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'THE OLD DUALITIES':
A DECONSTRUCTIVE READING OF THE PROSE OF ROBERT KROETSCH

by

Dianne Tiefensee

M.A., The University of British Columbia, 1986

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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of
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ABSTRACT

Many literary critics and theorists propose that Canadian postmodernism has been 'influenced' by Derridean deconstruction and that Robert Kroetsch's 'deconstructive' theory and criticism have led the way for critics who have, since the early 1970's, rebelled against the metaphysical notions of 'unity,' 'coherence,' and 'identity' upon which modernist literature and thematic criticism depend: notions which are basic to a coercive humanism and a patriarchal, repressive hegemony that governs our modes of thought and our lives. The 'intent' of postmodern fiction and criticism is to challenge that hegemony by disturbing the repressive patterns of thought upon which it depends, and that disturbance is to be accomplished by a paradoxical 'Derridean' practice of simultaneously asserting and subverting. Unfortunately, 'paradox' is a metaphysical notion, inseparable from the 'unity' and 'identity' which dialectic is believed to achieve, and, in practice, this postmodern 'asserting and subverting' reaffirms the logocentric philosophy these writers claim to contest.

In this dissertation, I attempt to explicate Derridean deconstruction and to determine the extent to which it is relevant to Canadian postmodernism, particularly in the prose of Robert Kroetsch. I have concentrated on Kroetsch's work because he is hailed as one of the 'fathers' of Canadian postmodernism and because he has been so actively

engaged in determining what his colleagues have come to describe as 'deconstruction.' My contention is that Kroetsch reaffirms the very values, conventions, and attitudes he claims to resist, because his thought is caught up in the quest of the hero, the grounding myth of Western thought's philosophy of the Subject.

The four chapters of Part I provide background in Derridean deconstruction and situate Robert Kroetsch in Canadian postmodern literary theory. Part II addresses the metaphysical presuppositions which govern Kroetsch's criticism, literary theory, and novels, and considers the extent to which Kroetsch's theoretical pronouncements have determined his critics' readings of his work.

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PART I

Canadian Postmodernism, Derridean Deconstruction,
and Robert Kroetsch

When I say I can't believe in truth, it
doesn't mean I believe in nothing. . . .
I guess against the idea of truth I
would posit the idea of play or game.

(Robert Kroetsch, in Neuman, 1981: 237-38)

Chapter One

Introductory Comments and Statement of ~~Intent~~

Although the term 'postmodern' is as elusive as it is, of late, ubiquitous, and both French and English Canadian literary theorists have made a concerted effort to define it, I have chosen to concentrate only on those writing in English who have responded in some tangible way to the work of Robert Kroetsch. Their attempts include the 1986 "Future Indicative" Symposium, the 1988 Learned Societies Conference, Frank Davey's Reading Canadian Reading (1988), and Linda Hutcheon's books on postmodernism -- A Poetics of Postmodernism (1988), The Canadian Postmodern (1988), and Politics of Postmodernism (1989) -- as well as various works on individual authors (such as Robert Wilson's and Robert Lecker's readings of Robert Kroetsch) and Stephen Scobie's collection Signature Event Context (1989).

In accord with Robert Kroetsch's claim that "criticism is really a version of story" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 30), one distinctive feature of Canadian postmodernism seems to be the loosening of genre distinctions between fiction and criticism. This intermixing of genres, or dissolving of categories, is, in the opinion of most writers on Canadian postmodernism, a direct result of the closer than usual relationship between the literary and the theoretical, which has come about through "the strong presence of a great number of important writer/theorists" (Hutcheon, 1988a: 13).

For example, as Linda Hutcheon points out, "[w]e have Robert Kroetsch's novels and poetry, but we also have his interviews, his own criticism, and his unorthodox essays that challenge the borders of genre and of traditional academic argument (and its accompanying authority)" (13). Other creative writers involved with postmodernism and with criticism and/or theory are George Bowering, Frank Davey, and Stephen Scobie. Although each of them emphasizes different aspects of postmodernism, from Bowering's predominantly literary interest in "the relationships between language, writing, and literature" (Bowering in Moss, 1987: 242) to Davey's "arguing not so much for a literary as for a sociological postmodern" (Davey, 1988: 106), certain characteristics of Canadian postmodernism are described in all their writings and in the work of other critics and theorists such as Linda Hutcheon, Robert Lecker, Stan Fogel, Robert Wilson, Brian Edwards, Susan Rudy Dorscht, and a non-Canadian critic, Walter Pache. The major characteristics by which these writers define postmodernism are essentially a paradoxical simultaneous asserting and subverting of traditional literary and cultural conventions and values along with a preference for multiplicity, fragmentation, and discontinuity over the modernist preference for unity, order, and wholeness. According to postmodernism's advocates, this paradoxical practice or method and these postmodernist preferences drastically disturb our traditional values, conventions, and modes of

thought, thus challenging and subverting the patriarchal, repressive hegemony which depends upon those patterns of thought to determine and control our attitudes toward ourselves and each other as well as our social, political, and cultural interactions with one another.

In my opinion, this postmodern asserting/subverting and these postmodern preferences (for multiplicity, fragmentation, and discontinuity) do not significantly challenge the hegemony which their practitioners would subvert; rather, they serve to reinforce, in a more subtle and more complicated way than do modernist practices and preferences, the very attitudes and modes of thought the postmoderns would contest. In an attempt to demonstrate how these traditional patterns of thought are unwittingly reaffirmed by these preferences and practices, I will examine the prose of Robert Kroetsch as exemplary of Canadian postmodernism -- exemplary because, by virtue of his work with boundary 2, his extensive criticism on Canadian literature, and his postmodern creative writing, many critics and theorists regard him as the guiding force behind Canadian postmodernism.

The 'unearthing' of the writer which this dissertation attempts is based upon two inseparable premises: (1) that Robert Kroetsch is representative of Canadian postmodernism in that postmodernist theory manifests itself in his work in ways that typify its operation in the work of Canadian postmodern theorists and critics; and (2) that although

Kroetsch claims to resist and subvert the hegemony by which we in the Western world are governed, his writing (in his essays, reviews, and novels) and his published conversations (in interviews) does nothing more and nothing less than reaffirm not only the modes of thought by which that hegemony operates, but also, the values, prejudices, and violence which are part and parcel of those familiar and therefore unexamined patterns of thought.

That postmodernism provides the means by which Kroetsch attempts to disentangle himself from traditional thought and to resist or subvert the hegemony governed by it is problematic because: (1) Canadian postmodernist theorists do sincerely attempt to rigorously examine our familiar modes of thought and to challenge and resist the hegemony; (2) the means by which their resistance is to be accomplished is by a simultaneous asserting and subverting of 'the Subject,' representation, and traditional values and conventions; and (3) the postmodern theory by which this 'asserting and subverting' is to be accomplished is a hodgepodge of bits and pieces from thinkers as incompatible as, for example, Foucault, Kristeva, Bloom, and Derrida. It is my contention that the only way we can possibly resist traditional modes of thought is to seriously take into account Derridean undecidability, which means that we cannot pretend that Derrida and Foucault or Kristeva or Bloom are all 'doing the same thing.' Otherwise, our attempts at resistance will inevitably fail, because the work of metaphysics will

invariably draw us back into asserting (without subverting) the very hierarchy, or hegemony, or patterns of thought we wish to contest. Moreover, I am convinced that, despite the seemingly Derridean flavour of 'simultaneously asserting and subverting,'¹ and despite the postmodernists' constant references to 'deconstruction' and 'undecidability,' Canadian postmodernism, like American Deconstruction, is not in any sense Derridean.

Donna Bennett typifies this problematic dissolving of conflict and difference between various contemporary theories when she describes Labyrinths of Voice as "an extended interview with Shirley Neuman and Robert Wilson [in which Robert Kroetsch] discusses his and other Canadian writings in the light of such European and American theorists as Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Harold Bloom, Jacques Derrida et al" (Bennett, 1983: 166). A statement which gathers together "Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Harold Bloom, Jacques Derrida et al" as representatives of "recent critical methodologies (mostly emerging from France)" (166) implies that these 'theorists' can be, if not equated, at least discussed in terms of some identifying principle or method. Indeed, they are all commonly called 'post-structuralist,' a term which seems to refer to methods or theories of reading which, in a temporal sense, follow

¹ Actually, the "both/and" nature of this 'postmodern gesture' is Hegelian. Derridean thought follows 'a certain logic' which is not compatible with traditional logic.

after Structuralism, as first devised and practised by the Russian Formalists. This temporal connotation of 'post' would possibly be acceptable, if we were very careful to remember that these 'post-structuralist' thinkers follow divergent paths, most of which are, in fact, the old structuralist trail re-blazed by new terms.

Our forgetting/non-recognition of this difference is endorsed, even perhaps initiated, in literary theory and criticism, where this effacement of difference leads to a monstrous lumping together of Derrida and practitioners of "so-called deconstructive criticism" (Gasché, 1986: 254), as that 'gathering together' manifests itself, for example, in Deconstruction and Criticism,² a collection of articles by Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Geoffrey H. Hartman, and J. Hillis Miller. But the theory and methods the American critics pursue are "an offspring of New Criticism" (Gasché, 1986: 254).³ Any relationship between

² Bloom (1979), sometimes referred to as the Yale Manifesto.

³ For similar assessments, see also Gasché, 1979; Leitch, 1983, particularly 115-21; and Berman, 1988.

Art Berman's book is concerned with American literary criticism's reception of structuralism and post-structuralism, and it proceeds from the assumption that American literary critical theory is based upon the philosophical suppositions of empiricism. After identifying "the premises of empiricism and the effects of these premises on the development of New Criticism [Berman examines], in the same context, structuralism and post-structuralism" (1), establishing that while these later movements "at first seem to fulfill, from an American perspective, the basic criteria necessary for a valid critical theory, they ultimately prove to be based on underlying epistemological assumptions, particularly those

these critics and Derrida lies in their naming themselves/ being named 'Deconstructionists' and in their use of terms coined or uniquely used by Derrida, even though their 'definitions' are not similar to Derrida's (non)definitions of those terms, and their 'deconstructions' are not Derrida's. Each of those critics proposes a theory of literature and of literary criticism as well as a methodology based upon his/her theory, whereas Derridean deconstruction (of which there is no such thing) is neither a theory nor a method.

Canadian postmodernism is a complex 'movement' or 'cultural form' advocating multiplicity, fragmentation, paradox, and discontinuity as tools with which to accomplish its project of simultaneously asserting and subverting subjectivity, representation, and our culture's ethnocentric and patriarchal hegemony. Most definitions of Canadian postmodernist literature contain terms coined by Derrida and are concerned with gaps and spaces/closure and unity, as is

concerning the self, that are incompatible with certain principal and fundamental influences on the temperaments and predilections of American literary critics" (1). Although I disagree with Berman's reading of Derrida's project as "Derridean skepticism" (5), I do agree that the American deconstructionists, whose works appear with Derrida's in Deconstruction and Criticism, have found in their (mis)readings of Derrida something that "oddly legitimates for [them] the reinforcement of notions of self and creativity that are quite inharmonious" (5) with Derrida's work. Other than Bloom, whose 'anxiety of influence' will be mentioned in my readings of Kroetsch's work, the American Deconstructionists per se are of no interest to me here, and I mention them only to point out that it may be interesting to trace the affinities between "The Canadian Writer [Critic] and the American Literary [Theoretical] Tradition."

Derrida, whose concern is the play of différance and/or undecidability in gaps and spaces -- the play which always already precludes metaphysical closure. Therefore, it would appear that Mark Taylor's comments on unity and split writing are relevant to Canadian postmodernism.

If the grounding principle of philosophy is One (i.e. identity and unity), then it might be possible to write otherwise by writing duplicitously. To write duplicitously, it is necessary to break the laws and deviate from the methods that implicitly and explicitly govern writing in the ontotheological tradition. Strategies have to be devised to write what philosophy has not said and cannot say in language that is nevertheless philosophical. The realization of a writing that is neither philosophical nor nonphilosophical requires the ceaseless mixing of genres and the constant shifting of styles. To be duplicitous the writer must redouble her efforts by writing with at least two hands at once.⁴ (Taylor, 1987: 268)

The split writing to which Taylor here refers is the Derridean double gesture by which concepts are put 'under erasure,' and which will be discussed in the following chapter. But before we move into the brief explication of Derridean deconstruction which will inform the assessments made in this dissertation, it would be helpful to consider Mark Taylor's account of postmodernism and its relationship

⁴ The expression 'writing with two hands' comes from Jacques Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," in Derrida, 1978b: 196-231.

to modernism. It is the most clear definition I have encountered and it is in agreement with Derrida's views.

