renewed by frustration. "Pinch-Me," in the nursery rhyme, is the only one left when "Adam and Eve got drowned." The emphasis on the last word, deliberately mis-spelled, is on death, of innocence certainly, and of sexual and poetic power probably. The question, "But how do you grow a lover?" is still unanswered at the end of the section. "We decided we could do it/just one last time" is, with its wry humor, loaded with guilt and pain. The overburden of rhetoric on erotic love, like that on the squash, disguises and defiles its true nature, "names it out of existence", and paralyzes the narrator's poetic power which depends on it. "Naming" has numinous power for Kroetsch. Even the stress of sexual trauma does not nullify his keen sense of the power of language. The section provides more evidence that sexuality and language comprise another pair of twin intertwining strands in Seed Catalogue's structure and theme.

Section 4

The misleading rhetoric of the seed-catalogue and the outmoded contents of Mary Hauck's hope chest maintain continuity with the previous section. Yet both, by their nature, contain the seeds of hope for the narrator. Both arrive in town (Heisler, the "hot place") in January, the month of the god Janus, who looks both behind to the dead past and ahead to the hopeful future. Days are becoming longer and warmer, nights shorter. On the shortest night of all, June 21, 1919, (the first since WW I ended), Mary Hauck, cooking at the Heisler Hotel, loses all her treasured possessions when the hotel burns down. What she lost symbolizes the traditional past

that the prairie town never had. Her satin sheets, tea towels, English bone china and silver serving spoons are part of an alien exhausted tradition, so far as prairie culture is concerned. And the proverbial "the shortest night heralds the longest day", as the year 1919 reminds us (the long night of WW I echoing behind it) with the shortest digit, 1, followed by the longest, 9, in series, projectable to infinity, which makes the proverb a general truth. We may interpret the longest day as the light of hope, then, that inevitably follows the dark of despair, outlasting it always. Mary Hauck's brief night of loss implies the prairie culture's long gain. (WW I's four years of dark despair were followed by twenty of peace and light). When the hawk that drives the gopher to its brief cover departs, the gopher reappears instantly and remains until the next alarm. Under "How do you grow a prairie town?" the narrator responds with "The gopher was the model." The passage that this statement heads occupies the "credit" side of the binary structure; Mary Hauck's lost treasures in her hope chest occupy the "debit" side, and the two passages are out of phase, the gopher appearing after the hawk has departed. Another way of saying the same thing is that Mary Hauck's failure, despite her "cooking", to hawk her settled Eastern culture to the prairie town was followed by that town's renewal of its indigenous habits.

Under "How do you grow a past/", the long list of absent traditional symbols like "silkworms, Lord Nelson, pyramids, sailing ships, ballet and opera, Heraclitus [you can never step into the same river twice, or even once] and the Seine, the Rhine, the Danube, the Tiber and the Thames," is deflated by an occasional appearance in the list of something indigenous. A bottle-opener, a condom, the girl with available nipples to kiss (but only if the Eskimos win the Grey Cup, the Holy Grail of football-minded Canadians), and the Battle River that ran dry one fall, so that "the Strauss boy could piss across it"--all these contrast ironically with the hallowed and sacred

symbols of traditional cultures. There is a good deal of mockery, in this local pride, but that pride is for Kroetsch a rich source of authentic poetic materials, including a "past." Local pride replaces the traditional past with the tall tales that the "A-1"[small caps] Hard Northern Bullshitters" tell in the lobby and beer parlor of the Heisler Hotel. The substitution of "A-1" (small caps) for "No. 1" which properly completes the top grade of prairie wheat--"No. 1 Hard or Northern"--is significant: the vernacular meaning of "ampersand", the symbol &, is "A-1" in the sense of being "the most excellent thing or person" (OED). Although the small caps here humorously undercut its importance, the ampersand is an important symbol for Kroetsch of what is of the greatest significance in language. We shall encounter it again in Seed Catalogue. The de-construction that is going on in this section includes not only the traditional symbols of a rich but alien past, but also one of a rich Canadian prairie tradition of growing top grades of wheat. Shades of Herman Trelle, who grew Marquis wheat to a series of world championships and made the prairies famous! But pride in the oral tradition is genuine with Kroetsch, and to apply the prideful top grade of prairie wheat to hotel beer parlor bullshitters is only a measure of his regard for the oral tradition. It is self-mockery that the indigenous resident may indulge in, but not the outsider. It is the inverse of pride, but not the converse.

Under "How do you grow a prairie town?" the answer is simple: "Rebuild the hotel when it burns down. Bigger. Fill it full of a lot of A-1 Hard Northern Bullshitters." A bold, confident note sounds in this succinct advice. Mary Hauck's "cooking" may have contributed to the destruction of the hotel, a central symbol of prairie culture (with its incomparable bullshitters the "most excellent" element in it). But Heisler, the "hot place", has its own way of effecting transformations, of burning out the dross from the real, and Mary Hauck's symbols of the settled, static culture of Bruce County, one

of the first in Canada to be settled, went up with the hotel. The gopher triumphed over the hawk. The hotel reappeared, bigger than ever, with its bullshitters better than ever, in fact the best in the world.

Section 5

Mary Hauck's failure to transplant eastern culture to her prairie relatives finds an echo in the narrator's melon-planting experiment. "Gophers ate everything." That is, "foreign" writing, themes, styles, methods, materials, and products failed to meet the competition of writers using indigenous materials. When the narrator veered in the opposite direction, toward realism, no one was receptive to it. The "Government" to whom he "applied . . . to become a postman,/to deliver real words/to real people" may be a metaphor for a mental set, an inner "Government" opposition, an emotional defiance in readers and publishers, against his radical authenticity. His appeal to their appreciation of the real as opposed to the false fell on deaf ears. "There was no one to receive my application" means just that. That the passage is on the "credit" side of the binary structure may mean that rejection is necessary to drive him ever deeper into despair, and eventually into a re-evaluation of himself. If so, it succeeded. "I don't give a damn if I do die, do die . . ." is a masturbation lyric, form following function. It may be a metaphor for masturbation in words, a deliberately stimulated fantasy of love. Yet, substitution of the unreal for the real thing or not, the passage occupies most of the available line space, neither as debilitating as the melons of his experiments in exotica, nor as salutary as the attempts at realism. At any rate, the next section begins in fantasy.

Section 6

As an ironic epigraph or emblem of opposition to the kind of poet the narrator is on the way to becoming, to the budding poet hoping to burst into bloom, the cauliflower offers itself as an advance of a sort over the cabbage, being indeed a flowering cabbage, as its older name, "cole-flower" indicates. The cabbage, we need to recall, was said to be "creating considerable flurry among professional gardeners all over the world." Of the narrator, it could be said that he too hoped to create just such a flurry, not necessarily a pleasurable one, but perhaps even a panicky or indignant one, or at least one that would make other professional "gardener"/writers take note of his radical departure from inherited rhetoric. ". . . unquestionably one of the greatest inheritances of the Present generation, particularly Western Canadians" could be an ironic description of himself. In the same ironic vein, the cauliflower, according to the OED, was in Queen Anne's reign the model of, and gave its name to, a wig especially popular with judges and clergymen for its snowy dignity. The statement, "Being a particularly high altitude plant, it thrives to a point of perfection here, seldom seen in warmer climes!" belongs in the same class of ironic opposition, especially if the reader considers the narrator's emphatic preference for his roots, the vernacular, and the Heisler heat. The word "Pedigreed" in the grandiloquent name reflects the narrator's ironic concern for his own ancestry, and perhaps his father's fear of the son's researches uncovering blots on the 'scutcheon. Most interesting is the "No. 339" that identifies this resounding success: the first two digits are square roots or factors of the third, the magic number 9, the number of the Muses, who are "in triple rhythm, 3 times 3, heralds of the paradisaal dance of the Graces".¹⁹ It is propitious indeed. The success of the cauliflower is due to two prime factors: inheritance and the elevated

prairie habitat. Potent factors in the narrator's soul? The "straight" indication is that the narrator should concentrate on and use these factors to achieve a success as magical as his vegetable reflection/guide. But magic is illusion and fantasy. What happens when you rely on such guides? "The finest specimens we have ever seen, larger and of better quality, are annually grown here on our prairies" sounds like an ironic description of prairie writers appearing with perennial regularity on the writing scene. The prairies are made to sound like the most favored of places for the would-be writer to bloom--if it weren't for that irony. Even the rigorous prairie winter somehow encourages that creative growth, we might be persuaded to believe.

But the narrator's early experiences are more likely to be frustrating than otherwise. First, there is the matter of the muse, if the way inherited from the great poets of the past is to be followed. That's on the "debit" side of the page, to begin with:

Start: with an invocation
invoke--

His muse is
his muse/if
memory is

and you have
no memory then
no meditation
no song (shit
we're up against it)

The halting attempts which end in defeat aside, the passage is important for Kroetsch's definition of the poetic process as a meditation on memory.

Hillman's definition of amplification as "like meditation" and "revolving around the problem under surveillance" should be recalled to remind us that

Seed Catalogue has an organic structure, growing as it does by this spiralling

method, ever returning (its epigraphs, Janus-like, looking both back and ahead) to its matter. Thus, the narrator's sporadic and vernacular attempts to invoke his muse may lead us back by way of the epigraph's ironic juxtapositions to the great epics and Paradise Lost in particular; to Milton's solemn and lengthy invocation to the Holy Spirit, to his theme:

Of Man's First Disobedience, and the Fruit
Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal tast
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat.²⁰
Sing, Heav'nly Muse, . . .