Although it recurs throughout the century, concern with difference and otherness is a distinguishing trait of thinkers who can be described as 'postmodern.' . . . While it is impossible to define and delimit modernity with any degree of precision, there seems to be a consensus that modern philosophy begins with Descartes's inward turn to the subject. Plagued by uncertainty and doubt, Descartes seeks certainty through doubt. He doubts everything until he reaches what he regards as indubitable--his own doubting self. Descartes labels this self-certain subject res cogitans, which he distinguishes from all else, described as res extensa. Having radically differentiated res cogitans from res extensa, . . . Descartes insists that the subject's relation to otherness is mediated by and reducible to its relationship to itself.

In the wake of Descartes's meditations, modern philosophy becomes a philosophy of the subject. As the locus of certainty and truth, subjectivity is the first principle from which everything arises and to which all must be returned. With the movement from Descartes, through the Enlightenment to idealism and romanticism, attributes traditionally predicated of the divine subject are gradually displaced onto the human subject. Through a dialectical reversal, the creator God dies and is resurrected in the creative subject. As God created the world through the Logos, so man creates a 'world' through conscious and unconscious projection. In different terms, the modern subject defines itself by its constructive activity. Like God, the sovereign subject relates only to what it constructs and therefore is unaffected by anything other than itself. What appears to be a relationship to

otherness--be that other God, nature, objects, subject, culture or history--always turns out to be an aspect of mediate self-relation that is necessary for complete self-realization in transparent self-consciousness. Absolute knowledge actualized in the full self-consciousness of the subject seems to realize Western philosophy's dream of enjoying a total presence that is neither disturbed by irreducible difference nor interrupted by the return of an absolute other.
(Taylor, 1987: xxi-xxii)

It would appear that, in Taylor's view, modernism is involved with notions of self-identical, self-certain knowledge -- in other words, with presence, as is traditional Western thought -- whereas postmodernism is concerned with irreducible difference and radical alterity -- in other words, undecidability -- as is Derridean deconstruction. And this analysis seems also to be in accord with the views of Canadian postmodernists, as they posit closure, unity, totality as ingredients of modernism and discontinuity, différance, and fragmentation as aspects of postmodernism. It is certainly compatible with the view of Linda Hutcheon, who sees the 1960's as a period in which "previously silenced ex-centrics: those defined by differences in class, gender, race, ethnic group, and sexual preference" (Hutcheon, 1988a: 11) were 'inscribed' into history or allowed a voice, and the seventies and eighties as a period in which postmodernism has allowed those same ex-centrics to be 'inscribed' into fiction: "Female, gay,

and various ethnic voices can now be heard, and the postmodern interest in the ex-centric has . . . contributed both to this new valuing and to the challenging of all kinds of '-centrism' (andro-, hetero-, Euro-, etc.)" (11).⁵ In other words, "[t]he postmodern 'different' . . . is starting to replace the humanist 'universal' as a prime cultural value. . . . And postmodernism offers a context in which to understand the valuing of difference" (ix).

Différance (a Derridean term) is but a means of talking 'undecidability,' which is Jacques Derrida's major concern. Having said this, I would like to emphasize that my concern in this dissertation does not lie with modernism and/or postmodernism as such. I am concerned with undecidability and with how taking undecidability into account can shake the metaphysical ground of Western thought and, through that shaking or displacement, force us to become aware of the oppressive violence and the work of negation which inhere in that thought and its permutations in 'the world'; without the thought of undecidability, logocentrism's oppressiveness cannot be recognized, because the work of Western thought is precisely to hide and efface the violence by which metaphysics achieves its ends. That is, I am not interested in postmodernism per se in any of its 'manifestations' or

⁵ This view of the sixties and its resistance to 'centrisms' is iterated also in A Poetics of Postmodernism, where Hutcheon writes that "[p]ostmodernism retains, and indeed celebrates, differences against what has been called the 'racist logic of the exclusive'" (Hutcheon, 1988b: 61).

according to any of its definitions. I am very much interested in how a thinker such as Robert Kroetsch, who claims an interest in différance, is necessarily held captive by the very system he wishes to shake, when (or where) the strategy he adopts in order to effect such a displacement is a negative one, a strategy of resistance through the dialectical anti, which is entirely governed by the very metaphysical thought which, on one level, he desires to 'escape.' As Linda Hutcheon recognizes when she insists upon postmodernism's simultaneous asserting and subverting of socially constructed 'identities,' values, and conventions, we must give up the dream of escape, and accept the fact that metaphysics is inescapable. Which is not to say that it cannot be resisted. However, the negation by which Kroetsch claims to 'reject history' and 'resist the temptation of meaning' can never accomplish the subversion ascribed to it, but will do nothing more nor less than assert the very values and modes of thought which postmodernism claims to challenge. Concepts (such as 'history,' 'meaning,' 'unity,' and so on) cannot be rejected (negated) or destroyed, and attempts to destroy them will result in their coming back, with new names, to haunt us, with all their metaphysical implications and gestures still intact. Metaphysics and the oppressive violence it fosters can be... not escaped, but resisted (and this resistance is not a negation) only by our rigorously contextualizing the 'metaphysical' concepts which govern our thought, our

actions, and our lives.

If it is the case that the thought of undecidability is indeed necessary to any act of resistance that is not caught in the metaphysics it wishes to resist, and, if Kroetsch's resistance is not 'rooted' in Derridean undecidability, we will find, by considering Kroetsch's definition of postmodernism and juxtaposing his definition with his work, that the tenets of postmodernism which he claims to espouse are not borne out in his work, neither in his theory of Canadian literature, nor in his readings of Canadian literature, nor in his novels. This dissertation will attempt to show that, rather than being resistant to systems and unfettered by ideology, as he claims it is, Kroetsch's work is firmly grounded in the very metaphysical presuppositions which have governed not only modernism, the movement against which he defines his thinking as different, but also, all of Western thought. Essentially, Kroetsch's thought is caught in traditional metaphysics because his basic theme is the quest of the hero, the very quest of any metaphysics of identity. That quest is the grounding myth of Western thought's philosophy of the Subject and is the pursuit through which the full presence of the Self is sought by means of a dialectic which posits the other as 'one's own other,' in order that the victorious hero may succeed in subsuming the other within his completed and immediately present Self.

Statement of ~~Intent~~

In this dissertation, I attempt to accomplish two goals: (1) to provide an explication of Derridean deconstruction and to demonstrate its relevance to assessments of postmodern aspects of literary works, and (2) to delineate the philosophical presuppositions which underlie Robert Kroetsch's postmodern literary theory as he presents it in interviews, in a selection of his essays, and in his novels, thus subjecting all of these works to deconstructive readings. My purpose here is not to point out Kroetsch's deceitfulness or failure, but, rather, to show how his loyalty to the traditional thought he opposes is, for him, unavoidable, because metaphysics can be subverted or resisted neither by an effort of will nor by a proclamation of oneself as anti-system or anti-ideology. (The anti calls forth the negation by which dialectic operates, the dialectic upon which Western thought depends in its pursuit of and desire for presence.)

I have chosen to critique Kroetsch's work partly because he is considered to be one of the 'fathers' of Canadian postmodernism and partly because he claims to resist metaphysical implications such as 'unity,' 'meaning,' and 'telos' and speaks often of 'undecidability.' But because he equates undecidability with indeterminacy, because his 'resistance' to metaphysics is a 'resistance by negation,' and because he believes metaphysics can be

destroyed or escaped, he is, unwittingly, confirming and perpetuating the repressive and exploitative modes of thought that he claims to subvert. This is of concern to me because he has been highly influential in shaping the thought of his contemporaries, and, because postmodernity is generally held to be 'other' than traditional and therefore resistant to metaphysics, the force which his work adds to the oppressive power of metaphysical thought is insidious.

I am convinced that we cannot risk remaining unaware of the ways in which our world and our attitudes are conditioned, usually unbeknownst to us, by the traditional modes of thought which at least since Plato have dictated and governed our views of reality -- dictated and governed by denying and suppressing difference and otherness. And Derrida is the only thinker of whom I am aware who manages, through his use of such (non)concepts as originary doubling and undecidability, to demonstrate precisely how Western metaphysics represses otherness and difference, while managing to resist succumbing to the very gestures he means to resist. Therefore, I have chosen to read Kroetsch from a Derridean point of view, even though Derrida has yet to use the term 'postmodern' and despite Kroetsch's confessing to anxiety about 'deconstruction,'⁶ because my ultimate purpose

⁶ In Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 60: "I think my ultimate anxiety about deconstruction, or even structuralism, is its built-in objective of winning over the author." Cf. "I am attracted to deconstructionist critics like Derrida who talk about violence and free play. The writer asserts his writerliness by doing violence. . . . in order to get a

here is not merely to criticize him for advocating and promoting the negative attitudes which he holds in common with the culture in which he lives and works, but, rather, to criticize the attitudes themselves.

My decision to read Kroetsch from a Derridean point of view is supported by several factors: (1) at this time, there is no other mode of thought available to me by which the metaphysical presuppositions which underlie and govern Kroetsch's (our) thought may be uncovered and/or subverted; (2) misconceptions of Derrida's work which are fostered, or at least perpetuated by several contemporary theorists and critics' being called Deconstructionists permeate Kroetsch's criticism; (3) terms coined by Derrida, such as 'deconstruction,' 'under erasure,' 'trace,' and différance occur often in Kroetsch's criticism and dialogue; (4) Kroetsch is seen by his contemporaries as "having worked through Derrida's theory" (Godard, 1987: 46), and his criticism is considered to have "led the way" in "Canadian deconstructionist criticism" (43); and (5) Kroetsch's preference for 'multiple voices' is believed to subvert traditional conventions of dialogue and narrative, and that belief seems to stem from a current notion that an avant garde approach will in itself overcome our longing for Unity, an essential self, Presence; and (6) Kroetsch, like many other postmodern thinkers (such as Harold Bloom), has

space on the shelf" (42).

appropriated Derrida's work, modifying it in such a way that this thinking which, in Derrida's hands, is subversive of our familiar modes of thought is, in Kroetsch's work, used to confirm the very hegemony he would resist and subvert. Primarily, I am concerned with the claims that Kroetsch makes for himself (and that others make for him) in regard to his subverting so-called 'modern' notions of unity and continuity. This concern is double-edged: I am convinced (1) that those claims would have been unthinkable without Derrida and (2) that Kroetsch's resistance to Derrida, particularly his denial of Derrida's insistence that we cannot escape metaphysics, makes it impossible for those claims to be borne out in his conversation or his work.

Chapter Two

'Writing With Two Hands': Derridean Deconstruction

Derridean deconstruction is a strategy of critical reading which "does not point out the flaws or weaknesses or stupidities of an author, but the necessity with which what he does see is systematically related to what he does not see" (Johnson, 1981: xv). It is not an interpretation or a commentary, but a critical reading which "does not ask 'what does this statement mean?' but 'where is it being made from? what does it presuppose?' " (xv; emphasis Johnson's and mine), and is thus a critique of "the metaphysical forces that structure and smother difference in every text" (xvi; emphasis added). The metaphysical assumptions and presuppositions which the deconstructive reading seeks to disturb inhere in 'philosophy' and in the everyday language that we use, a language which is governed by a metaphysics of presence; that is, a metaphysics which presupposes and requires that all human experience be grounded in a concept of presence, which, in turn, manifests itself in concepts such as 'truth,' 'essence,' 'substance,' 'meaning,' 'God,' and so on. In a Derridean deconstructive reading:

Structure is perceived through the incidence of menace, at the moment when imminent danger concentrates our vision on the keystone of an institution, the stone which encapsulates both the possibility and the fragility of its existence. Structure then can be

methodically threatened in order to be comprehended more clearly and to reveal not only its supports but also that secret place in which it is neither construction nor ruin but liability. This operation is called (from the Latin) soliciting. In other words, shaking in a way related to the whole (from sollus, in archaic Latin "the whole," and from citare, "to put in motion." (Derrida, 1978b: 6)

The notion of structure has always been determined and defined by a centre or a fixed origin which organizes it and, most importantly, ensures

that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the play of the structure. . . . [T]he center of a structure permits the play of its elements inside the total form. . . . [and] closes off the play which it opens up and makes possible. As center, it is the point at which the substitution of contents, elements, or terms is no longer possible. At the center, the permutation or the transformation of elements (which may of course be structures enclosed within a structure) is forbidden. At least this permutation has always remained interdicted. . . . The concept of centered structure is in fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play.⁷

(Derrida, 1978b: 278-79)

Thus, the centre has been thought as the very thing which

⁷ Derrida uses the term 'play' according to a very rigorous 'definition,' which we will come to soon.

governs a structure, while itself escaping structurality; "the center is, paradoxically, within the structure and outside it. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality has its center elsewhere" (279); the centre is and is not centre. Hence, the concept of structure is theological insofar as the centre is accorded the privilege of the transcendental position (beyond and independent of that which it makes possible), and structure is conceived "on the basis of a full presence which is beyond play" (279). According to Derrida, the history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, has as its matrix "the determination of Being as presence in all senses of this word" (279): presence as 'meaning,' 'God,' 'logos,' 'consciousness,' 'alēthia,' 'essence,' 'man,' and so on. And the history of the concept 'structure' has been thought "as a series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center" (279). Presence, as 'centre,' 'meaning,' 'substance,' and so on, has always been presupposed to be transcendental and absolute, a self-sufficient, self-identical ground for all human experience, homogeneous in itself while generating and explaining all diversity.

That the centre is and is not centre is the double-edged proposition by which metaphysics is able to find coherence in paradox, ensuring the gathering together of everything in full and immediate presence. But, according

to Derrida, it is undecidability which both makes possible this double-edged proposition and makes impossible the full and immediate presence which metaphysics constantly desires and requires. The thought of undecidability shakes and displaces the concept of presence, or, to put it another way, it is through this 'double meaning' that the movement of undecidability allows for the various determinations of presence as 'centre,' God, logos, and so on, while, at the same time, that same movement of undecidability never allows any of those determinations to become fully present. The centre is and is not the centre, and the movement of undecidability endlessly differs and defers "the substitute which comes to take the place of that which was never fully present" (279) -- fully present neither inside the structure nor outside the structure. Thus, the transcendental signified (of which the 'centre' or 'origin' is only one in a series of determinations) is absent, not in the sense of 'not present,' but in the sense that it can never be fully, self-sufficiently present.

The thought which does not seek to find coherence in paradox is the unthinkable thought of undecidability -- unthinkable in that it does not conform to traditional logic and in that it accepts contradiction as unresolvable.⁸

⁸ The principle of non-contradiction "states that 'The same attribute cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject and in the same respect' (Aristotle, Metaphysics, 1005 b19-20). It is also stated more concisely as 'It is impossible for the same thing to be and not to be' (Aristotle, Metaphysics, 1005 a1)" (quoted in Flew, 1984:

According to this (Derridean) thought, 'play' is no longer limited by presence in the form of a fixed origin or centre.

One could call play the absence of the transcendental signified as limitlessness of play, that is to say as the destruction of onto-theology and the metaphysics of presence. . . . [This play] is not a play in the world, as it has always been defined, for the purposes of containing it, by the philosophical tradition and as the theoreticians of play [game theory⁹] also consider it. . . . To think play radically the ontological and transcendental problematics must first be seriously exhausted; the question of the meaning of being, the being of the entity and of the transcendental origin of the world . . . must be patiently and rigorously worked through . . . and their effectiveness and legibility must be conserved. Even if it were crossed out, without it the concepts of play and writing to which I shall have recourse will remain caught within regional limits and an empiricist, positivist, or metaphysical discourse. . . . It is therefore the game of the world that must be first thought; before attempting to understand all the forms of play in the world. (Derrida, 1974: 50)

The 'game of the world,' which is, according to Derrida, grounded in a desire for presence, is governed by the binary structure of Western conceptuality, a structure

75).

Throughout the history of the West, philosophy has been nothing more and nothing less than an attempt to deal with this principle and to resolve contradiction in presence.

⁹ 'Play' is not to be confused with 'game,' which is governed by traditional notions of structure and, thus, by the rules of logic and metaphysics.

of dichotomies or polarities such as presence/absence, being/nothingness, identity/difference, speech/writing, truth/error, certainty/uncertainty, good/evil, mind/body, and so on. However, because presence is assumed to be homogeneous -- the self-sufficient, self-identical unity which allows and contains all multiplicity -- these polar opposites are not considered to co-exist as independent and equal entities, but, are hierarchically opposed; one term is given priority while the other term is considered to be the negative, corrupt, undesirable version of the first -- a fall away from it. This hierarchical structure, deemed a priori and natural, allows absence to be considered a lack of presence, evil to be a fall from good, difference to be a lack of identity, thus privileging attributes of presence such as unity, identity, and immediacy over distance, differentiation, dissimulation, and deferment.

This hierarchical structure, and the desire for presence which motivates it, is indissociable from the privilege accorded to voice. Voice is privileged because it is thought that perfect understanding is rendered possible in speech and, by definition, cannot be threatened by any temporal or spatial distance between speaker, speech, and listener, for both speaker and listener are simultaneously present to the utterance. Even when this seems not to be the case, speech is deemed more valuable than writing. For example, natural writing, "the writing of truth in the soul, . . . the book of Nature and God's writing" (Derrida, 1974:

15) are "immediately united to the voice and the breath. . . . [they are] not grammatological but pneumatological.

[Natural writing] is hieratic, very close to the interior holy voice of the Profession of Faith, to the voice one hears upon retreating into oneself: full and truthful presence of the divine voice to our inner sense" (17).

"Writing, the letter, the sensible inscription, has always been considered by Western tradition as the body and matter external to the spirit, to breath, to speech, to the logos" (35), whereas speech is considered to be immune from the contagion of the 'outside' or of distance, because it is presupposed that in the spoken word we know what we mean, mean what we say, say what we mean, and know what we have said. According to Derrida, this image of perfectly self-present meaning is the underlying ideal of Western culture, and he has termed this belief in the self-presentation of meaning (as opposed to writing's representation of speech) 'logocentrism,' from the Greek Logos (meaning, speech, logic, law, reason, the Word of God): that is, presence.¹⁰

Logocentrism is also a phonocentrism; voice is privileged by virtue of the presumed "absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning" (Derrida, 1974: 12). This prioritizing of voice requires that speech be privileged over writing, as, indeed, it has been, at least since Plato's

¹⁰ For a thorough discussion of the history of the logos in Western philosophy, see Richardson (1990), 1-15.

condemnation of the poets in the Republic and his condemnation of writing in the Phaedrus.¹¹ (In Revelation, the book's writer is told to take the scroll which is open in the hand of the angel "and eat it" and then: "You must again prophesy" (Rev. 10:8-11); in order to be truth, the scroll, the written word, must be transformed into 'natural writing' and voice.) Within Western metaphysics,

phonocentrism merges with the historical determination of the meaning of being in general as presence, with all the subdeterminations which depend on this general form and which organize within it their system and their historical sequence (presence of the thing to sight as eidos, presence as substance/essence/existence (ousia), temporal presence as point (stigmé) of the now or of the moment (nun), the self-presence of the cogito, consciousness, subjectivity, the co-presence of the other and of the self, intersubjectivity as the intentional phenomenon of the ego, and so forth). Logocentrism [supports] the determination of the being of the entity as presence [and the] epoch of the logos thus debases writing considered as mediation of mediation and as a fall into the exteriority of meaning.

(Derrida, 1974: 12-13)

In the logocentric system, speech is considered to be a presentation of thought, and writing to be merely the

¹¹ Interestingly, while engaged in the act of writing, Plato concretizes the metaphysical gesture of excluding writing by recommending the exclusion of poets from the 'ideal' republic. For a thorough deconstruction of this exclusion, mainly in regard to its treatment in the Phaedrus, but with reference to all of Plato's work, see Derrida's "Plato's Pharmacy," in Derrida, 1981a.

representation of speech. Hence, unlike speech, writing is distanced from consciousness and is stained by the brush of/with re(presentation), the imitation which, in the wake of Plato's determination of poetry as mimesis, is proclaimed inferior to the imitated -- in this case, speech/thought. Writing is deemed a substitute for speech, a second-rate activity that cannot overcome spatial and temporal distance because it is involved with that distance; the writer inscribes her thought on paper, thus distancing her thought from herself, transforming it in such a way that it is no longer immediately present to herself, is no longer governed by her, and is 'present' to be read even after her death. This process includes distance, difference, and death, which are thought to corrupt the self-presence of meaning, to expose meaning to the adulteration which the immediacy of speech is believed to prevent. Writing threatens logocentrism's desire for full, immediate presence, because its necessary inclusion of distance (spatial and temporal) ensures the impossibility of overcoming space and time.

It is through the gesture of privileging one term over its opposite, while considering the second term to be the negative of the first, that Western metaphysics cheerfully reconciles binary oppositions in a satisfying unity -- in a third term which represses difference by positing the privileged term as an 'original' unity from which the negative term has fallen, but back to which, through "the fight to recover what has been lost" (Eliot, 1971b: V.15),

the original identity can be restored, redeemed, reappropriated in a future final unity which is the telos of both terms. Hence, "[in] my beginning is my end" (I.1).

However, this reconciliation, or synthesis, or reappropriation, is essentially violent -- it is the violence of a metaphysics which inheres in the gesture of exclusion/effacement by which we reassure ourselves of the self-identity of presence. Derridean deconstruction endeavours to expose this violence by demonstrating that the underlying notions of Western thought are grounded in and determined by the concept of presence and that the concept of presence must contain its own absence -- its own difference from itself.

One way in which Derrida reveals the cracks in the supposed self-identity and self-sufficiency of presence is to demonstrate the unstable nature of concepts such as 'writing,' 'text,' 'sign,' 'meaning,' and so on. By indicating how these presumably closed signifieds are always already inhabited by irreducible alterity,¹² and by thus displacing the self-sufficient notion of presence upon which these signifieds depend, he attempts to reveal the gap, the 'almost nothing,' the différance through which Western metaphysics is opened to the possibility of its 'other' -- to the possibility of an always already occurring process of

¹² Irreducible alterity, or radical alterity, is difference which is not simply the 'other' of identity and therefore cannot be reduced or resolved in a dialectical synthesis.

differentiation that is denied/repressed by the metaphysical gesture through which the 'inferior' term of a binary pair is reappropriated (relève¹³) in its binary opposite.

In revealing the cracks within the self-identity and self-sufficiency of presence, Derrida must use the concepts of Western metaphysics because those concepts structure our thinking and our language; to think we can escape them is an impossible dream. Derrida points out repeatedly that to exchange the old concepts/words for new ones is to run the risk of (mistakenly) thinking that we have rid ourselves of the metaphysical implications of the word or concept we have abandoned or banned. The problems posed by the metaphysical

¹³ La relève is:

a reinterpretation of the central Hegelian concept: the Aufhebung. Aufhebung literally means 'lifting up'; but it also contains the double meaning of conservation and negation. For Hegel, dialectics is a process of Aufhebung: every concept is to be negated and lifted up to a higher sphere in which it is thereby conserved. In this way, there is nothing from which the Aufhebung cannot profit. . . . [The] translation of a word with a double meaning is particularly difficult. . . . (Baillies's rendering of Aufhebung as 'sublation' is misleading.) Derrida, however, in his attempt to make Aufhebung write itself otherwise has proposed a new translation of it that does take into account . . . its double meaning. Derrida's translation is la relève. The word comes from the verb relever, which means to lift up, as does Aufheben. But relever also means to relay, to relieve, as when one soldier on duty relieves another. Thus the conserving-and-negating lift has become la relève, a 'lift' in which is inscribed an effect of substitution and difference, the effect of substitution and difference inscribed in the double meaning of Aufhebung.

(Translator's note; fn. 23, in Derrida, 1982: 20)

implications we wish to resist inhere in our familiar and therefore unexamined habits of thought, and, in attempting to examine and change those habits of thought, Derrida must, at the same time, both use and 'erase' the concepts in which they inhere. To put a concept 'under erasure' is not to substitute a new concept for it or to reject it, but to take note of undecidability, thus allowing "the value of the [concept to] make its necessity felt before letting itself be erased. The [reinscribed concept] must comply with both that necessity and that erasure" (Derrida, 1974: 61). This double gesture accomplishes a shaking that dislodges the familiar (metaphysical) order of thought by virtue of the fact that "the ['sous rature': putting 'under erasure'] is in fact contradictory and not acceptable within the logic of identity" (61; emphasis added).¹⁴ (Graphically, to put under erasure is to write a word and then cross it out, printing both the word and the deletion. The word is printed because it is necessary and crossed out because undecidability makes it impossible for the word or the concept to stand as a self-identical 'entity.') In speaking of the necessity of using and erasing the concepts of the metaphysics/language he is disrupting, Derrida says,

¹⁴ In traditional logic, difference is contradiction, and the work of logic is precisely to resolve contradiction by interning difference in identity. In Derridean thought, difference is retained and contradiction is not resolved.

Since these concepts are indispensable for unsettling the heritage to which they belong, we should [not] renounce them. Within the closure, by an oblique and always perilous movement, constantly risking falling back within what is being deconstructed, it is necessary to surround the critical concepts with a careful and thorough discourse--to mark the condition, the medium, and the limits of their effectiveness and to designate rigorously the intimate relationship to the machine whose deconstruction they permit; and, in the same process, designate the crevice through which the yet unnameable glimmer beyond the closure can be glimpsed.