And especially to the elevated diction he deemed appropriate to his great endeavour we turn, with Kroetsch's equally determined vernacular in mind for ironic contrast:

I thence
Invoke thy aid to my adventurous Song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
Above th'Aonian Mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime.
(I: 12-16) (emphasis added)

We find that while the narrator's muse of memory may appear to be incapable of dredging up anything except shamefaced sexual failures with adolescent girls in skating shacks, compared to Milton's majestic and dazzling conceptions of an overwhelming Satan and myriads of angels, and a cosmic range of tremendous battles, yet at bottom the themes are similar; sexual transgression and its fruits of pain. Nor are the Holy Spirit and the narrator's memory so different, when you include in memory, as Kroetsch would, its connection with the unconscious or the collective unconscious. The narrator's meditation on the memory of his despair is not so much at variance with Milton, blind, addressing his muse now as "Holy Light," and after recounting how he "Escap't the Stygian pond though long detained/In that

obscure sojourn . . . (III: 14-15), and thereby regaining inspiration and the power of poetic creation:

Yet not the more
Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt
Cleer Spring, or shadie Grove, or Sunnie Hill,
. but chief
The Sion and the flowrie Brooks beneath
.
Nightly I visit:
Then feed on thoughts, that voluntarie move
Harmonious numbers;

(III: 26-37), p.228.

Kroetsch's narrator emerges from his own "Stygian Pool" of Section 5 into the light of inspiration too, with "angel" Rudy Wiebe's visit later in the same section. Like Milton too, he finds his poetic materials finally in familiar settings. His search for authentic voice for his shamanistic flight of song has its parallel in Milton's invocation to his muse to aid him in his "adventrous Song,/That with no middle flight intends to soar" And certainly, like Milton, he "pursues/Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime", in his radical authenticity. The parallels are there. Although the mocking tone of Kroetsch's narrator disguises, it cannot wholly refute the high purpose in Seed Catalogue, or, his range of humour notwithstanding, his high seriousness. The Garden is the setting for both poems, but Kroetsch's narrator is not only in the garden, he is also the gardener, and the garden too, with its plants and animals. To put it another way, he tends the qualities in himself that they reflect. In that sense too, like Adam, he tends the Garden that reflects God in himself, as we shall see in his conception of God as the DNA, the master pattern of all living things. The narrator's preoccupation with sexual sin and guilt inherited from the priest's warnings, a force evil enough to immobilize the divine erotic/poetic power within him, is no less powerful and vengeful than Milton's Satan. His victimization by it allies him with Adam and Eve and the Fall--a fall that

for him is very real, leading as it does to sexual detumescence, impotence.

For the fact is that the narrator and Germaine re-enacted in its essentials the Adam and Eve story. Before the priest's warnings, they were as innocent of wrong-doing as their archetypes, for these too enjoyed sexual congress before the fatal knowledge came to them:

. into thir inmost bower
 Handed they went; and eas'd the putting off
 These troublesom disguises which wee wear,
 Strait side by side were laid, nor turned I weene
 Adam from his fair Spouse, nor Eve the Rites
 Mysterious of conjubial Love refus'd:
 Whatever Hypocrites austerely talk
 Of puritie and place and innocence,
 Defaming as impure what God declares
 Pure, and commands to som, leaves free to all.
 Our Maker bids increase, who bids abstain
 But our Destroyer, foe to God and Man?

(IV: 738-749), p. 264.

What the passage suggests of Milton's healthy attitude to sex favours an ambiguous interpretation of the "Death" entailed by the Fall, an interpretation which could include sexual death brought on by "Whatever Hypocrites austerely talk/Of puritee. . ." Kroetsch's priest belongs in that class of agents of evil. We may conclude that his narrator sides with Milton on the issue, and that the great Christian myth as set forth in Paradise Lost finds many echoes, not all of them ironic, in Seed Catalogue.

The increasingly desperate series "How do you grow a poet?" ends with a last gasp of "How?" just before the climax of the crises is reached and begun to be resolved by Rudy Wiebe. Having established memory as muse, the narrator tries some memories. Adolescent girls he fumblingly tried to have sex with? No, only more frustration, not to speak of humiliating failures. Home-tried recipes for physical, mental, and moral indispositions, including self-abuse? No, they don't work, especially the "ten Our Fathers & ten Hail Marys", and the masturbation continues. Why the ampersand? It appeared as

"A-1" (small caps), its vernacular meaning, to help rate the Heisler Hotel bullshitters. Here, it probably has a related meaning, like "A-1 bullshit."

The testimonial from the First Prize winner at the Calgary Horticultural Show, who used the seed company's seeds, is no help; it's a metaphor for magazine ads aimed at would-be writers, offering professional help and tested formulas, with grateful letters from successful graduates. The narrator's father has his formula for ambitious farm boys who want to be poets:

"fencing". Heavy with sarcasm, he instructs his son in the tools of the trade, which, for writing a poem, the son knows perfectly well won't work:

"We give form to this land by running/a series of posts and three strands of barbed wire around a quarter-section:" ("Ferocious closure": anathema to Kroetsch's notion of the free-est of free verse). All the father's advice is a parody of writing a poem; that is, how not to go about it. "Son, this is a crowbar" hints at a stifling of voice; the crow, according to folk wisdom, is a wise old bird that talks things over in the crow community. To "bar" the crow is to rule him out of order, keep him out of the action.

"Fencing" in the sense of dialectical disputations may be the real action. The rest of the series of "This is . . ." sentences conveys in one way or another the formula approach to writing: the willow, emblem of sorrow, hints "Make them weep"; the sledge, "Hammer down your meaning"; the bag of staples, "Fix everything in its place"; the claw hammer, "Blunt the hurtful fact."

The crowbar, the silenced poet, is to be driven down into that gumbo, that is, driven underground. So far, so good; that is where he needs to go, and gumbo is a fertile medium to work in, though it can cause a fall, when rain makes it soupy. As soup, gumbo is rich in assorted vegetables, including what other soups do not, okra, an exotic from the south, a detail which recalls the lines from Section 1: "storm windows off the south side of the house/and put them on the hotbed" and "WW Lyon, of South Junction, Man."

These suggest stimulation of growth, a secret source of delight to the narrator as poet. The number of holes the father specifies, 1,156, with the third and fourth digits adding up to the 11 of the first two, hint perhaps that the latter half of the experience adds nothing to the first. Another way of saying the same thing is that the first half has all that is necessary to reach the goal; Heisler contains it all. Father concluded the session with what sounds like further threats: "And the next time you want to/write a poem,/we'll start the haying." But "haying", storing up a rich supply of hay or experience, may be valuable, judging from the brome grass imagery cropping up at intervals and especially at the end of Seed Catalogue, when it engulfs Cindy.

The five despairing 4-line stanzas that follow the session are unusual in their regularity; they may parody traditional form as a last gasp of near-surrender to it before giving up the struggle. They begin with an echo of the "Son, this is a crowbar" series, but now it is the son, speaking bitterly, summing up, under the final "How do you grow a poet?", his first efforts. The "crowbar" is lifted (Kroetsch's What the Crow Said, published the year after Seed Catalogue, suggests affinity between bird and man). With the narrator's "This is . . ." series, the heavy sarcasm parallel to the father's is self-directed. The road between "nowhere and nowhere" reflects frustration; the dead porcupine mirrors his independent stance abandoned with his futile attempt to needle his readers, or gain respect for his sharp insights. "It was trying to cross the road" (going at cross-purposes to the mainstream is risky). Nor is the poet recorded as "having traversed/the land/ in either direction" (No one seems to have taken any notice of him across the country). The narration here and in the next eight lines is in the third person, avoiding identification also by going in and out of animal identities, leaving only what is associated with them--"a spoor", "rabbit turds" and a

"scarred page"--to be found with the writer's work. It's as if he must distance himself from discovery by means of these trickster disguises, leaving only false clues to his identity. It's a phase of the poet's apprenticeship, as "all spring long" suggests, an identity crisis, as "poet . . . say uncle" makes clear. Yet the sparse and fugitive imagery of the divided poet and the demand for surrender to the vernacular are couched in authentic voice, and point to a positive resolution of the crisis. It comes with Rudy Wiebe.

The idiom of the surrender demand recalls schoolground wrestling matches. Amplified, "wrestling" suggests a famous match, that of Jacob wrestling with the angel. The story in Genesis (appropriate for a real beginning of a poetic career), Chapter XXXII, has Jacob, a wily trickster, diddling his brother Esau out of his birthright by donning a hairy animal hide over his own smooth skin, and presenting himself to their blind father Isaac as his hairy brother. Isaac receives and blesses him with Esau's rightful share of his wealth, his birthright. Jacob, fearing reprisals, prays to God, affirming his unworthiness, and also his divided state, "into two bands." An apparent man, who is in fact an angel, wrestles with Jacob all night, but at dawn says: "Let me go, for day breaketh." Jacob answers: "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." The angel then asks, "What is thy name?" and when Jacob tells him, says, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God and with man and hast prevailed" (26-28).