(Derrida, 1974: 14)

This 'unnameable glimmer' is the gap, the 'almost nothing' (between opposing terms) which Derrida refers to as undecidability. According to Derrida, undecidability has to do not with the impossibility of deciding whether something is 'this' or 'that,' but, rather, with originary doubling. Every entity, every self, every term of a binary opposition is originarily doubled, always already marked with its other. For example, as Taylor points out, because consciousness of self is dependent on the possibility of a separation of self from self, on an originary doubling, "[the] search for self-presence in self-consciousness leads to the discovery of the absence of the self" (Taylor, 1984: 50).¹⁵ As Derrida says: "What can look at itself is not

¹⁵ 'Absence,' here, is precisely the absence we encountered in terms of the centre and of the transcendental signified. It is not an absence that is the negative of or lack of presence, but the 'absence' which, by virtue of originary doubling, makes it impossible for an entity or

one" (Derrida, 1974: 36) and the "deconstruction of presence accomplishes itself through the deconstruction of consciousness and therefore through the irreducible notion" (70) of undecidability and/or originary doubling.

In order to understand how deconstruction displaces presence, we must look more carefully at 'undecidables.' Although I will discuss a number of these 'undecidables' as though each were a 'something,' we must constantly remember that undecidability is the important notion here -- I emphasize that there is no such 'thing' as an 'undecidable.' Each of the 'undecidables' is useful only as a means of talking undecidability. Also, although 'undecidable terms' such as 'différance,' 'trace,' 'text,' and so on, are not synonymous in any conventional sense, they are members of a non-finite chain of differing, deferring 'substitution,' because each of them is a way of 'writing' undecidability. One may ask why Derrida does not merely use one of these terms -- différance, for example -- in order to avoid confusion; the answer to that question is that he continues to 'write' undecidability in terms of an ever increasing 'list' of 'undecidables' in an effort to avoid any one term's becoming a 'master-word' (a transcendentalizing term), thus seeming to acquire a solidity or 'essence' which undecidability, by definition, cannot have.

In Derrida's deconstructive readings, which attempt to

concept to be fully present.

show an always already occurring process of differentiation which allows both for the possibility of presence (as an effect of undecidability) and for the impossibility of presence (as a self-identical concept), Derrida posits a series of terms which cannot be reduced to any single, unified, self-identical meaning -- terms such as pharmakon, supplement, trace, text, writing, différance, and so on. A Derridean 'undecidable,' which resides in the gap between opposed terms, refuses to be incorporated into the familiar dichotomy, and, moreover, functions as a force that resists the sublimation or synthesis (Aufhebung) of the binary opposites between which it resides, partaking of both, yet being neither. For example, pharmakon resides in the gap between 'poison' and 'remedy,' making possible both poison and remedy (as effects) and making impossible both poison and remedy (as self-identical entities). Pharmakon marks the space of undecidability, the originary doubling and the play¹⁶ of differences by which 'poison' and 'remedy' each constitutes its other, and which at the same time disallows either 'remedy' or 'poison' to constitute itself as an original plenitude under the authority of which the other may be subsumed, reappropriated, or excluded. Deconstruction teases out, marks and re-marks the operation of these undecidables, thereby avoiding both "simply

¹⁶ The reader will recall that 'play' is the 'absence' of the transcendental signifier, the limitless movement of undecidability.

neutralizing the binary oppositions of metaphysics, and simply residing within the closed field of those oppositions, thereby confirming it" (Derrida, 1981d: 41).

As an 'example' of an undecidable, let us consider différance, in which the a marks the space of undecidability and the generative movement of differentiation.

The verb 'to differ' (differer) seems to differ from itself. On the one hand, it indicates difference as distinction, inequality, or discernibility; on the other, it expresses the interposition of delay, the interval of a spacing and temporalizing that puts off until 'later' what is presently denied, the possible that is presently impossible. . . . In the one case 'to differ' signifies nonidentity; in the other case it signifies the order of the same. Yet there must be a common, although entirely différent root within the sphere that relates the two movements of differing to one another. We provisionally give the name différance to this sameness which is not identical: by the silent writing of its a, it has the desired advantage of referring to differing, both as spacing/temporalizing and as the movement that structures every dissociation. . . . différance is not simply active (any more than it is a subjective accomplishment); it rather indicates the middle voice, it precedes and sets up the opposition between passivity and activity. With its a, différance more properly refers to what in classical language would be called the origin or production of differences and the differences between differences, the play (jeu) of differences.

(Derrida, 1973: 129-30)

"Difference is not a 'concept' or 'idea' that is 'truer'

than presence. It can only be a process of textual work, a strategy of writing¹⁷" (Johnson, 1981: xvi). As Derrida says, with respect to différance:

Every concept is necessarily and essentially inscribed in a chain or in a system, within which it refers to another and to other concepts, by [means of] the systematic play of differences. Such a play, then--différance--is no longer simply a concept, but the possibility of conceptuality, of the conceptual system and process in general. (Derrida, 1973: 140)

Because undecidables are not concepts or even words¹⁸, but effects of an originary doubling which allows for both the possibility and the impossibility of concepts and words, they cannot be gathered into a system that can be "closed upon itself by means of some dominating center. . . . The system of the [undecidables] cannot be formalized,

¹⁷ 'Writing' here refers neither to writing as marks on a page, nor to the act of writing, but rather, to the 'split writing' or double gesture of deconstruction which Mark Taylor mentions in the quotation included in Chapter One, 9.

¹⁸ In the logocentric system, in accordance with the privilege granted to voice, the word (vox) is presumed to be "the elementary and undecomposable unity of the signified and the voice" (Derrida, 1974: 20), "a unity of sense and sound, of concept and voice, of the concept and a transparent substance of expression" (20). But "if différance is . . . what makes possible the presentation of being-present, it is never presented as such" (Derrida, 1981a: 4). Because différance can never present itself as such, because it is but the marking of undecidability in a text, of the play of differences by which 'words' are constituted, its 'name' can be a word (an atomic unity) no more than différance (itself) can be a self-sufficient, self-identical concept. So it is with all undecidables.

idealized, or systematized because it is precisely its play that makes these projects possible" (Gasché, 1986: 185). Derrida emphasizes that, because undecidables "block every relationship to theology," every relationship to any manifestation of presence ('transcendental signified'), none of them may become "a master-word or a master-concept" (Derrida, 1981d: 40) and, therefore, their operation precludes any possibility of absolute closure.

The metaphysical gesture which denies and represses différance could not accomplish itself without double-edged concepts like Aufheben or Aufhebung. But what metaphysics must deny and repress is an awareness that those concepts which allow it to repress différance are, at the same time, the very concepts through which différance is always already in operation. That is, "there is always an effect of différance when the same word has two contradictory meanings. Indeed it is this effect of différance . . . that is precisely what the Aufhebung can never aufheben: lift up, conserve, and negate" (Bass in Derrida, 1982: 20). The deconstructive reading which brings into focus this effect of différance is a double gesture, and, although the 'phases' of the double gesture are described below as though they were sequential, the deconstructive reading proceeds as a "writing with at least two hands" (Taylor, 1987: 268) and the 'phases' are not chronologically separate.

The 'first' phase of Derrida's double gesture occurs in those places throughout his work where, for example, "the

polemical energy seems clearly engaged in putting writing above speech" (Spivak, 1974: lxxvii). The hierarchy is reversed; the 'inferior' term of a binary opposition seems to have been exalted over its privileged opposite. However -- and this is a crucial phase of the deconstructive double gesture -- this reversal must be displaced. Otherwise, we would merely reverse the terms in the hierarchy, while leaving the structure (hierarchical opposition) intact. The closed field of binary oppositions would be confirmed, and the play of undecidability would still be repressed.

In performing the 'second' phase of the double gesture (to continue the speech/writing opposition), Derrida demonstrates how the very possibility of opposing speech and writing on the basis of presence versus absence or immediacy versus representation is impossible, since speech is always already structured by difference and distance. A word is always already divided into a phonic signifier and a mental signified, and, as Saussure pointed out,¹⁹ language is a system of differences and not a collection of independently meaningful units. The sign "is not a homogeneous unit bridging an origin (referent) and an end (meaning), but is always already inhabited by the trace of another sign which never appears as such" (Spivak, 1974: xxxix). Therefore, each unit (like each self, each member of a binary pair) is always already 'contaminated' by its other, by what it is

¹⁹ In his Course in General Linguistics, critiqued by Derrida in Of Grammatology (1974).

not -- in other words, alterity is the condition of 'identity'.²⁰ Language (a system of differences) is always already constituted by the very distances and differences that the prioritizing of speech seeks to overwhelm.

The structure of the sign carries within itself the trace of a perennial alterity. To this 'structure,' which is undecidable, Derrida gives the name 'writing.' Thus, he "simultaneously provokes the overturning of the hierarchy speech/writing, and the entire system attached to it, and releases the dissonance of a writing within speech, thereby disorganizing the entire inherited order and invading the entire field" (Derrida, 1981d: 42). This 'writing' (the

²⁰ [Identity] means 'sameness', and the concept arises in Christian theology especially in connection with belief in a life beyond death, whether conceived as the resurrection of the body or the immortality of the soul (and these two ways of thinking of the matter have been confused in theology since the first century). How is it conceivable that the same person could live on either side of death? (Flew, 1984: 279)

That 'identity' and 'sameness' are considered synonymous in theology, philosophy, and everyday language (governed as theology and everyday language are by the concepts laid down by Western philosophy) is precisely the 'starting point' of a deconstructive reading. To Derrida, 'sameness' and 'identity' are not synonymous, and, with this difference between sameness and identity (demonstrated over and over in his work), he begins a critique which shows how the concepts which govern our thought are never able completely to control its operation and how the différance, the something/nothing, the almost indiscernible gap that cuts 'identity' from 'sameness' opens the movement of differentiation which we call 'thought' and/or 'language.'

structure always already inhabited by the trace²¹) is undecidability, and, as such, is also the name of the double gesture which effaces the presence of a concept ('presence,' as defined by Western metaphysics, cannot be structured or inhabited by alterity) and yet keeps it legible.²²

We must remember that the double gesture of a deconstructive reading takes notice of the undecidability that is always already operating and does not destroy a unity that is/was present. Within the familiar philosophical oppositions, there is always a "violent hierarchy. One of the two terms controls the other (axiologically, logically, etc), or has the upper hand. To deconstruct the opposition, first of all, is to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment" (Derrida, 1981d: 41). But in

²¹ Derrida's 'trace,' the mark of the other within the self, of absence within presence, marks the play of undecidability or originary doubling. "A trace is derivative of, and opposed to, an instant or instance of full presence, the trace . . . names the difference, and . . . must inhabit that agency of full presence in order to distinguish it from its trace" (Gasché, 1986: 188). Since the trace (for example, the trace of the other within the self, without which the self could not constitute itself as itself) "can only imprint itself by referring to the other, to another trace ('the trace of its reflection') by letting itself be upstaged and forgotten, its force of production stands in necessary relation to the energy of its [effacement]" (Derrida, 1981a: 331) and it "cannot be thought without thinking the retention of difference within a structure of reference where difference appears as such" (Derrida, 1974: 46-47).

²² The reader will recall that this double gesture which effaces the presence of a concept while keeping it legible is the gesture of putting the concept 'under erasure.' See 30-31.

the 'next' phase,²³ this reversal must be displaced, the apparently exalted term must be reinscribed. The (deconstructing) reader must make room for "the irruptive emergence of a new 'concept,' a concept that can no longer be, and never could be, included in the previous regime [system of oppositions]" (42). This new 'concept' is neither a word nor a concept; that is, it is not theological, not grounded in Being or non-Being, but is the space, the gap, the nothing, that allows for both the possibility of binary oppositions as effects and for their impossibility as self-identical, self-sufficient concepts.

If this interval, this biface or biphasic, can be inscribed only in a bifurcated writing (and this holds first of all for a new concept of writing, that simultaneously provokes the overturning of the hierarchy speech/writing, and the entire system attached to it, and releases the dissonance of a writing within speech, thereby disorganizing the entire inherited order and invading the entire field), then it can only be marked in what I would call a grouped textual field: in the last analysis it is impossible to point it out, for a unilinear text, or a punctual position, an operation signed by a single author, are all by definition incapable of practicing this interval.

Henceforth, in order better to mark this interval . . . it has been necessary to analyze, to set to work, within the text of the history of philosophy, as well as within the so-

²³ It will be remembered that these 'phases' cannot be separated and are produced not sequentially but collaterally.

called literary text . . . certain marks, . . . that by analogy (I underline) I have called undecidables, that is, unities of simulacrum, "false" verbal properties (nominal or semantic) that can no longer be included within philosophical (binary) opposition, but which, however, inhabit philosophical opposition, resisting and disorganizing it, without ever constituting a third term, without ever leaving room for a solution in the form of speculative dialectics (the pharmakon is neither remedy nor poison, neither good nor evil, neither the inside nor the outside, neither speech nor writing; the supplement is neither a plus nor a minus, neither an outside nor the complement of an inside, neither accident nor essence, etc.²⁴ . . . Neither/nor, that is simultaneously either or). In fact, I attempt to bring the critical operation to bear against the unceasing reappropriation of this work of the simulacrum by a dialectics of the Hegelian type (which even idealizes and "semantizes" the value of work), for Hegelian idealism consists precisely of a relève of the binary oppositions of classical idealism, a resolution of contradiction into a third term that comes in order to aufheben, to deny while raising up, while idealizing, while sublimating into an anamnestic interiority (Erinnerung [the 'interiorizing memory' into which contradictions are 'lifted up' (negated and preserved)], while interning difference in a self-presence.
(Derrida, 1981d: 42-43)

Briefly then, Derrida dislocates the speech/writing opposition by reinscribing 'writing' as a structure of alterity which at once makes speech and writing possible (as

²⁴ The supplement is the undecidable produced in Derrida's reading of Rousseau in "Nature, Culture, Writing" in Derrida, 1974: 95-316.

effects of undecidability) and impossible (as self-identical totalities). Similarly, he reinscribes the restricted notion of text (i.e., as a self-enclosed, self-sufficient physical entity) as a notion of the 'general text' (i.e., as undecidability). Traditionally, 'text' has been determined:

(1) "as the sensibly palpable, empirically encounterable transcription of an oral discourse, as a material opacity that must efface itself before its oral reactivation and the meaning it represents"; (2) "as an intelligible object. . . . thought to correspond to the signifying organization of diacritically or differentially determined signifiers and signifieds"; (3) "as the dialectical sublation, either as 'form' or 'content' of both its sensible and ideal determinations. . . the text is determined as the milieu, the element of Aufhebung, or, which is the same, of the dialectical exposition of that which is implied in its very concept."

(Gasché, 1986: 278-79)

Derrida's generalized notion of text overrides all these determinations, tampering and changing "all those boundaries that form the running border of what used to be called a text . . . that is, the supposed end and beginning of a work, the unity of a corpus, the title, the margins, the signature, the referential realm outside the frame, and so forth" (Derrida, 1979: 83) and forcing us to extend the notion of the text. A 'text' is no longer "some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something

other than itself, to other differential traces" (84).

It is in regard to textuality as much as to 'writing' that Derrida has been misunderstood, or not read. Probably his most infamous line is "There is nothing outside of the text (there is no outside-text; il n'y a pas de hors-texte)" (Derrida, 1974: 158), from his reading of Rousseau. He explains in "Living On" that "it was never our wish to extend the reassuring notion of the text to a whole extra-textual realm and to transform the world into a library by doing away with all boundaries, all framework, all sharp edges" (Derrida, 1979: 84). Rather, the notion that "there is no outside-text" questions the opposition inside/outside and the notion of the 'text' as a totality, the unequivocal meaning of which can be determined in a self-identical signified, transcendental or otherwise. But just as the 'text' cannot be reduced to an 'extra-textual' meaning (in terms of "speech, life, the world, the real, history" (84) and so on), neither can a 'text' be about itself. Because it is undecidable, it has no unified identity or self with which to coincide. "All self-referral, as shown in 'The Double Session,' is grafted on a structurally endless referral to other determinate texts, thus making all textual self-reflexivity ultimately impossible" (Gasché, 1986: 281).

The play of differences supposes, in effect, synthesis and referrals which forbid at any moment, or in any sense, that a simple element be present in and of itself, referring only to itself.

Whether in the order of spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present. This interweaving results in each 'element'--phoneme or grapheme--being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system. This interweaving, this textile, is the text produced only in the transformation of another text. Nothing, neither among the elements nor within the system, is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces.

(Derrida, 1981d: 26)

Although Derridean deconstruction does not search for the 'meaning' of a text in any traditional sense, and, although it "must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the schemata of the language that he uses" (Derrida, 1974: 158), it "is not a form of textual vandalism designed to prove that meaning is impossible" (Johnson, 1981: xiv)²⁵ or, as Kroetsch accuses, "to one-up the author" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 60). Derrida is engaged in a type of critical reading which teases out of a 'text' the deconstruction of its metaphysical

²⁵ On the same page, Johnson points out that:

The deconstruction of a text does not proceed by random doubt or generalized skepticism, but by the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text itself. If anything is destroyed in a deconstructive reading, it is not meaning but the claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over another.

presuppositions; that is, the deconstructive reading does not produce or perform a deconstruction, but takes notice of the deconstruction that is always already taking place.

It is a typical accusation that Robert Kroetsch makes against 'deconstruction' when he writes: "The words violence and deconstruction are in complicity" (Kroetsch, 1980c: 108), an accusation which fails to take notice of certain features of both deconstruction and metaphysics and capitalizes upon the disturbing connotations of the term 'deconstruction,' connotations which derive from considering 'destruction' and 'deconstruction' to be synonymous even though, etymologically, 'deconstruction' is not related to 'destruction.' 'Deconstruction' is defined in the OED as "to undo the construction of, to take to pieces," and Derrida uses the term as referring to how the 'constructs' upon which our thought is based are always already undone, even as they assert themselves. As he says, he tries

to respect as rigorously as possible the internal, regulated play of philosophemes or epistememes by making them slide--without mistreating them--to the point of their nonpertinence, their exhaustion, their closure. To "deconstruct" philosophy, thus, would be to think . . . the structured genealogy of philosophy's concepts, but at the same time to determine . . . what this history has been able to dissimulate or forbid, making itself into a history by means of this somewhere motivated repression. By means of this simultaneously faithful and violent circulation between the inside and the outside of philosophy . . . there is

produced . . . a writing [which] enables us to read philosophemes--and consequently all the texts of our culture--as kinds of symptoms . . . of something that could not be presented in the history of philosophy, and which, moreover, is nowhere present, since all of this concerns putting into question the major determination of the meaning of Being as presence, the determination in which Heidegger recognized the destiny of philosophy.

(Derrida, 1981d: 6-7)

We must constantly remember that deconstruction is the movement of undecidability that is always already operating, making possible our familiar modes of thought. It is not a destructive action which a reader performs upon a once stable and unified totality; it is the undecidability which always already permits the endlessly differing and deferring substitution which permits the notions of 'structure,' 'unity,' 'presence,' and so on, even while it disallows self-sufficient full presence in any of the forms in which we desire to find it. Furthermore, and more importantly, we must never lose sight of the blind violence by which metaphysics accomplishes the reappropriating gesture of mastery and exclusion by which the self seeks to achieve the presence which we have always, until Derrida, found so reassuring. It is the violence which another writer has recognized in the following manner: "Philosophers are violent and aggressive persons who, having no army at their disposal, bring the world into subjection to themselves by means of locking it up in a system" (Musil, 1988: I.300).

The Aufhebung can only accomplish itself by means of a violent gesture of negation (of the 'inferior' term, person, or culture) and conservation (in the 'superior' term, person, or culture). Whereas philosophy does not recognize its violence and blindly seeks to neutralize difference -- condemned as contradiction -- by repressing and subsuming whatever and whomever is judged 'inferior' (whether it is 'absence,' 'evil,' 'inferior' peoples, or groups of 'inferior' people), the thinker of undecidability seeks to recognize that:

For an era dominated by the struggle between, among, and against various 'isms'--communism, fascism, totalitarianism, capitalism, racism, sexism, etc.--the issue of difference is undeniably political. Is difference tolerable? Are others to be encouraged to express and cultivate their differences? Or is difference intolerable? Are others who are different to be converted, integrated, dominated, excluded, or repressed? The ghettos of Europe, America, and South Africa, the walls in Germany, China, and Korea, and battlefields throughout the world testify to the urgency of the issue of difference.

(Taylor, 1987: xxi)

In the troubled world in which we live, we cannot condemn as 'violent' or 'negative' the Derridean thought which recognizes difference and is not based upon the negating and conserving (in oneself) work of the dialectic.

Chapter Three

'Gaining Ground':

Situating Robert Kroetsch in Canadian Postmodernism

It is not without good reason that Robert Kroetsch's colleagues have considered him to be at the cutting edge of postmodernism in all aspects of his work. In 1972, he and William Spanos founded "the influential critical journal boundary 2: A Journal of Post-Modern Literature" (Brown, 1983: 418). According to Robert Lecker, Kroetsch's "attempt to defy the 'tyranny of narrative' . . . explains his involvement as coeditor of a journal of postmodern aesthetics significantly entitled boundary 2" (Lecker, 1986: 12). Linda Hutcheon also alludes to his postmodernist attempt to defy 'the tyranny of narrative,' telling how the editing contradicted "Kroetsch's constant desire to combat ordering impulses" (Hutcheon, 1988a: 172) to such an extent that he reacted against the editing act: "'it becomes so goddamned orderly' that he wants to add pictures of crashing planes (and he does) to combat 'a humanism that coerces'" (172). Editing this influential journal is one way in which "Kroetsch has been deeply engaged in the formal process of defining contemporary literary sensibilities" (Thomas, 1980a: 1), perhaps partly through boundary 2's convening of a symposium devoted to postmodern literary theory in 1976. Somehow, Kroetsch's critics find no discrepancy between his "attempts to defy the tyranny of narrative" and his being

"deeply engaged in the formal process of defining contemporary literary sensibilities."

In 1985, looking back to find "Aspects of Postmodernism in Canada," Walter Pache defines postmodernism as a literary movement that originated and established itself in the United States before 1960. However, "[i]t required a writer of the independent stature of Robert Kroetsch to liberate the postmodern debate in Canada . . . and turn it into a productive force," and Pache describes "Kroetsch's central role in this process" (Pache, 1985: 67). According to Pache, Canadian writers welcomed the movement as "a tool against modernism and its implications of literary domination" (64), even though these same writers agreed that postmodernism began with the 'death of modernism' -- somehow, postmodernism is perceived as both a cause and an effect of modernism's 'death.' Leaving that contradiction aside, though, Pache sees the 'death of modernism' as including both literary and political elements, namely,

the end of the psychological and social realism of mimetic fiction, . . . [and the] disappearance of a unified and hierarchically structured world picture. . . . While modernists were seen as vainly struggling to cope with an increasingly fragmented world by using more and more subtle narrative devices, the new experimental writers abandoned any attempt to describe and analyze the 'real world.' They decreed that the communicative function of literature was superseded by the new poetics of a 'literature of silence.' Many of their texts, by deliberately exposing their

own artificiality, refuse to provide readers with traditional means of orientation and identification. The reader's role becomes more and more complex as he is asked to reconstruct a new context from disparate fragments or to discover this context by deconstructing the structure of a written text. Consequently, postmodern novels frequently tend to lay open the rules governing the reader's perception of reality.

There is a general tendency for contemporary writing to become openly self-reflexive. New terms like metafiction . . . indicate that fiction focuses more and more on the creative process itself, whereas its referential function is reduced.²⁶ As the literary

²⁶ Metafiction is also referred to as "Literature of Exhaustion," a term deriving from John Barth's 1967 essay and used to describe "fiction whose subject is fiction in the making, the creative process in action" (MacKendrick, 1978: 10). It seems that metafiction is inseparable from "'fabulation,' with an emphasis on design and form which 'asserts the authority of the shaper, the fabulator behind the fable'" (Robert Scholes (1967), quoted in MacKendrick, 1978: 11). With this assertion of the authority of the shaper, the author, I find it difficult to understand how metafiction accomplishes "[t]he assault on form, linearity, and convention" which "accentuates play, discontinuity, and fantasy" (12) in such a way that, "[r]egardless of its predominantly theoretical focus, metafiction is highly committed fiction" (Fogel, 1984c: 15), "an essential weapon of deconstruction" (32) committed to "a political thrust" (15) aimed at subverting "the language of the regime" (19). I agree, with MacKendrick, that "the apparent anarchy of much postmodern writing merely affirms its oral quality" (12), but I also contend that this affirmation of voice reaffirms the traditional notions by which 'realist' literature is governed: notions of Presence and the Self, 'meaning' and 'truth.'

Incidentally, John Barth followed his "The Literature of Exhaustion" with "The Literature of Replenishment: Postmodernist Fiction" (1980). In the later article, Barth refers to the earlier essay as "much misread" (71):

the simple burden of [the earlier essay] was that the forms and modes of art live in human history and are thus subject to used-upness, at least in the minds of significant numbers of artists in

imagination becomes engrossed with explaining its own workings, fiction turns to fantasy or fabulation, experimenting with word games and sound patterns. Older genres like romance and allegory are revived--if only to be subjected to new forms of parody and travesty. . . . Historical narrative, in particular, turned out to be a favorite target for this process of deconstruction and transformation, because it represented a type of fiction tied more closely than others to the existence of an objective reality.