Rudy Wiebe reflects that kind of angel, first opposing the narrator with his notion that poetry could never come to grips with prairie vastness, but later showing him the spot where "The Bloods surprised the Crees/to death." The pinpointed date is important, as always with Kroetsch: February 14 is Saint Valentine's Day. For the narrator, Rudy's action is an act of love that resolves the crisis. Specifically, it begins the integration of the

narrator's divided self; it re-unites him with love, which he had ignored when he succumbed to the temptation of power, and like Jacob, concealed his identity under animal disguises. The "pile of rabbit/turds" is a metaphor of the birthright got by deception; the rabbit is a puny parody of the horse, that great exemplar of erotic/poetic power, and its excretions are in tiny pellet form like a charge of small-shot, an image of scattered and short-range power. The horse turd in the magpie image represents a significant advance in the genre, and that is what makes the magpie's search for the all-important remnant in it an authentic attempt to re-constitute poetic power, as the Blackfoot legend of the magpie tells. The slash in "rabbit/turds" indicates that kind of relationship; but re-constitute a rabbit from anything in his turds, and you don't get a horse, only "a reduction to mere black. . . and white"; the timidity of the rabbit does not imply poetic "flights". On the other hand, Rudy's language, "Nature thou art", is of a piece with the angel's that wrestled with Jacob. It is the language used in speaking of the divine, and its content ranks with the angel's message of "Power with God and man." Its name-change does too; henceforth the narrator is "Nature", giving him something of the cachet of Jacob's to "Israel." Even allowing for ironic self-mockery typical of Kroetsch, naming has numinous power for him, and the encounter with Rudy Wiebe must have had immense and positive consequences for him.

"Nature thou art", quoted from Rudy, states the rudimentary fact of the narrator's identity. It has the quality of a benediction, concluding the narrator's solemn acknowledgment of that encounter (and concluding Sec.6 as well). If we examine carefully his account immediately following the crucial date, we get an astonishing secular version of creation that nevertheless parallels the Biblical version. The line, "Rudy, you took us there: to the Oldman River" (with the echo of Paul Robeson's rendition of "Old Man River"

still ringing in our ears) signals a privileged view about to be vouchsafed of the nature of life. In "Lorna & Byrna, Ralph & Steve and me", if we break down the names and supply definitions of the ampersand (&) from the OED, we get: "Lo-RNA, 'A per se; the first, chief, most excellent, most distinguished person or thing; A 1,' By-RNA, R-alpha[a]-'A in Greek; as aleph, A in Hebrew and Phoenician; the beginning, first in numerical sequence; the first subspecies of a permanent variety of a species in Natural History [e.g. Adam?], &-(as above), St-Eve and me." The RNA is the replicate of the DNA molecule, formed from it and lying alongside it and forming the other half of the double helix. It differs from the DNA only in its bonding, having both a hydrogen and an oxygen atom (in the OH radical), where the DNA has only a hydrogen atom. All life develops from this master pattern of the double helix in the cells; interestingly, in one complete turn of the spiral there are ten "bases" ²¹ (corresponding to the ten of Seed Catalogue?). The Bible version of Creation begins: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John I, 1). In Seed Catalogue, God should appear as the DNA, the parent pattern, but since God is ineffable, it does not appear directly in the line. It must be inferred from its replicate the RNA, which, with the DNA, is the means, working with the basic building elements such as are in the stars, by which "The Word is made flesh" (John I, 14). The oxygen atom in the OH radical of the RNA corresponds to the breath of life that God breathed into it, that breath yet containing or bonded to the H(ydrogen) of its creator. Thus life, man, is part God; God is in all life (Bruno's heresy). Alpha, besides standing for the first man or androgyne, Adam, (and after the split in the Garden, Eve), as Alpha centauri, is a star ("St" and "R" are left over in the line) of the first magnitude in the constellation of the Southern Cross, in this context a warming sign, ²² and redemptive as in the Crucifixion. The "most distinguished person or thing"

(or centaur) in this context is Jesus (or Chiron), the wise bearded teacher(s) of the children of gods, (a description also applicable to Kroetsch, a university professor). Putting all this together, we may hazard a paraphrase: "Lo, in the beginning, by RNA after RNA, a star was made flesh, of which the first, most distinguished are Adam & Eve, Chiron & Jesus; and (then there's) me." The difference between "and" and the ampersand makes the qualification necessary. In spite of the self-mockery of including himself in this distinguished company, there can be little doubt that this epiphanic and crisis-resolving encounter with Rudy Wiebe must have been immensely heartening for the narrator.

By "Lebensgliebes", "that which makes life complete", Rudy is alluding to the integration not only of love in the psyche, but also of death. This is the content of what he showed the narrator: The Bloods surprised the Crees, next to the Oldman River, "in the next coulee/surprised them to death." That is, next to the river of life is the "coulee" of death. Death is a cooling, as life is a warming. Death is contiguous with life, "that which makes life complete". The slash after "coulee" indicates their inextricable relationship. This is Rudy's Valentine message, echoing the image of the narrator's Demeter/mother, a figure of love stretching between the apparent opposites of life and death a pattern, in the binder twine over the clay, of the beauty and strength of their intertwining. It takes a journey to the underworld to discover that beauty, following the archetype of Psyche, who, to appease Aphrodite's jealousy of Eros' attraction to the greater beauty of Psyche, had to fetch from there the box containing the knowledge of the beauty of death. Only then could Psyche be re-united with Eros. Only when Kroetsch's narrator, himself a figure of Eros, has himself "died" to his "world(ly) series" of loves for Aphrodite, can he unite with Psyche, his soul. Only then can he be whole. To be whole is the nature of his quest,

the quest of Nature, for he is Nature, as Rudy tells him. It is the Great Quest; the Holy Grail was the quest for wholeness, in Jungian thinking. The old legend told only a truth of Nature. It is part of the structure of Seed Catalogue that the next section should begin with an entry that rings true to nature, for the first time wholly natural, as befits the narrator moving decisively toward the authentic.

Section 7

"Brome Grass" is heralded by no extravagant claims, no rhetorical flights. The extreme hardiness claimed for it is no fiction. That it "Flourishes under absolute neglect" makes it an apt symbol of the quality most needed if the poet is to survive as poet. Its hardiness makes it also an appropriate epigraph for the "Piss-up" that follows, which defies the so-called "reality" of its setting, and yet its perpetrators, the two tipsy poets, survive quite handily. In the revolving restaurant, itself an image of "amplification, revolving around the object under surveillance" (the master plan of Seed Catalogue's structure and theme), "We were the turning center in the still world." It's a parody of Eliot's "At the still centre of the turning world",²³ where a moment of ecstatic union of suffering and joy was caught, held in timelessness. For Purdy and Kroetsch, it was the world beyond their "turning center" that was caught, held in timelessness, stuck in its old ways, frozen in ancient postures, outmoded. It's they who have "outsights" instead of insights that the "still world" prides itself on. They have created a topsy-turvy world, a "piss'up" that defies "reality" and "Twice, Purdy galloped a Cariboo horse [that horse again, in glorious motion this time] right straight through the dining area." A tall tale, I should think, that was shaped out of a brilliant piece of poetic improvisation by Purdy, by the geni of non-denatured alcohol, and by the memory of a Grey Cup or Calgary

Stampede celebration where a horse in a hotel has been known to occur. The dining area setting favors the Grey Cup interpretation, paralleling the Last Supper and the Holy Grail, the "paying customers" and the waitress being understandably distracted by the two poets "shouting poems." The name, "Al Purdy" ("perdy" from pour dieu, 'for God'), reinforces the hints of spiritual experience from the escapade. As a first response to "How do you grow a poet?" the performance, with its excesses, justifies a rueful "Now that's what I call/a piss-up." But the little epilogue echoing Rudy Wiebe's "No song can do that" is on the "credit" side and was followed originally by a very significant "blessing". Even if it is a refutation of Rudy's warning, it is an ironic one, for the "reality" defied is a puny thing and so is the defiance like pissing over the principal's car. (The spouting feat of "the Strauss boy" has a parallel in Richard Strauss, d. 1949, first Bayreuth Festival conductor of Wagner's Tannhauser, 13th C. Minnesinger, who escaped fleshly temptation at Venusberg but was refused papal absolution until his staff sprouted miraculously. It's an encouraging, though ironic, example for our narrator.) And, like the brome grass, the poets of the piss-up not only survive, but flourish "under absolute neglect." Natural endowments suffice.

The second epigraph, 7b, "No. 2362--Imperialis Morning Glory" copes differently with reality, and has "wondrous beauty" to show for it. The reality is that its stems are too weak to support themselves, yet it bends and curls and spirals upward around a stronger stem, to bloom in beauty. This is its natural action (an act of love, in Seed Catalogue terms) as a convolvulus, to perform. There is a lesson here for the narrator, in the intertwining structure, in the "coincidence of opposites" dear to Giordano Bruno. For the narrator, re-reading The Double Hook (through which the characters live out their archetypes in the absences and emptiness of their

prairie-like setting) and looking at Hiroshige's print series, Fifty-three Stations on the Tokkaido, and one in particular, "'Shono-Haku/u'", marks another of those "moments in time" crucial to him. "The bare-assed travellers, caught in a sudden shower. Men and trees, bending" not so much defy reality as bend to it, as Nature directs, to survive. Their actions reflect ancient bitter-sweet wisdom, and, as with the Morning Glory, beauty. The narrator meditates on the parallels with his own situation: "The double hook" of "the home place", that de-limits but revitalizes; the "stations of the way", unlocatable in Japan's history, which is not Christian or dominated by the sense of Fall, to the stations of the Cross and "the other garden" that is himself, with the Christian archetypes of the Gardens of Eden and Gethsemane echoing through it. The meditation concludes with his realization that if out of these parallels come works of art, then out of his milieu could come another. The pin-pointed date, "Sunday, January 12, 1975," which in the Catholic calendar is the celebration of the circumcision of Jesus, his initiation into the Tribe, suggests that it is the narrator's initiation into the Tribe too, but of Nature, not Israel. Rudy Wiebe's pronouncement, "Nature thou art", is ratified.

After the supernally bright "morning glory" of this illumination, the third episode, 7(c), seems at first anti-climactic, though the progression from (a) to (b) would suggest otherwise. The shadow of the rider falling from the horse, recalling the narrator's impotent efforts as a boy to control his creative potential, falls upon the scene. Language fails. The narrator's fumbling efforts to communicate his pain through the medium of the historical figure of Pête Knight, "Bronc-Busting Champion of the World", brings, with its seed-catalogue double-talk rhetoric again, only Neanderthal grunts from the "lady" and suspicion of insanity. But it is the inherited language that fails. If the "pain" is to be "deliver[ed]" to some "woman,"

it must be through another voice. The voice must be sought by going back (the emblematic advice cannot be attributed to "Jim Bacque" for nothing) to ancestral roots. The narrator's quest is akin to the knight's quest for the Grail, ergo "Pete Knight," who died after a fall: "Got/killed--by a horse. He fell off." In the poem fragment from Kroetsch's "Projected Visit" quoted above, the poet refers to himself as "errant son", hinting of the knight-errant wandering on his quest. His Grail is integration, wholeness. For him, it is to be achieved through erotic love, hence Jim Bacque's reference to "woman." Our language betrays our secret quest: we still say "the other half", meaning wife or "lady"; the narrator's "Hey, Lady" means she is a potential "other half" of him. He tells the "Pete Knight . . . of Crossfield, Alberta" story to impress her with what he and the cowboy hero have in common: they are both knights (but Pete is a real one); they both "died" in a fall from a horse (but Pete's death is real, while the narrator's "death" is of erotic/poetic power, which he hopes to restore by union with the "lady").

At that point the flawed parallel breaks down. Pete has "Crossfield" to his credit (but for the narrator, "we can find no record/of his ever having traversed/the land/in either direction"). The judgement of the "lady at the bar" is unfavorable. "Pete Knight" outclasses the narrator-knight in all ways, it seems, not least in "Bronc-Busting" (a disciplining process), whereas the narrator has been a conspicuous failure: "How/in hell did you manage to/fall off a horse that was/standing still?" the "hired man" had jeered. But "manage" suggests that the falling-off was planned. In the context of eroticism, "a horse that was standing still", that is, "still standing" (the italics demand special reading), suggests an erect phallus. The would-be poet's falling-off is then a failure of erotic/poetic nerve. "Pete Knight"'s superiority may reside in this. "Pete" is a diminutive of

"peter", already used by the priest in its vernacular meaning of "penis"; as "King of All Cowboys" he is an androgynous Christ figure whose "horse" was the creative power of his message of hope for the "fallen", which led to his betrayal by Judas, and Calvary. "All cowboys" demands the inclusion of the androgyne in the class of "cowboy", whose vernacular meaning it is. (The "lady at the bar" failed to judge properly the relevance of the narrator's words to herself). Christ's "fall" was not from lack of nerve, but because he persisted in his radical preaching. His Resurrection justified his action, being raised again after his fall. This is the lesson for the narrator: persist in the quest for radical voice, for if you "fall", you "rise" again.

But the erotic component of integration demands "some woman" as Jim Bacque said. The line, "(I was waiting for a plane, after a reading; Terminal 2, Toronto)," recalls Jesus, waiting for those who would, through killing him, raise him again; "Terminal 2, Toronto" suggests a second "death", that of the narrator following his Toronto reading, as Christ's death followed his message to his disciples. The line, "You've got to deliver the pain to some woman, don't you," recalls Christ's reappearance on the road to Emmaus and the "sad" women's words to him, as he walked beside them, unrecognized: ". . . And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: . . ." (Luke XXIV, 20-21). The Bacque echo of these words implies that the narrator would redeem Nature, if he survives the priests and rulers of the country. We have already noted their capacity for destruction, and the "strong-running vines" of their "squash" continue to proliferate. Bruno's "coincidence of opposites" is not for them, and they have no plan to intertwine their vine of squash with its opposite, best described in the way Jesus spoke of himself:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me, ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned (John XV, 1-6).

The Hubbard Squash is the only plant of which Kroetsch's narrator describes the vine and its fruits. Its ironic parallel lies in the words of Jesus quoted above, and Bruno's heresy that burned him alive in 1600 is still a heresy in 1984 in the seats of power. And human pawns in the power struggle are still being burned alive!

Section 8

The death of God inheres in "THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF ME HENRY L. KROETSCH", the statement looking as if it should be boomed out (its only counterpart in large caps in Seed Catalogue is "'THE MOST PRIZED OF ALL BEANS'"), but, as noted,

We silence words
by writing them down.

Should we expect some sort of parallel to that virtuous anthropomorphic bean for whose "virtue" we found a parallel in Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" where Duke Theseus counselled the excessively weeping crowd to make a virtue of the necessity of death, in that case, Arcite's? Is God, like the bean, really an almost human being? Part of us, in fact? And we of him? Immanent, then, instead of "out there" somewhere. And is he blown up too much, like the bean, by extravagant claims for his virtue? Is he really, at times, willful like us? And finally, if so, is the death of such a God to be excessively mourned, like Arcite's, who had prayed for victory at the shrine of Mars,

victory over Palamon, who had prayed at the shrine of Venus? For gods, like men, die; and are ever-resurrected anew. And the fair Emily, the image of our soul, will unite willingly enough with the winner of the individual's internal struggle between love and aggression. Kroetsch's narrator worships at the shrine of love, and takes the field, Seed Catalogue, with words for weapons, against those men that worship power, as we have seen, men--and now, God? At any rate, his TESTAMENT provided seeds ("testa") for thought ("ment").

"Testis" originally had the double meaning of "testicle" and "testimony" as from a witness, and so an erotic component exists in creation, with a sense of a disinterested witness after that. The one sub-heading "(a)[yes, his first bequest]" gives the sense of an open-ended world; begun, but after that, on its own. Until, however, this grandfather-God turned over "To my son Frederick my carpenter tools." This, the narrator's "Uncle Freddie," is a figure of Sigmund Freud, who is to get to use the same tools with which God created the world. What are they, we are entitled to wonder? Under the description of "perfectly designed barns/with the rounded roofs," with which Uncle Freddie "mapped the parklands", we recognize Freud's mapping of the mind, contained in the skull, with its dynamics housed in the sections that Freud postulated in his model of the conscious and unconscious minds. "I remember Uncle Freddie" indicates the narrator's familiarity with Freudian theory of sexuality, now largely forgotten as noted in "(The farmers no longer/use horses.)" Presumably the outstanding memory is the morning coffee ritual, with everything--hot water, cream and sugar--everything except the coffee, the most important ingredient, which the Depression of the '30's leaves no money to buy. Under that syndrome, we see the Fall from grace, the loss of innocence which deprived the narrator and Adam of their first erotic experience of its poetry, the most important ingredient of the experience.

When the narrator-nephew, his aside "I wasn't all that old" now identifying him with C.G. Jung, innocently asks "Why do you do that?" Uncle Freddie-Freud comes back with "Jesus Christ," which does not merely remind us that the narrator embodies a Christ figure along with other identities, nor that historically Freud was infuriated with what he regarded as Jung's challenge to his theories of sexuality. Its more important function is that it is because of Christ he does it; it is what Christ used to feed the 5000 with the few loaves and fishes, and to change the water into wine at the wedding feast, and it is why he, embodied in Pete Knight, "Got killed--by a horse./He fell off." It is the "carpenter tools" inherited by "Uncle Freddie/Freud" when his father, God, died. It is imagination, poetic/creative power, that created the world, restored the content to the coffee-less ritual, and is now perceived by the narrator as that which will restore his lost erotic/poetic power.

The lines, "He was/ a gentle man, really", I take as referring to Jesus Christ rather than Freud; first, because Freud was not particularly gentle, whereas Jesus was. Secondly, the rather unusual separation of "gentle" from "man" emphasizes the fact of Jesus being a man, which implies that what he could do was within the range of human potential. "Really" emphasizes his reality and that of his miracle-working, which supports the view of Jesus as a credible model. The italicized "anything" in the final line emphasizes the limitless range of, to use a Hillman word, "imaginal" power. Typically, Kroetsch disguises the real import of the three-line passage. At first, it appears merely to emphasize Uncle Freddie's impatience with his obtuse nephew. But that is not an important idea at all, and so we are directed as usual into the amplification process that Seed Catalogue's structure follows. Only then can we get at something approaching the underlying ideas. Seed Catalogue is an exercise in alertness for the reader.

Imagination suffers from the loss of the oral tradition, as expressed in "Don't you know anything?" The ritual that restores the lost coffee/content is a corrective to that loss, and Freud is rightly given credit.

Jung corroborates the narrator's view of Freud's contribution: "The impetus which he [Freud] gave to our civilization sprang from his discovery of an avenue to the unconscious. By evaluating dreams as the most important source of information concerning the unconscious processes, he gave back to mankind a tool that had seemed irretrievably lost"²⁵ (emphasis added). If removing words from the oral tradition impoverishes it, whence come those precious seeds after that?