(Pache, 1985: 65-66)

Linda Hutcheon resoundingly echoes Walter Pache's assessment

particular times and places; in other words, that artistic conventions are liable to be retired, subverted, transcended, transformed, or even deployed against themselves to generate new and lively work. . . . But a great many people . . . mistook [Barth] to mean that literature, at least fiction, is kaput . . . that there is nothing left for contemporary writers but to parody and travesty our great predecessors in our exhausted medium. (71)

The essay was "really about . . . the effective 'exhaustion' not of language or of literature but of the aesthetic of high modernism" (71). Barth claims that "the modernists, carrying the torch of romanticism, taught us that linearity, rationality, consciousness, cause and effect, naive illusionism, transparent language, innocent anecdote, and middle-class moral conventions are not the whole story" (70), but that the contraries of these things -- "disjunction, simultaneity, irrationalism, anti-illusionism, self-reflexiveness, medium-as-message, political olympianism, and a moral pluralism approaching moral entropy-- . . . are not the whole story either" (70). And the whole story is what Barth seeks, as he proclaims that "[a] worthy program for postmodernist fiction . . . is the synthesis or transcendence of these antitheses" (70; emphasis added). Through that synthesis or transcendence, Barth hopes that Presence will be attained in "[t]he ideal postmodernist novel" (70; emphasis added) and postmodernist fiction "might also be thought of one day as a literature of replenishment" (71), of rebirth, of redemption.

of Robert Kroetsch as the motivating force behind Canadian postmodernism: "In many ways it is probably redundant to call Robert Kroetsch a postmodernist; he is Mr Canadian Postmodern" (Hutcheon, 1988a: 160). Therefore, it is not surprising that in the Introduction to The Canadian Postmodern, the chapter in which she defines postmodernism, she quotes Kroetsch extensively and briefly discusses some of his novels as examples of postmodern works.

Hutcheon sees postmodernism as a "cultural form [which] began to appear in the seventies and eighties" in Canada (1). She allows that its definition "remains decidedly vague," but, in accord with Pache, she "glean[s] from the usage of the term [that] 'postmodernism' would seem to designate art forms that are fundamentally self-reflexive" (1). To her, the term 'self-reflexive' applies to

art that is self-consciously art (or artifice), literature that is openly aware of the fact that it is written and read as part of a particular culture, having as much to do with the literary past as with the social present. Its use of parody to echo past works signals its awareness that literature is made, first and foremost, out of other literature. (Hutcheon, 1988a: 1)

Recognizing that her definition could apply to modern and postmodern works and admitting the continuity between them, Hutcheon argues that "what distinguishes them . . . is that in the postmodern this self-consciousness of art as art is

paradoxically made the means to a new engagement with the social and historical world in such a way as to challenge (though not destroy) our traditional humanist beliefs about the function of art in society" (1-2).

According to Hutcheon, as to Pache, postmodern self-reflexivity finds its most apt expression through fragmentation and parody, techniques which render postmodernism paradoxical in that "it both sets up and subverts the powers and conventions of art" (2), using and abusing them in order to question both the "modernist search for order in the face of moral and social chaos" and "any realist notion of transparent reference" (2). Moreover, the paradoxes of postmodernism are not only artistic, but also political, concerned with an 'archaeological' stance which fragments the order and continuity sought by history and with "those contradictory acts of establishing and then undercutting prevailing values and conventions in order to provoke a questioning, a challenging of 'what goes without saying' in our culture" (3). Whereas modernism's self-consciousness and use of parody sought for order and/or truth, postmodernism's self-consciousness, its use of parody and irony, situates postmodern literature

squarely in the context of its own reading and writing as social and ideological actualities. For many Canadian novelists . . . the act of making fictions is an unavoidably ideological act, that is, a process of creating meaning within a social

context. . . . [M]uch Canadian fiction presents itself as investigating the relationship between art (and language) and what we choose to call 'reality', between the discourses of art and the structures of social and cultural power.
(Hutcheon, 1988a: 10)

I suppose it is postmodern irony which allows Hutcheon to so applaud the political stance of postmodernism here and in A Poetics of Postmodernism ("postmodernism is . . . inescapably political" (Hutcheon, 1988b: 4)), while, in another article, she writes: "'Feminism is a politics.' Postmodernism is not; it is certainly political, but it is politically ambivalent, doubly encoded as both complicity and critique" (Hutcheon, 1989a: 43).

In terms of Robert Kroetsch's aesthetically and politically postmodern stance, Stan Fogel refers to the irony which Hutcheon deems essential to Canadian postmodernism.

Kroetsch realizes [the ironic sensibility] is an attractive mode for one who juggles two antithetical national identities and their attendant aesthetics. It also appeals to one who is sensitive to the special qualities of self and state, but who also finds himself unable either to voice or even to accept the inherent truth of those entities in an unmitigated way. Irony precludes the prophetic or messianic voice; rather it encourages iconoclasm, irreverence. National and personal characteristics are never permitted to solidify, to acquire wholehearted assent. (Fogel, 1984c: 81)

This distinctly Kroetschian irony is inseparable from Kroetsch's fascination with dialectic and from his postmodernist project of simultaneously setting up and subverting conventions. It is "[t]he postmodern irony that refuses resolution of contraries -- except in the most provisional terms" (Hutcheon, 1988a: 4) and is "perhaps . . . the most apt mode of expression for what Kroetsch has called the 'total ambiguity that is so essentially Canadian: be it in terms of two solitudes, the bush garden, Jungian opposites'" (4). According to both Hutcheon and Kroetsch, only parody can produce this irony because it allows the postmodernist to both assert and undercut that which she or he contests; the paradoxes created by parody "'inscribe' and then negate subjectivity . . . they represent and then undo representation" (14; emphasis added). However, it is my contention that this 'inscribing and then negating' will only affirm and then reaffirm that which it means to challenge, because negation is the process by which 'differences' are set up as logical opposites, which can always be resolved by dialectic, and are so resolved, even when a dialectician such as Robert Kroetsch claims that his opposites are 'totally ambiguous' and irreconcilable.²⁷

²⁷ Peter Thomas notes indirectly the affirmative nature of negation in his comments upon "Kroetsch's comedy [which] is deeply attuned to the whole sensibility of neo- or Post-Modernism" (Thomas, 1980a: 98). Thomas notes the farcical nature of postmodern comedy and its relation to a 'comical' "current of apocalypticism" (98) which results from the postmodernist interest in chance. He concludes that "[c]hance inevitably produces farce in the abrupt collapse

Hutcheon's insistence upon postmodernism's dependence on paradox, which allows the simultaneous asserting and subverting of the subject, of representation, of socially constructed values and conventions, and so on, is typical of all writing on Canadian postmodernism. For example, Stan Fogel sees Kroetsch as one of Canada's few postmodernist writers in that "he recognizes demands for voice and identity, for a cultural framework, but he cannot capitulate to system, stability, or framework" (Fogel, 1984c: 80). Frank Davey writes that "the term 'postmodernism' has . . . [come] to denote not any specific literary movement . . . but the gamey, ontologically floating and simultaneously totalizing and decentralizing culture [Davey] had tried to name in 1973 [in From Here to There]" (Davey, 1988: 107; emphasis added). Brian Edwards also refers to postmodern asserting while subverting: "The artifice and power of the printed word, the authority of the writer to prescribe reality, and the consequent reminder that the text's presented versions of reality are fictions are all foregrounded in What the Crow Said" (Edwards, 1987a: 106-107). And Stephen Scobie invokes this postmodern paradox in his closing remarks at the "Future Indicative" conference: "Traditionally, in those long-distant mythological days

of our fictions of concordance. This may be disguised by a narrative order which conforms to chance (a kind of double negative); for instance, Backstrom's rain and his electoral victory provide an ending that appears to justify his chaos" (98-99; emphases Thomas's and mine).

Before Theory, the first word was the province of the poet, of that godlike Author whose death has been so thoroughly proclaimed" (Scobie in Moss, 1987: 239), and "the last word" was "the ambition of the critic" (240). But now,

if there's one thing that we can learn from contemporary movements in theory, from that moment of theory in which we now find ourselves, it is that there's no such thing as the last word: no summation, no totalizing formula, no closure. And the reason that there's no last word is that there's no first word either: no source, no origin, no *In Principio Erat Verbum*. Instead, we're all stuck somewhere in between, in the process of translation, trying to translate first words into last words, and vice versa.

(Scobie in Moss, 1987: 239)

To proclaim that there are neither first nor last words will not ensure that one has 'lost faith' either in those words or in their metaphysical implications, particularly when one is engaged in the process of translating "first words into last words, and vice versa." To see the end in the beginning and to restore the origin in the end has always been the project of Graeco-Christian thought, and to claim to be 'floating' in 'process' will not release us from the bondage of first or last words, or of origins or ends, however intensely we stress paradox, because paradox is the magical 'power' by which the 'translation' of which Scobie speaks has always been thought to be made possible.

Also, it would seem that in Derrida's honour Scobie has

entitled his 1989 collection of essays Signature Event Context, and its 'preface,' "Amorce: Always Already." In this collection, Scobie cites and discusses Derrida frequently and at length, devoting the 'preface' to a discussion of 'always already,' which he calls "one of the commonest phrases of poststructuralism" (Scobie, 1989: 1), citing occurrences of the term in Of Grammatology. The essays discuss other common phrases of poststructuralism such as "the death of the Author" (Ch. 1) and "the deconstruction of writing" (Ch. 2). 'Deconstruction of writing' makes no sense whatever in terms of Derrida's thought. What Derrida does is to rigorously contextualize the concepts, demonstrating how undecidability allows 'writing' and 'speech' to be differentiated from one another, while, at the same time, never allowing either to stand as a self-identical, self-sufficient entity, wholly separate from the other. If Scobie did so, he would not use the term 'deconstruction of writing.'

In Hutcheon's analysis of postmodernism, we are given to understand that postmodern self-reflexivity, unlike modern self-reflexivity, is very much concerned with challenging the concept of subjectivity, with debunking the notion of a self-sufficient, self-identical, fully present Self by revealing the socially constructed nature of our traditional notions of Self (which are predominantly and

dominantly male).²⁸ And Hutcheon, like Kroetsch, maintains that Canadians were particularly receptive to the paradoxes of postmodernism because Canadians, like women, had no real sense of selfhood or identity before the 1960's. Therefore, it is necessary that we first assert our identity before we are able, in a parodical, paradoxical, postmodern manner, to subvert 'the subject,' the humanist 'universal' which suppresses difference. That the second stage of this paradoxical gesture does not always occur in postmodern fiction, criticism, or theory becomes obvious in the final paragraph of Hutcheon's Introduction:

postmodernism . . . is the name we give to our culture's 'narcissistic' obsession with its own workings--both past and present. In academic and popular circles today, books abound that offer us new social models, new frameworks for our knowledge, new analyses of strategies of power. This phenomenon does betray a loss of faith in what were once the certainties, the 'master' narratives of our liberal humanist culture.²⁹ But that loss need

²⁸ That this postmodern project of debunking the Subject is to be accomplished through any form of self-reflexivity is problematic in that 'self-reflexivity' is inseparable from the notion of the perceiving consciousness, from the twentieth century phenomenological notion of the self as a consciousness. Self-reflexivity 'is' the moment of phenomenological intuition or pure consciousness, and is, therefore, just one more form of essentialism, through which the 'intentional Subject' is transcendentalized.

²⁹ "A loss of faith in our 'master' narratives' is, according to Jean-François Lyotard, the cause and guiding force behind postmodernism, and Robert Kroetsch also subscribes to this theory.

Also, "the narcissistic indulgence characteristic of

not be a debilitating one.
 (Hutcheon, 1988a: 23; emphasis added)

What Hutcheon does not see is that this loss is not debilitating precisely because it is not a loss; regardless of how 'new' they may be, 'frameworks for our knowledge' and the 'strategies of power' which are inseparable from those frameworks are precisely the concern of the male-dominated hegemony which has always sought and served to silence 'ex-centrics,' to exclude, deny, and repress difference.³⁰

Replacing old 'master' narratives, old 'frameworks' or

the literature of exhaustion [surfiction, metafiction]" (Ross, 1985: 65) inevitably leads to solipsism and, therefore, reaffirms "strategies of power," rather than subverting them.