Section 9

This question is the link to Section 9, through its epigraph, "The danger of merely living." Merely living, that is, living without imagination, without remembering origins, can violate them. The oral tradition keeps the memories alive, the seeds viable. Writing them down silences them, as they are in history texts. It is for that reason that when a theatre company working by collective creation undertake to re-create history, they dream it out of research in archives, family records, anecdotes, and memories of old-timers, to bring it back to life, as it was in the oral tradition. Forgetting exacts revenge. The muse of "forgetfulness" in Section 9 is a "strange" and terrible figure; her gardener's "green thumb" has, since she plants a prolific host, blood on it. The "cousin" is the example: a victim of forgetting the seeds of the past, he becomes, in a terrible irony, "a strange planting." No matter how you account for the exploding shell that killed him, whether by an "intrusion on a design that was not his", or by unintentional design on his part, they are both accounted for by "merely living", forgetting origins. He violated them by navigating a bombing plane to

Cologne, "forgetting" it was the birthplace of his great-grandmother, whom he had "forgotten" too. His "strange planting in the earth of his maternal ancestor's birthplace makes a "terrible symmetry", echoing the same bleak summing-up of the "home place" in Section 1. "Strange" is a key word. Even the "man falling" is "strange", an Icarus figure who forgot the terrible power of the sun, giver of life, flew too close and melted his wings. "Planted," he is an Orphic figure, destroyed by the frenzied and vengeful Bacchae whom he had "forgotten." "Strange" does not seem to mean foreign to our nature or unnatural, since it is our nature to forget, but rather a weakness in us to overcome. We need to make the conscious effort not to forget, since the punishment for forgetting is terrible, as here, where warfare is a condition of "merely living."

The section offers a positive way of countering war: by cultivating our memories of the past, we become more aware of our ancestral connections and our inter-connectedness with the rest of the world. Although the tone of this meditation is sombre, even negative, it implies a counter-meditation on a design for living that, by remembering our past, removes warfare as a condition of life. If we think of the cousin's death as a metaphor for the "death" of the poet of outmoded poetry, he "falls away" from his high creative power because he forgot the giver of his life, the past. There is in his "strange planting" the positive aspect of remembering Orphic regeneration when "winter is past", and the transformation of scattered bits of the past into new life. "Orpheus transformed may reverse the traffic to the ego's city," says Hillman.²⁶ "Kroetsch always reminds us that destruction is transformation, and that transformation is art," comments Lecker, from the source attributed to him above.

Section 10

Section 10, in its epigraphic balancing of the account, a binary structure symbolic of the intertwining symmetry of the master pattern of Seed Catalogue, follows the interpretation of section 9 last given. The bomb that destroys prepares for new life; the "ego's city" (our mental structures) of power-mad traditions "falls" into new ways of seeing, new perspectives; the rider-poet who "falls" to his "death" rises to remount the horse of his creative power. The work of the poet must be to teach us "to love our dying", since "death" leads to "rebirth", transformation and art. For the narrator, whose "West is a winter place" of prairie and death, where snow leaves it white and unscarred like a fresh sheet of paper, it is a landscape that invites his pen. "Palimpsest", erasable parchment, suggests old wounds gently healed.

(a) "No. 3060 - Spencer Sweet Pea": Significant of the poem as process moving toward authenticity, now nearly completed, this entry is bare of rhetoric, though not of rich meaning. The epigraph echoes Spenser--"Sweet Spenser," Wordsworth called him; (FQ, lxvii). De Selincourt refers to the "linked sweetness" of his stanza in The Faerie Queene (FQ lxii), and the "sweet undertone" of his alliteration, and of his manner as "the exuberance of a garden set in rich and fruitful soil," and of the "slow and circling movement of his verse that continually returned upon itself" (lxvi). De Selincourt's description could as well be applied to Seed Catalogue.

In "No. 3060," the doubling of the first pair of digits by the second may be the writer's signal, "30", that the first part of the knight's quest is completed, as in The Faerie Queene, Part I, with the second yet to come. I am not going to assign to Kroetsch's narrator the virtues of Holynesse, Temperaunce, and Chastitie, which Part I has the Red Cross Knight, Sir Guyon, and the Lady Knight Britomartis struggle, respectively, to achieve. But Spenser, in a letter to Raleigh, describes the first as "a tall clownishe

younge man . . . mounting on that straunge courser" (whom we see again in "A gentle knight was pricking on the playne") "and he went forth with her, a fayre ladye . . . riding on a white Asse, on that adventure" (FQ, p. 408). "Straunge" meant "borrowed or "added; if Kroetsch had that meaning in mind for the "strange" phrases repeatedly used in Sec. 9, "borrowed planting" and "borrowed muse of forgetfulness" would strengthen the argument for indigenous language. Both poets made a point of going against the conventional style for serious matter: Spenser against the notion that English was not fit for it, and by using Chaucerian words, and Kroetsch against inherited rhetoric-- by insisting on plain English words. Finally, De Selincourt's descriptions of Spenser's manner and verse, with the latter's unmistakable identity of movement with amplification, as defined by Hillman, and quoted earlier in reference to Kroetsch's use of it to define love--all add up to a strong presence of Spenser in Seed Catalogue, and in Kroetsch's life as poet, if we read "grace" as salvation.²⁷ Amplification, then, as Kroetsch uses it to define love, means that Seed Catalogue, like The Faerie Queene, is a labour of, and about, love. The section is a graceful and grateful tribute to Spenser, as well as to the narrator's Demeter-mother.

Spenser's Red Cross Knight undertook his quest for holiness by championing the beautiful maid Una, i.e., Truth. Their union could not be complete until he had conquered, with her help, without which he would fail, the monster Error, the magician Deception, the giant Pride, and the sophist Despair. That is, until he had himself become true, had won through to Truth. Then, the union they both desired would be complete; of them, it could be said, with Keats: "Beauty is Truth; Truth, beauty".²⁸ He, Truth, is her, Beauty's, strong support, her champion ("this clownishe younge man"), and to him she clings, and they are inextricably intertwined, as they are in Seed Catalogue.

For Kroetsch's narrator, the sweetness of Spenser is not unalloyed in the lessons taught by "Your sweet peas/climbing the staked/chicken wire . . ." The sweetness certainly exists in "the smell/of morning, the grace/of your tired/hands, the strength/of a noon sun, the/colour of prairie grass". But the sour smell of sweat that brought the sweet peas to this point of beauty is inextricably intermingled with it, as the materials that combine to produce them are intertwined: the beauty of the sweet peas with the truth of staked chicken wire and stretched binder twine. Again, it is the Beauty/Truth equation, but with the emphasis that for Kroetsch's narrator, Truth has a sour, unpleasing element in it. Spenser's knight has to conquer the flaws in his nature before he can enjoy union with Beauty. It is an interesting, but not a surprising difference. Modern heroes are acceptable with a few flaws, for the sake of the truth. Spenser's ideal has Kroetsch's loyal support, conditioned by allowance for human frailty.

The staked chicken wire and the stretched binder twine recall the loving Demeter figure of the mother "marking the first row/with a piece of binder twine, stretched/between two pegs" of Section 1. But now the seeds have grown to bloom in beauty, supported by the homely materials, themselves intertwined for strength. The narrator attributes his salvation to "your tired hands" that set the pattern for him to grow in knowledge of the beauty of his prairie place, and the truth (not all pleasant) of the homely materials that support it. Like the twine, truth is often "stretched"; like the staked chicken wire, it often has holes in it, and is often "at stake." But truth is still the support to beauty, from Spenser to Keats to Kroetsch. The first two have been the great exponents in English of beauty perceived through the senses, and who would argue that Kroetsch is not a sensual poet?

Finally, the phrase "By the front porch" has what may be a relevant Spenser parallel (FQ, Bk. II, IX):

Of hewen stone the porch was fairely wrought,
. . . Over the which was cast a wandring vine,
Enchaced with a wanton yvie twine.

(p. 114, 24, 11. 1, 4, 5).

The porch was that of the castle or House, of Temperance, presided over by a lovely lady

Alma she called was, a virgin bright;
That had not yet felt Cupides wanton rage,
Yet was she woo'd of many a gentle knight,
. . . For she was faire, as faire mote ever bee,
And in the flowre now of her freshest age;
Yet full of grace and goodly modestee,
That even Heaven rejoyced her sweeted face to see.

(p. 114, 18, 11. 1-3, 6-9).

Sir Guyon and party are invited to enter and are shown into a lovely Parlour, where many fair ladies, some happy, some sad, are variously engaged. Guyon selects one

That was right faire, and modest of demaine,
But that toc oft she chaung'd her native hew:
Straunge was her tyre, and all her garment blew,
Close round about her tuckt with many a plight:
Upon her fist the bird, which shoneth vew,
And keepes in covert close from living wight,
Did sit, as yet ashamd, how rude Pan did her dight.

(p. 116, 40, 11. 3-9).

She refuses with downcast head to explain to Guyon what troubles her so,

Till Alma him bespake, Why wonder yee
Faire Sir at that, which ye so much embrace?
She is the fountaine of your modestee;
You shamefast are, but Shamefastnesse it selfe is shee.

(p. 116, 43, 11. 6-9).

Thereat the Elfe did blush in privitee,
And turned his face away; but she the same
Dissembled faire, and faynd to oversee.

(p. 116, 44, 11. 1-3).