³⁰ Interestingly, in her review of The Canadian Postmodern, Donna Pennee implies a similar blindness in Hutcheon's work on postmodernism and she claims that the "cumulative effect" of Hutcheon's process of defining Canadian Postmodernism "is to make the rubric useless, to dissolve the postmodern 'difference' into a disturbing sameness" (Pennee, 1990: 112); to put it another way, 'difference' is resolved and interred in 'identity.' Pennee describes Hutcheon's project as an attempt to save

various forms and degrees of what is loosely referred to as metafiction from its detractors. The first stage of the project insisted that the shift in fiction from mimesis to diegesis did not constitute a loss of the role that the mimetic was once believed to perform, but problematized and improved it by demanding greater and more aware reader participation in the production of the text. The greater didactic potential of such fiction has always been stressed in Hutcheon's comentaries. . . . Now, Hutcheon focuses on that didactic potential in postmodern art. (109)

(In "The Postmodern Scribe" (1984), for example, Hutcheon claims that "metafiction . . . proves to be a most didactic genre" (284).)

systems, and old 'strategies' with new ones leaves the structures of those systems intact, which allows power politics to dominate our thinking and our lives, just as they always have. That this is the case is suggested by the fact that Kroetsch's influence upon Hutcheon's views of postmodernism and her admiration for him compel her to define Canadian postmodernism in terms of Kroetsch's work and to call him "Mr Canadian Postmodern," which rings out the Canadian version of a knight's title. Hutcheon's declaiming Kroetsch as 'Mr Canadian Postmodern,' in juxtaposition with another of the very appropriate epithets applied to him -- 'Male: Robert Kroetsch'³¹ -- renders her lauding of Kroetsch somewhat confusing, in view of her claim that postmodernism is "a cultural practice that has actually been defined, in part, by the impact of feminism" (Hutcheon, 1988a: viii).³² As Donna Pennee points out, Hutcheon gives

³¹ "Male: Robert Kroetsch" is the title of Alan Twigg's 1981 interview with Kroetsch.

³² For Hutcheon's more thorough explication of the manner in which feminism has influenced postmodernism, see Hutcheon, "Incredulity Toward Metanarrative" (1989). In that article, she refers to Lyotard as she argues that "feminisms have successfully urged postmodernism to reconsider -- in terms of gender -- its anti-metanarrative challenges to that humanist 'universal' called 'Man' and have supported and reinforced its 'de-doxifying' of the separation between the private and the public, the personal and the political" (Hutcheon, 1989a: 43).

Another writer who sees Canadian postmodernism as political and influenced by feminism is Gail Scott, who writes:

the ethical function of the text has been underscored in a [postmodern] writing practice

Kroetsch "the first as well as the last word on the Canadian postmodern," and she questions Hutcheon's participating in "entrenching his already too-dominant place in the canon of Canadian letters, especially at the expense of the 'different,' the feminist, and the 'new engagement with the social and historical' that is supposed to be the 'postmodern'" (114). However, both Hutcheon and Kroetsch maintain that the latter's work is influenced by feminism, as do some other critics of his work.

Susan Rudy Dorscht's "Telling the Difference" "is a postfeminist rereading of 'woman,' with Robert Kroetsch's writing" (Rudy Dorscht, 1988b: iv). In that work, Rudy Dorscht differentiates between first, second, and third wave feminism, the first and second waves being concerned with women's suffrage and equal rights, and the third -- post-feminism -- being both "a lack of political energy among young women" and "a feminism that is quite rightly disillusioned with the discourse of 'equal rights,' the liberal political philosophy within which feminism has been inscribed" (5).

greatly concerned with deciphering the effects of social constructs in language. This emphasis on the relation between our [women's] struggles and writing-as-change has gained us . . . a new sense of what the essay is: a form deriving not only from the ideological, but also, the self-reflexive and the fictional. In other words, a text where the everyday, the political, the cultural meet, risking syntax in the process of positing and dissolving "meaning" (notably the traces of male dominance), and the (traditional female) subject.
(Scott, 1989: 10)

In order for certain kinds of change to be effected, feminism has had to assume the liberal humanist belief in a stable, unified subjectivity. But no matter how politically useful the appropriation of identity has been and continues to be, the future of feminist intellectual work depends on the simultaneous recognition that identity itself--for men or women --must be seen as an historically and culturally specific notion. . . . Apart from its unfortunate connotations in popular parlance, postfeminism can generate a useful space of difference within feminism because it does not take for granted the possibility or the desirability of fixed identity. . . . Postfeminism is like deconstructive feminism in that it attempts to destabilize predominantly male cultural paradigms. But postfeminism suggests further that what we think of as "male cultural paradigms" are constituted within a set of ideological practices--including literary practices--which are themselves contradictory, which already tell the differences within.

(Rudy Dorscht, 1988b: 6-7)

However, despite the fact that différance makes "male cultural paradigms" impossible as unfissured, fully present entities, while making them possible as effects, and despite Rudy Dorscht's perfectly correct claim that it is the thinking of Derridean différance which makes it possible for a postfeminist to uncover the contradictory nature of "male cultural paradigms" and to "tell the differences within," Rudy Dorscht actually works to dissolve difference and to reduce everything to identity, as does traditional Western thought. To put it another way, her readings of Kroetsch's

work celebrate "the ambiguity and contradiction"³³ of a world of both ands," as do "Kroetsch's texts" (30). The 'world of both ands' which she finds subversive and somehow 'incorporating' différance is the 'Hegelian world' in which we all live and in which Kroetsch "undermine[s] 'the' difference between men's and women's writing--between binary oppositions of all kinds" (19), undermining difference by resolving it, against 'his own intention,' in an identity which is, ultimately, always egocentric and male. Rudy Dorscht claims that Kroetsch "deliberately undermines authority, stability, identity, and gestures toward the position of the daughter." Yet, she supports this statement as follows: "'He' displays 'his' position of marginality--the marginality of all of us who speak--in order to point out the possibility of 'theirs' as always already his own: 'this is what it is/ to love daughters'" (83). The daughters' position, which second wave feminists would seek to call 'theirs,' is, to Kroetsch and to Rudy Dorscht, "always already his own." His property, his prerogative, his identity, his story.

Rudy Dorscht tells us that "third wave feminism [postfeminism] is, in Julia Kristeva's words, a 'signifying space' where 'the very notion of identity [of difference between] is challenged" (iv), and, by inserting "[of

³³ The reader will recall that ambiguity and contradiction are essentially metaphysical notions and are not synonymous with Derridean différance.

difference between]," she equates 'difference' with 'identity.' If, in fact, third wave feminists perceive 'difference between' as identical with 'identity,' how is it possible that postfeminism challenges "notions of self, origin, truth and meaning" (19) by deconstructing traditional notions of identity? Obviously, it cannot do so, regardless of how strenuously Rudy Dorscht "appropriates Jacques Derrida's metaphor of the 'post-postal letter' to de/scribe Kroetsch's most recent texts" (v; emphasis added).³⁴ In the end, the postfeminist theory and the "misreadings of 'Kroetsch's' writing" (84) which she offers appropriate Derridean différance in a gesture which justifies "male cultural paradigms" and reinforces the male-dominated hegemony by presenting the impossibility of those paradigms' standing as seamless, self-sufficient, fully present 'entities' as an 'alibi' -- an alibi which allows us to ignore and, thus, deny those same paradigms' effects.

Unlike Walter Pache and Linda Hutcheon, George Bowering claims not to subscribe to the idea that postmodernism is a reaction against modernism or an effect of its 'death.' In a way that is reminiscent of Yeats's 'theory of gyres' and that seems compatible with Derrida's concern with the 'undecidability' which makes it impossible to strictly

³⁴ This metaphor is not Jacques Derrida's. It is a term used by Greg Ulmer in his de/scribing of Derrida's The Post Card (1987), and Rudy Dorscht's appropriation of it fails to take account of Derrida's problematization of the notions of 'text' and 'metaphor.'

divide 'literary history' into periods, Bowering considers postmodernism "not simply a successor to the modern. It is a re-emergence of a tradition that has always existed" (Bowering, 1978: 32). At the same time, though, he is extensively engaged in periodization and in defining the differences distinguishing the postmodern from the modern. In "Modernism Could Not Last Forever," he claims that modernism is "ontological in purpose," whereas "post-modernism is epistemological," and, incidentally, "nineteenth-century fiction was teleological" (Bowering, 1979-80: 82).³⁵ He maintains that postmodern or post-realist fiction is unlike realist fiction in that it is not mimetic or representational, not a window on the world or a

³⁵ Interestingly, Brian McHale, another theorist of postmodernism, opines that "[t]he dominant of modernist writing is epistemological" (McHale, 1986: 58), and that the move from modernism to postmodernism is characterized by "the shift of dominant from problems of knowing to problems of modes of being--from an epistemological dominant to an ontological one" (59-60). He adds that:

Intractable epistemological uncertainty . . . becomes at a certain point ontological plurality or instability: push epistemological questions far enough and they 'tip over' into ontological questions. By the same token, push ontological questions far enough and they tip over into epistemological questions--the progression is not linear and one-way, but circular and reversible.

(60)

I would suggest that the crux of the question is not so much whether modernism is epistemological while postmodernism is ontological or vice versa, but rather, that both Bowering and McHale wish to present postmodernism as further removed from 'nineteenth century' teleology than is modernism. Unfortunately, both epistemology and ontology are 'tainted' by teleology, just as teleology is 'tainted' by ontology and epistemology.

reflection of the world, but, rather, a process through which the writer "create[s] what did not exist before" (Bowering, 1978: 26). With his emphasis on creation, Bowering implies that purely 'representational' fiction is essentially impossible, because "the only way a story can be told is fictively. . . . life is revealed as a fiction. Or . . . the only way we can entertain a meaning of life experience is in the recounting. For the reader, reality can only exist in the fiction" (27).

Like other Canadian poets, Bowering has "followed the direction of Olson . . . back to this Heideggerian emphasis on process" (Godard, 1984: 12), and that direction is shared by Kroetsch, despite Kroetsch's attempt to separate Canadian and American postmodernism. Their common interest in process is an interest in 'the telling of the story,' although Bowering more heavily emphasizes the fiction, whereas Kroetsch emphasizes the telling that makes us real. To both of these writers, process is very much a 'process of telling,' which leads them, in slightly different ways, to prioritize Voice.³⁶ Bowering maintains that "one of the

³⁶ This emphasis on process could as aptly be described as Kierkegaardian, Nietzschean, Heraclitan, or Hegelian: "For the real issue is not exhausted by stating it as an aim, but by carrying it out, nor is the result the actual whole, but rather the result together with the process through which it came about" (Hegel, 1977: 2-3).

In regard to the propensity of later Canadian poets to emphasize process, Barbara Godard notes that:

Little theoretical work on the question is to be found in Canadian periodicals: rather it is

delights of the new fiction has been the returning of interest in the verbal, even the vocal forms" (35), but his interest in the verbal is, on the surface, different from Kroetsch's. Whereas Kroetsch is concerned with "the only heroic act . . . the telling of the story" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 179) and is interested in the oral tradition because he is convinced that "we talk ourselves into existence" (Kroetsch, 1981g: 6; emphasis added), Bowering

located in the pages of Boundary 2. . . . Two issues are of special interest in focussing the lines of this criticism, that on Heidegger in 1976 [4.2] where Riddel continues his explorations in "From Heidegger to Derrida to Chance: Doubling and (Poetic) Language" and Spanos describes Heidegger's attempt to recall "forgotten being" in "Heidegger, Kierkegaard and the Hermeneutic Circle: Towards a Post-Modern Theory of Interpretation as Disclosure." More influential in regard to Canadian poets has been the issue devoted to oral poetics [4.2, 1976], stemming from Olson's concern with a return to "speech" and "breath," language marked by an irreducible doubleness, Logos or discourse, the return to language as an act of the instant, speech equalling performance, the "act" that shatters representation. (Godard, 1984: 12)

In discussing "the shift from phenomenology to deconstructionism that has occurred within Kroetsch's criticism" (14), Godard notes that "one senses a metaphysical presence in the valorization of absence. Silence holds the fullness of the ineffable, despite Kroetsch's determined 'effing'. . . . Moreover, the tendency of American deconstructionism is not without resemblances to the old 'new criticism'" (17; emphasis added), because American "deconstructionism [is] in constant danger of inversion, making a heaven out of hell, a presence out of absence" (18).

Incidentally, Douglas Barbour's and Dennis Duffy's more recent "Transformations of (the Language of) the Ordinary: Innovations in Recent Canadian Poetry" (1989) and "Losing the Line: The Field of Our Modernism" (1989), respectively, may also be of interest in this discussion of the Canadian poets' emphasis on process.

deems this return to the verbal important because "[t]he only thing real about language is the speaking of it, the act of the one voice" and "Voice, speech, is a means of bonding or asking; it is what connects people with one another & with the world, or reaching from the post-modern world, with the universe" (Bowering, 1978: 35). He claims his interest in this 'verbal' aspect of postmodern fiction is not ideological or political. In fact, he ascribes political intention to realist novelists, who "assumed that there was a real world one could make sense of & care enough about to want to correct. [They] therefore tried to make [their] realism convey the real world," but now, "[a] lot of novelists will agree that the real world is a fiction. . . . So why convey that? Why not make your own?" (36).