There can be not much doubt what this is all about, especially after the masturbation lyric in Sec. 5. "A wandring vine" entwined by parasitic "wanton yvie" is an image of a debilitating life process for the knight-errant. Alma means "soul" or "spirit" in Italian, and represents the virgin soul in the context. "Shamefastnesse" is "modesty" in the Spenser Glossary, but "modesty-from-guilt" probably more accurately describes in current usage the lady's excessive self-consciousness at the way "rude Pan" decked her. "Dight" means "to deck or adorn", but the rude vernacular sense of "deck" is an aggressive sexual act. "Straunge (was her tyre)" means "borrowed" or "added", suggesting the artificial, "borrowed" nature of masturbation, as opposed to the authentic sex act. The lady is his anima, the personification or reflection of the soul of the knight's embarrassment. The bird on the lady's fist is probably the owl, favorite of Minerva, goddess of wisdom, and therefore "did sit, as yet ashamd" at the unwise act.

The parallel of Sir Guyon to our narrator allows us insight into the dark face of his soul, as opposed to the bright face represented by the sweet peas. These opposites need to be reconciled before wholeness is possible. The lady's excessive self-consciousness signifies that moderation, "temperance", is called for: our narrator would be wise to moderate, if not both masturbation and his excessive guilt, at least the latter. The narrator of The Sad Phoenician (1979), two years later, is still "embarrassed though not exhausted by too-frequent masturbation" (FN, p. 97).

Sec. 10 b's letter 'from the gods' brings two central motifs, brome-grass and horse, together: the hardy brome-grass grows in proliferating abundance around the horse, even "up to her hips," that focus of sexuality. The two motifs are symbiotically related in Nature: each sustains the other, yet feeds upon it. But Cindy, the long-sought Cinderella of love's fulfillment, is a mare, not a stallion as we tend to think the horse of erotic-creative

power should be, with his awesome sexual equipment. Yet she represents a transformation from the scruffy Shamefastnesse--to this shining Cinderella soul, while retaining the erotic/poetic potential of the horse: an erotic Cinderella that satisfies while she consumes. The mare/grass image testifies to the vigorous growth of the poet, when he is psycho-sexually integrated. It significantly develops an earlier Kroetsch theme of The Studhorse Man's search for the perfect mare for his Poseidon stallion. (God of the creative flow, Poseidon is god of the horse and of the sea, two age-old symbols of the unconscious). With mare (L.) "sea", as in the West "where the sun and the maternal sea are united in an eternally rejuvenating embrace",²⁹ so here, the desired but devouring female consumes her male brome grass lover; and he goes into her. In its vernacular sense, this is the clue to the rest of the letter 'from the gods' (i.e. from the mental depths, unconscious mind of the narrator) which describes an analogous process. "Amie," French for "love" or "loving friend" (fem.), and her partner (call him Ami), "laid down on some grass" Amie "pulled by hand". The ungrammatical use of "laid" calls attention to it: in the vernacular, "laid" is the sex act, and "pulled by hand" is masturbation of the male. Following the Cindy/grass lead, Amie devoured/masturbated Ami, "the longest brome grass I remember seeing," who went into her. But this may be the masturbation fantasy of one male, with Amie his anima as fantasy partner. (The anima in Jungian theory has the bright face of a seductive, beautiful woman; she is a psychic construct "born" in the male unconscious, his soul's image, personifying all the allurements of the feminine nature of his unconscious; her other, dark face is destructive, leading to death.) Born of fantasy, then, "Love" is "laid" in the truck box, "on some grass" she had "pulled by hand". The scene, read "straight", parallels the birth of Jesus in the stable and his being laid in the manger. In the vernacular, it is a travesty of that Birth, and the

"French" letter ("condom" in the vernacular) mocks Eliot's "Journey of the Magi",³⁰ itself a letter of a sort (its first five lines are quoted, no source given):

Then at dawn we came to a temperate valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;
With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,
And three trees on the low sky,
And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.

Amie's little party arrives in Brooks--the water imagery in both letters suggests baptism, rebirth, spiritual regeneration--in the course of their journey to a "great event," the Calgary Stampede ("a sexual meaning attaches to stamping"--'the Stempe, acc. to Grimm, was an indeterminate nightmare figure'--Ed. [Jung, Symbols of Transformation], p. 250). It is heralded by a glittering light in the sky, the drive-in movie screen, itself a fantasy device. The magi are led by the morning/evening star Venus, goddess of love (she has a dark, destructive side too, which relates to Amie). In both accounts, Love is born in humble settings, and laid in a hay (or grass) manger, before the destination, the metropolis, is reached. In Brooks, the "birth" occurred "about eleven o'clock"--the hour of Christ's death. The implication is that this birth is really a death (which has a parallel in the ~~magi~~ magi story), not merely a sexual death, but the death of Christ in Ami.

The cautious, world-weary conclusion of the magus forestalls premature rejoicing for any new Birth which means the death of the old religion:

It was (you may say), satisfactory
. . . And I would do it again, but set down
This set down this, were we led all that way for
Birth or Death?

The prospect of being one voice among many may excite for a time,

But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.

I should be glad of another death.

The old white horse had galloped away for Eliot's magus. In the phrase "slept for about three hours" which echoes Peter's denial of Christ three times before the cock crew, Amie's Calgary/Calvary rendezvous foreshadows betrayal, suffering, and death. The vernacular meanings of "peter" and "cock" reinforce the notion of a betrayal of Christ in the masturbation/birth-of-love ritual in the Brooks contest. Amie's "Sir" of "Dear Sir" echoes a handler's term for his stallion.

Fantasy, not imagination--so important in Sections 8 and 9, had with Amie's letter replaced reality. The Coleridgean distinction rules here, between "Fancy, a mere mode of memory emancipated from time and space, the Drapery [only] of poetic genius," and "Imagination, which dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to re-create; which reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposites; the soul of poetic genius that . . . forms all in one graceful and intelligent whole" (Eng. Romantic Writers, pp. 452, 455).

The letter's ironic parallel with the Birth points to a dark side of the narrator's feminine nature that Spenser's Shamefastnesse has prepared us for.

Yet with this letter from the gods, "the influence of its messenger Hermes who, it is said, embodies the longing in us to move beyond fantasy and beyond experience into our ever-expanding reality, is that what appear as opposites are really one; they are expressions of the same reality. Hermes, the god of the solemn descent to the depths of spirit, is also the god of sexuality. He fantasizes freely, but is never trapped. A trickster, he is not to be caught." With justification, he may remind us of Kroetsch's narrator, particularly at this point in Seed Catalogue.³¹ The purpose of the Great Quest is to integrate the opposites, the work of Imagination, as defined above.

Amie's letter leads to amplification of Section 2. As the female fantasy figure of love in the androgynous male masturbation fantasy, she is

the Love in "Love is an amplification by doing/over and over" in the very real sense of bringing the male to orgasm, with the male organ "leaping up/and down" as semen ejaculates. That is why the badger "looked like a little man." He was one, the narrator. So with the "dead" magpie; being "shot", a limp phallus after orgasm is "a beak in the warm flesh." The badger's persistence in "standing up/to the loaded gun" becomes the repeated erection of the phallus in response to the loaded, double-barrelled shotgun of the testicles. "Love is a burrowing" becomes a necessary part of getting out of sight. That the father has played a destructive role in his son's sexual development seems likely, from the shotgun metaphor of his fury. He couldn't shoot the "badger", since it was his son, but he could frighten him with predictions of dire consequences ("he uncocked the shotgun"), so that the son's sexual capacity became impaired to the point of virtual impotence, as the magpie's pitiful image in death may remind us.

The letter's ironic parallel to "Journey of the Magi" is best seen as the de-construction of the myth of the Birth, and the re-creation of a new myth of love as fantasy, but "longing to move beyond fantasy into ever-expanding reality". But Kroetsch is notorious for his self-mockery, and his other target may be his narrator's "dark" side in contrast to the "light" side of Jesus. The pain of psychic maiming may have receded, not departed: Amie's "I remember tying her up to the truck box" echoes Eliot's magus, "All this was a long time ago, I remember," which may put the Brooks episode a long time ago too, perhaps into a "timeless" frame. But there is the magus' final word: "I should be glad of another death," and the narrator's last: "Adam and Eve got drowned--/Who was left?" and they are on the debit side of the page. The account is not yet balanced.

With the de-mythologizing of the supernatural by Amie's letter (the renouncing of the transcendent God "out there"), Seed Catalogue ends with the

narrator having attained secular spirituality through natural grace. The process began early with the big lie of the priest's terrible warnings, achieved its first positive result with Rudy Wiebe's "Nature thou art," then with Sec. 10's Spenser and the Demeter/mother's "grace of your tired hands", both of which replaced supernatural grace with natural grace, ends with the coup de grâce delivered by the letter. Amie, the narrator's anima, turns out to be, through her Calgary/Calvary rendezvous, the "woman" foreshadowed by Jim Bacque. A shadow-woman, timeless, harboring a shadow-pain, Shamefastnesse Agonistes. "'Yet shame brings honor; shame is the crown of the soul and a sense of shame the highest virtue'" (CM, p. 451): Thus Wolfram von Eschenbach (1170-1230), "the most significant poet of the German Middle Ages, and on the European scale . . . second not even to Dante (CM, p. 430), in Campbell's redaction of his Middle High German Parzival, c. 1215. Parzival is the Grail knight discovered by Seed Catalogue's narrator's persistent digging in his ancestral "potato patch", and for us a useful parallel to him. Shame had come to Parzival at the Grail Castle because, instead of listening to his inner voice, he had followed instructions not to speak there to the Fisher King Anfortas, Guardian of the Grail though wounded by a heathen spear through the testicles. Both figures parallel Seed Catalogue's narrator.

Like Anfortas (Enfortez [O.F.], 'Infirmity'), he began with a built-in prophecy, as his creator's name, Kroetsch ('crutch', 'crotch'), suggests, of erotic impairment, since their fathers had given them their names and places. Like Anfortas, his (figurative) "battle-cry" had been Amor, "inappropriate, lacking in gentleness and humility." And he had been maimed: Nature had avenged his acceptance of the priest's strictures with a metaphorical spear through his testicles, crippling his erotic/poetic power. Like Parzival, the "guileless fool" (CM, p. 504) at the start of his adventures, he had listened to priestly, and later, literary authority, instead of to his own inner

voice, and, as a result, had suffered the shame of failure. But he too had fought back: he had renounced the priest's God "out there" that transcended, i.e., "was no part of", his own creation. Near the end of his own years "wandering in the wasteland" that followed this renunciation, his natural component was restored, after the magpie's preliminary search in the horse turd, by Rudy Wiebe's instruction, and ratification of his new status as Nature. The process was analogous to Parzival's re-union with his "magpie" heathen brother, by which, as the heroic sense of his name 'Pierce-through-the-middle' indicated, he had chosen the "middle way", of both nature and spirit. Then, vouchsafed a second vision of the Grail, the philosophers' stone with its 25 Grail maidens-attendant (the wondrous parallel to "No. 25--THE MOST PRIZED OF ALL BEANS"), Parzival asked of Anfortas the all-important question, healed him and succeeded him as King, but without the wound. Finally, our narrator's "Amie" may be thought of as an up-to-date, ironic version of Parzival's virgin queen, *Condwiramurs*, *Conduire amours*, 'to summon, guide, to love', whom he married, who, in her own time and in her own right, "stood for a new ideal--of love, *amor*, as the sole motive for marriage, and an indissoluble marriage as the sacrament of love--contrary to the worldly notion of love, governed only by securities of power, while love, *eros*, was to be sublimated as *agape*" (CM, p. 456). Her ideal remains valid, but a hard act to follow.

But the ideal of Parzival is beyond the powers of most modern men too, and so, we turn to his friend and fellow-questor of the Grail, Gawaine, older by sixteen years and loyal supporter of his ideals, but "moving in a casual course from one adventure to the next, largely with ladies on his mind" (CM, p. 460), for a more realistic parallel to our narrator. It was Gawaine's fate, his *wyrd*, i.e. "the sense of an inward potential in the process of becoming" (CM, p. 140), to arrive eventually at the whirling Castle of Marvels whose

enchanted inhabitants he was to free (a parallel to the revolving restaurant of the Chateau Lacombe, named for the missionary, with our narrator and Al Purdy, 'all for God', the latter riding his "Cariboo horse ['untamed', colloquial poetry] twice, right straight, through the dining area", a Parzival 'pierce-through-the-middle' figure, to warn the cringing "Peters" they had only one more chance).

Gawaine, after falling immediately and irrevocably in love with the Castle's tart-tongued Lady Orgeluse,³² priestess of the Sacred Wood, from which he plucked for her the Golden Bough of immortality (her "test" for him), and, with Parzival's help, pacified its unjust, angry guardian, King Gramoflanz, married his "world-scarred" Orgeluse amid general rejoicing, reconciliations and marriages of the freed inhabitants with their contrite erstwhile captors.³³ We "paying customers" of "the revolving restaurant" of the world will in time experience many changes, it is certain, among the most desirable of which would surely be along the lines of this happy timeless parallel. But with the "piss-up" at the Lacombe on the debit side "up", and Rudy's "'No song can do that'" on the credit side "down", the balance, so far, favors Rudy's pessimism.

The conclusion to Seed Catalogue's great concerns may be in the stars, where the beginning was. "According to Wolfram's perhaps invented reference, the Provençal author Kyot [cf. the Plains Indians' chief trickster figure, coyote, and a Kroetsch favorite] discovered the legend of the Grail in Toledo, in the forgotten work of a heathen astrologer, Flegetanis by name, 'who with his own eyes had seen wonders in the stars. He tells of a thing called the Grail, whose name he had read in the constellations . . .'" (CM, p. 429). "Flegetanis may be confused with Phlegethon, the fiery stream of Pluto's Hades" (CM, p. 403). If so, it is a happy confusion, for it has given us a link with Seed Catalogue's "Heisler" as Hades, and our narrator's self-

references there and in the stars.

From its first word, Seed Catalogue challenges: "No. 176," as Acts 17: 6, "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also" is an opening manifesto of high seriousness. Sec. 7's "No. 2362" expresses Kroetsch's irrepressible humor in "23 skidoo," a bit of '20's slang, meaning "Have to get going now," and this vernacular, fittingly enough, signals the voice which is to be the outcome of the supernal epiphany of the Morning Glory. The long despairing wail of "I don't care if I do die" ad infinitum is not merely that, or even a masturbation lyric that I heard fifty years ago in a hayfield on the farm from a smirking older boy, but a literal statement based on the belief that death is a prerequisite for a transformation into a new life. In Amie's letter a paradoxical reality emerges out of what seems a wanton fantasy: "We unloaded Cindy and I remember tying her up to the truck box" is not just unloading even a Cinderella mare from a truck box in which, ironically, an auto-erotic act would replace her; but of unloading her in the sense of disburdening oneself of superstitious belief in magical solutions in which one need initiate no action. Of which magic the truck box is its quintessential symbolic opposite, and "tying her to it" exemplifies that "coincidence of opposites" that is central to the quest. Imagination tied to the hard service of love is the key. As in the beginning, so in the end:

Love is an amplification
by doing/over and over.

List of References

¹ Frank Davey's printed version appears as "The sub-text here is a provocation, a stimulus, a key that may unlock unanticipated material within the writer" in his "The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem" (Lantzville, B.C.: Island Writing Series: 1983), p. 16. SFU Weekend Conference/Festival, The Coast is Only a Line, July 25, 1981.

* Robert Kroetsch, "Seed Catalogue," in his Field Notes, The Collected Poetry of Robert Kroetsch (Don Mills, Ontario: General Publishing Co., 1981), pp. 47-67. Because this study focusses on Seed Catalogue, which is fairly short, further references to it will not be given. For other poems in Field Notes, references will be given in the text under FN. See Note 4 for the Kroetsch quotation used as an epigraph to this study.

² C.G. Jung, Analytical Psychology, The Tavistock Lectures (New York: Pantheon, 1968), pp. 92-93. Further references given in text.

³ James Hillman, Suicide and the Soul (Zurich: Spring Publications, 1976), pp. 148-149.

⁴ Robert Lecker, "Robert Kroetsch's Poetry," in Open Letter, ser. 3, no. 8 (Spring 1978), pp. 72-78.

⁵ Robert Enright and Dennis Cooley, "Uncovering our dreamworld: an interview with Robert Kroetsch," in Essays on Canadian Writing, nos. 18, 19 (Summer-Fall 1980), pp 21-32.

⁶ "The Faerie Queene," in The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser, ed. J.C. Smith and E. De Selincourt, with Introduction by E. De Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1912; rpt. 1952), p. 4, I, l. 6. Further references given in text under FQ.

⁷ Joseph Campbell, The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology (New York: Penguin, 1977), pp. 293-294. Further references given in text under PM.

⁸ "Aion, the key god, with the winged body of a man and head of a lion, and encircled by a snake rising over his head, is supreme in the Mithraic hierarchy that creates and destroys all things. He is a sun god. Leo is the zodiacal sign where the sun dwells in summer, while the snake symbolized the winter or wet time. So Aion represents the union of opposites, light and darkness, male and female, creation and destruction. He is represented as having his arms crossed and holding a key in each hand. He is a spiritual father of St. Peter, who also holds keys. The keys which Aion holds are the keys to the past and future. . . . The ancient mystery cults are always connected with psychopompic deities. Some of these deities are equipped with the keys to the underworld, because as the guardians of the door they watch over the descent of the initiates into the darkness and are the leaders into the mysteries. Hecate is one of them." (Jung, Analytical Psychology, pp. 135-136).

⁹ Donald Cameron, "Robert Kroetsch: The American Experience and the Canadian Voice," Journal of Canadian Fiction, 1: 3, Summer 1972: 50.

¹⁰ William Wordsworth, "The Prelude" (Bk. I, ll. 301-302), English Romantic Writers, ed. David Perkins (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc., 1967), p. 216.

¹¹ Acts IX, 3-5, The Bible, Standard (King James) Version. Further references given in text.

¹² A conflict that Peter Thomas stresses: "This opposition is central to any critical discussion of Kroetsch's work." He quotes Kroetsch: "My mother grew up near where I was born, learned names of flowers, birds, loved these things. My father had an intense Edenic recollection of a lost home (Ontario). The two gave me a strange sense of belonging and not belonging." Thomas comments: "The seed-catalogue sets the metaphoric field from which Kroetsch's writings are drawn: the broad anthropological distinction defining the prairies as the meeting place of a planting culture, with its cyclic, female-dominated myths of seeding, decay, and ritual, and the hunting culture of the Plains peoples, for whom the shaman is the mediator with death. In the Dis-Demeter-Persephone archetype, the narrative is ritualized, recurrent and dualistic with a celebratory spring song and a winter elegy. . . . But for the shaman, the journey to the Land of the Dead is associated with conditions of flight and dance, and the story he returns is his own. He prepares by fast and isolation to go 'out of himself' into dream, learning the powers of ingenuity, innovation, elaboration, boundlessness. . . . Seed Catalogue chronicles the contention of these two claims--the closed structures of the agrarian mythos and flight of shamanistic song in personal, autobiographical terms, Kroetsch using different roles of his mother and father to exemplify this larger conflict."--Robert Kroetsch, Studies in Canadian Literature (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1980).

¹³ "Projected Visit," The Stonehammer Poems (Lantzville, B.C.: Oolichan Books, 1975), p. 39.

¹⁴ William Shakespeare, Macbeth, V, ii, 20-23, in Riverside Shakespeare (Boston: The Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974), p. 1336.

¹⁵ Joseph Campbell, The Masks of God: Creative Mythology (New York: Viking, 1968) pp. 257-259. "James Joyce develops the Tristan theme anew, with all its 'equals of opposites', throughout the ever-revolving labyrinth of the dream-book Finnegans Wake. . . . The moral of it all is signalled by Joyce in a tantalizing number clue (11: 32) that keeps turning up. . . . Decoded . . . , the number implies a mythic theme of the conjoined Tree of Eden and Tree of Calvary, Fall-Redemption, Death-Resurrection, Wake of the Dead and Wake of Awakening, which is the leading theme of the nightmare Finnegans Wake." (Creative Mythology is further referred to in text under CM).

¹⁶ PM, pp. 290-291. Pythagoras' theory of the transmigration of souls is also echoed in The Sad Phoenician's "Pythagoras is the name" (FN, p. 101).

¹⁷ Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale," Chaucer's Major Poetry, ed. A.C. Baugh (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1963), p. 289, ll. 3041-3042.

¹⁸ Theodore H. White, The Making of the President 1972 (New York: Atheneum, 1973), p. 351.

¹⁹ Campbell, CM, p. 102. He continues: "And they are nine, because . . . their root (the square root of nine being three) is in the Trinity

above. . . . The arts--the Muses-- initiate us to the enduring harmony of the universe. . . . They are the daughters of Mnemosyne (memory). . . . They cause the soul to remember its forgotten higher estate, where . . . there is discovered the very god of light. . . . The triad of Euphrosyne (Mirth), Aglaia (Splendor), and Thalia (Abundance and the Muse of the Idyll of life's garden) are unfoldments of the spirit of the goddess Venus" (pp. 100-104). In fig. 13, p. 100, the loop of the serpent's tail, on which Apollo's feet rest as he faces the triad of Graces with the Muses below flanking the serpent, forms the symbol (&) of the ampersand, so frequently used in Seed Catalogue to indicate matter of the first importance. To Campbell (p. 103) that loop "suggests the sun door . . . to the very feet of the highest transformation of the Father, sheer light." The relevance of all this to the narrator's quest is unmistakable, the prognosis good, despite the irony, since to claim Memory as his muse is to include all the nine daughter muses, with their relationship to the Graces and the Music of the Spheres, as outlined above.

20 John Milton, Paradise Lost, The Poetical Works of John Milton (London: Oxford University Press, 1950) p. 181. Further references in text.

21 "The genetic information of all cells is stored in the sequence of bases of DNA and expressed with the aid of RNA" (p. 114). "The bases are stacked in pairs at the center of the helix, with the plane of the bases perpendicular to the helix . . . for stability. The DNA helix . . . makes one turn for each ten base pairs. However, because the structure of DNA depends on weak bonds, it is subject to denaturation, defined as a destruction of its native configuration (p. 117). . . . Heat will denature the molecule. The base sequence of DNA provides a four-letter alphabet (ATGC) with which to record the genetic information of the cell (p. 119). The main function of RNA . . . is to interpret the information stored in DNA and to translate that information into protein. The name protein is derived from a Greek word meaning 'First'".--Robert D. Dyson, Cell Biology, A Molecular Approach (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1975), pp. 114-119.

22 An understatement. Stars are fusion furnaces of atomic nuclei (a life-giving process as our Sun demonstrates); the hydrogen bomb duplicates the process in miniature. Thus, stars exemplify twin processes of life and death, the central skein of Seed Catalogue. My one question to Kroetsch, at the 1981 Poetry Conference, SFU, as to the source of the poem, brought this "It's all up there [looking up] like the Milky Way." It has taken me until now (1984) to understand his answer.

23 T.S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton," Four Quartets (London: Faber & Faber, 1959; rpt. 1963), p. 15; l. 62.

24 Will, in the Schopenhauerian sense, is concerned only with self-preservation. It is a method of perception that sees in terms of dualities such as life and death. What is needed, however, is a different way of seeing: that all apparent varieties of forms are really all aspects of one Being. And, "it is possible, in certain circumstances, to live . . . so to view an object not in terms of its relationship to the well-being of the viewer, the subject, but in its own being, in and for itself . . . with the world eye, as Schopenhauer calls it, without desire, without fear, absolutely dissociated from the vicissitudes of mortality" (CM, p. 81). Amplification gives perspective. That is what allows us "to love our dying" as our

narrator puts it (Sec. 10).

25 C.G. Jung, Memories, Dreams & Reflections (New York: Vintage, 1965), p. 169.

26 James Hillman, The Dream and the Underworld (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), p. 1: "Freud called the dream a royal road, the 'via regia' to the unconscious. But because this 'via regia', in most psycho-therapy since his time, has become a straight one-way street of all morning traffic, moving out of the unconscious toward the ego's city, I have chosen to face the other way." Kroetsch seems to have something of this in mind in the destruction/transformation images of the "city."

27 ". . . the soul's release from the matrix of inherited social bondage can be . . . and has often been attained . . . by those giants of creative thought . . . from whose grace the rest of men derive whatever spiritual strength or virtue we may claim" (Campbell, CM, p. 41, emphasis added). Grace may thus be "natural grace," not supernatural. In the context of Seed Catalogue, we may include, besides Spenser and the Demeter/mother, all those other "giants of creative thought" that echo through it and constitute much of the seed-catalogue. Moreover, apropos of our narrator's transformation by Rudy Wiebe's "Nature thou art": according to Jung, "Rebirth may be a renewal without any change of being, inasmuch as the personality . . . is not changed in its essential nature; but only its functions, or parts of the personality, are subjected to healing, strengthening, or improvement. Indirect rebirth [requires] one only to participate in some rite of transformation. [Even] the initiate . . . in the Eleusinian mysteries is vouchsafed the gift of grace . . . and praises the grace conferred through the certainty of immortality" (The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious [Princeton, N.J.: Bollingen/Princeton Univ. Press], pp. 114, 115).

28 John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn", English Romantic Writers, p. 1186, l. 49.

29 C.G. Jung, Symbols of Transformation (Princeton, N.J.: Bollingen/Princeton Univ. Press, 1976; rpt. 1967), p. 244. Our narrator has a parallel in the Grail knight Gawaine (see below), who began as a solar god. Jung continues with his "conjecture that the hieros gamos is connected with a rebirth myth" (Ibid.). It is so connected here, ironically.

30 T.S. Eliot, Selected Poems (London: Faber & Faber, 1954; rpt. 1964), p. 97.

31 Arianna Stassinopoulos and Roloff Beny, The Gods of Greece (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1983), pp. 190-197, much abridged. Stassinopoulos comments that Hermes "was also known as the psithyristsis, which still in modern Greek means the whisperer; and he taught me to listen to the inner whisperings that tend to get drowned in the mind's cacophony" (p. 193). Seed Catalogue's motif of "my mother's whisper" suggests that learning to listen to one's inner whisperings was of the greatest importance as a guide to self-realization.

32 Campbell says of her that she is "Gawaine's Lady of Destiny . . . and an invitation, literally, to death; in Jung's terminology, 'such women, shining with the light of the sun, are anima figures . . . the archetype of

life itself, life's promise and allure. This image,' says Jung, 'is my Lady Soul'" (CM, p. 488). Orgeluse, as Diana's priestess of the tree bearing the Golden Bough of immortality, would appear to be exactly the appropriate anima or amie to personify our narrator's hopes for death. The Calgary/Calvary destination of his Amie confirms Orgeluse as her model.

The Sad Phoenician's wise-cracking "guardian of the tree" and nourisher of the soul has some affinities with Orgeluse as priestess of the Goddess Mother of Life and guardian of the Realm of Nature. "The old gal" is perhaps, progressively plainer- and rougher-tongued than Orgeluse/Amie (as the latter is to Condwiramurs) in proportion to Kroetsch's increasingly bolder command of the vernacular, but her breezy informality is akin to Orgeluse's off-handedness.

33 Parzival's role in helping to pacify Gawaine's sworn enemy Gramoflanz and thus bring about this happy conclusion, along with his healing words to Anfortas, shows the indispensability of the absolute ideal wedded to action in the solving of worldly problems (such as beset Gawaine) by an individual responsible only to himself. Condwiramurs shares such indispensability: Campbell reports only that it is she who calls her young defender who has just routed her besiegers "her ami, her lord." Orgeluse not being so reported, though both are anima figures, may be due to her "world-scarred" (as Campbell describes her) though undeniably real attraction to the experienced Gawaine. But that Kroetsch signs the letter "Amie" leads back to that indispensability of ideal (already quoted) that Condwiramurs represents for him.

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