Just as authors should 'make [their] own' stories, so should critics make their own theories; Bowering wishes "that there be a little less application of theoretical systems, or perhaps the same amount of application, but of more people's systems -- in other words, fewer Bakhtinian readings of Canadian texts, for example, and more eccentric, unsystematized, unorganized readings according to personal, original theories" (Bowering in Moss, 1987: 242). Yet, even he says he wants "to deconstruct everything [he's] said until now and from now on" (241),³⁷ which indicates the

³⁷ This sort of 'deconstruction' would be essentially what Davey does in Reading Canadian Reading, which, as Lawrence Mathews implies, could just as appropriately have been entitled "Davey Reading Davey" (Mathews, 1990: 101).

ubiquity of 'deconstruction' in contemporary vocabulary.

But even though most definitions of postmodernism contain terms coined by Derrida -- 'deconstruct(ion),' 'différance,' 'undecidability,' and 'under erasure' -- and most Canadian postmodern theorists allude to him, Frank Davey is the one who most openly discusses what he sees as Derrida's importance to postmodernism. He notes that

questions concerning the relative priority of speech and writing have appeared frequently in Canadian writing since 1960, both anticipating and echoing Derrida's 1967 comments on logocentric and phonocentric elements in Western culture. At issue here has been the location of meaning--whether it pre-exists an utterance or text, is produced by that utterance or text, or is produced by its recipient. Our culture's tendency . . . has been to view the written text as a poor copy of a prior transcendent meaning . . . and to view the spoken word as 'closer' to transcendent meaning than the written word. The emphasis on poetry as an oral event, found in the sixties in . . . diverse Canadian poetries . . . argued a different sense of the spoken word not as encoding any transcendent and prior intention but as constituting an intrinsically significant act of speech. Meaning was to be created in the act of speaking. (Davey, 1988: 109)

Davey's emphasis on the significance of the speech act, with his insistence that "meaning is created in the act of speaking," does exactly what Kroetsch's emphasis on the oral tradition does. It prioritizes Voice, just as "our culture's tendency," our traditional mode of thought, has always done.

And the "logocentric and phonocentric elements in Western culture" are left undisturbed. This phonocentric 'preference,' which is common to all of Canadian postmodernism, is concomitant with the postmodern emphasis on process, as Peter Thomas has noted in regard to "Kroetsch's more recent claims for the value of the oral tradition in his own development" (Thomas, 1980a: 13): "the understanding of 'story' is that of the spontaneous act of narrative structure and not the repeated traditional tale. The conventions of such narrative depend heavily upon voice and performance and even audience participation" (13). Hence the postmodern concern with the 'active reader.'

So far as I have been able to discover, Kroetsch does not offer a concise definition of postmodernism. However, in Labyrinths of Voice, he discusses his postmodern novels and philosophy, telling how his ideas and methods differ from those of modernists. According to Kroetsch, Canadian writing abounds with postmodern works, whereas modern Canadian works are scarce.

I don't see much Modernism in our [Canadian] literature. Sheila Watson is an obvious exception. We came into contemporary writing with relative ease because we didn't have an Eliot or a Pound to deal with. There is a gap between older Canadian writing and most contemporary work. . . . Modernism was a product of a high urban civilization and we just didn't have any. There is a strong Victorian influence that lingers in Canadian writing right on through the 1920's. . . . But McLuhan seems to

emerge suddenly as a postmodernist figure, with little or nothing to prepare his way. He illustrates what I mean by saying that we came into contemporary writing easily. I think that has been because we had little contact with Modernism but also because we have. . . . basically an open, discontinuous system of communication. . . . having always had to deal with gaps and spaces.³⁸ Our national disconti-

³⁸ McLuhan will not be discussed in this dissertation, but it should be noted that 'gaps and spaces' are exactly what a 'communication system' attempts to close or cover up; there can be no such thing as an open system, because a system is a structure of closure; as for a 'discontinuous communication system,' I have no idea what Kroetsch means to say, but unless contact is made and the spaces are closed by some continuous line, again, no communication occurs. As Derrida says,

[The notion of] communication . . . implies a transmission charged with making pass, from one subject to another, the identity of a signified object, of a meaning or of a concept rightfully separable from the process of passage and of the signifying operation. Communication presupposes subjects . . . and objects. (Derrida, 1981d: 23)

Interestingly, Linda Hutcheon refers to McLuhan's thought, calling him "the sixties' prophet of the new folk orality in the electronic global village . . . Canada's own contribution to Derrida's 'phonocentric' conspiracy" (Hutcheon, 1984: 288). She goes on to say that "contemporary Canadian novelists . . . despite themselves, I suspect, are McLuhan's true spiritual heirs. They too come out of the contradictory, neo-Romantic, anti-establishment sixties" (289). But she manages to find irony in McLuhan's celebration of 'the invention of writing' as "the step from the dark [of the mind, where all backward peoples still live] into the light of the mind" (289). She claims that "it is hard not to be aware of the ironic way McLuhan has chosen to get across his message" (289) and then proceeds to posit his 'irony' as the factor which redeems contemporary Canadian novelists from the accusation of neo-Romanticism with which she had tainted them. According to her, these novelists who are

looking, often desperately, to auditory models for metaphors of the immediacy of artistic process [Romantic?] . . . are not guilty of what Derrida

nuities made us ripe for Postmodernism.
 (Kroetsch in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 111-12)
 (emphasis added)

Throughout this extended interview, Robert Kroetsch, Shirley Neuman, and Robert Wilson offer statements about postmodernism, and some of them are as follows:

A Postmodernist resists overriding systems, ideologies like Marxism, Thomism, Darwinianism and religious or political ideologies.
 (Kroetsch, 31; indirect quotation)

The Modernist was tempted by the cohesive dimension of mythology, while the Postmodernist is more tempted by those momentary insights that spring up here and there. . . . And that does not provide the organizing principle of a narrative. (Kroetsch, 112)

Postmodernism hypothesizes discontinuity and différance as the condition of the text. (Neuman, 196)

The spirit of high Modernism was to assert the validity of a single cosmology and, with it, closure.
 (Kroetsch, 28) In reaction against this assertion, the postmodernists propose that intertextuality is "a whole set of cosmologies that in turn become another elaboration of each other."
 (Kroetsch, 10)

would see as a resurrecting of the myth of the authenticity of the spoken word. Rather, what they set up and investigate is a dialectic between the written and the oral, or, as we have seen, more generally, between the static and the dynamic, always aware of the similar double nature of their texts' very production: the experience-fixing art of writing . . . and the reactivating one of reading. (289)

Postmodernism is a reaction against the
 conception of the artist as Artist.
 "I'm not an artist, I'm a **writer**."
 (Kroetsch, 195-96)

In serious Postmodernist writers' work:

[M]imesis becomes ironic, or self-
 reflexive, and, therefore, subsumed
 under the act of telling. (Neuman, 200)

Perhaps we are mimetic, nowadays, under
 erasure. (Kroetsch, 201)

[There is] an emphasis on the act of
 narrating over signification. This would
 certainly seem to be a reaction against the
 conventions of mimesis in the novel.
 (Neuman, 199)

[There is] a concentration on the
 signifier over the signified and a
 similar split in the idea of the self .
 . . it seems difficult for the
 postmodernist writer to conceive of a
 unified self. (Neuman, 207)

A wonderful sense of incompleteness.
 (Kroetsch, 204)

Apparently, a postmodern writer is unfettered by
 ideology or adherence to totalizing systems -- including a
 totalizing subjectivity -- but is concerned with self-
 reflexivity, 'mimesis under erasure,' and "différance as the
 condition of the text." The emergence here of the terms
 'under erasure' and 'différance' points to the generally
 accepted idea that Kroetsch has his "philosophical roots in
 [various later philosophers] and especially Derrida"
 (Hutcheon, 1988a: 160). If Kroetsch's thinking were
 especially influenced by Derrida, his work would take

account of 'undecidability,' in the Derridean sense, and would, in fact, be radical and subversive of our traditional modes of thought. However, his thinking is dialectical, his mode of 'resistance' is negation, and his thought is, therefore, metaphysical: dependent upon and supportive of the thinking patterns he means to resist. That this is so is strongly suggested by his closing comments in Future Indicative: "I think criticism and theory are a writing of the culture--and I like the pun there, a 'righting' of the culture--because when we simply have books we don't yet have a culture" (Kroetsch in Moss, 1987: 244). Writing? Righting? Getting it right? As opposed to wrong, or left? Putting it right? As Robert Kroetsch does in his criticism, which writes (rights) Canadian literary history and is nationalistic, narcissistic, and "very radically storymaking" (cited in Hutcheon, 1988a: vii) -- an effort to 'make' or to "have a culture."

Frank Davey is also concerned with 'writing as culture,' and is concerned more with the sociological aspects of postmodernism than with the literary.³⁹ But the

³⁹ This is what Davey says that he finds he was arguing for in From There to Here (1974), which is interesting, in view of his opening remarks in Surviving the Paraphrase (1983), where he writes the following:

It is a testimony to the limitations of Canadian criticism that thematic criticism should have become the dominant approach to English-Canadian literature. In its brief lifetime, Canadian criticism has acquired a history of being reluctant to focus on the literary work--to deal with matters of form, language, style, structure,

difference between the sociological and literary characteristics of postmodernism can be resolved because, as Davey sees it, the two are compatible, even inseparable.

Sociologically, this postmodernism is characterized by fragmentation and multiplication, by the relativity of authority, by the problematic growth of global 'multi-national' structures which paradoxically both alienate local humanity . . . and demand its assent and participation. In writing (understood not as the creation of literary objects but as one of society's many ways both of declaring itself and of conducting its ideological conflicts) it is characterized by a multiplicity of aesthetics and discourses, by decentred, discontinuous forms, by processes rather than structures.

(Davey, 1988: 106; emphasis added)

Apparently, Robert Kroetsch meets the sociological and the literary requirements of postmodernism, for Davey seems to consider him a model postmodernist. In the essay in which he uses the "Future Indicative" conference on contemporary Canadian literary theory as a vehicle through which to "comment on the state of Canadian criticism, on its still

and consciousness as these arise from the work as a unique construct. . . . Even the New Criticism's espousal of autotelic analysis did not move Canadian critics in this direction. . . .

Most of the weaknesses of thematic criticism stem from its origin in Arnoldian humanism, a tradition in which both the critic and the artist have a major responsibility to culture. . . . The focus of such criticism invariably rests outside the writing--on "literature," "culture," [and so on]. (Davey, 1983b: 1-3)

frequent lack of awareness of its own assumptions" (Davey, 1988: 17), Davey posits "Carnival and Violence" (1982) as the exemplary antidote to New Criticism, which "visibly elaborated and systematized elitist and paternalist views of university education," and to "[u]nitary theories such as those of Graff, Jung or Todorov [which] serve a residual humanism in our culture which would defend both a single concept of humanity and the efficacy of an analytical vision of knowledge" (11).

Davey's call for changes in Canadian criticism is a constant in his writing, as, for example, in "Atwood Walking Backwards" (1973; a review of Surfacing and Survival), From Here to There (1974), "Surviving the Paraphrase" (1974), Surviving the Paraphrase (1983), the Introduction to Open Letter's Robert Kroetsch: Essays (1983), and Reading Canadian Reading (1988). Responses to this call possibly include: the "Minus Canadian" issue of Studies in Canadian Literature (2.2, 1977), with the introduction ("Mandatory Subversion Manifesto: Canadian Criticism vs. Literary Criticism") in which Barry Cameron and Michael Dixon echo and expand upon Davey's comments in "Surviving the Paraphrase"; the "Beyond Nationalism" issue of Mosaic (24.2, 1981; "The Canadian Literary Scene in Global Perspective"), with a preface by Robert Kroetsch; and the issue of Essays on Canadian Writing (11, 1978) which includes a section on Kroetsch as well as Russell M. Brown's "Critic, Culture, Text: Beyond Thematics" and an editorial in which Jack David

and Robert Lecker respond favourably to Brown's article while adding that "[t]he contents of this issue of Essays on Canadian Writing also demonstrate the exploration of critical areas beyond Brown's suggestions" (6).

As Barbara Godard points out in "Other Fictions: Robert Kroetsch's Criticism" -- a paper describing "[t]he history of Kroetsch's publications" as "the unfolding history of the 'new new criticism' of Canadian Literature" (Godard, 1984: 9) -- the debate between the old thematic criticism and the new new criticism crystallized in 1974, the catalyst being Frank Davey's "Surviving the Paraphrase." At that time, "the death of the subject" (9) was the major focus of this debate, as it has continued to be throughout the almost two decades in which have emerged the various theories of Canadian postmodernism I have discussed. From the beginning of this 'controversy' or 'development,' the criticism, theory, and creative work of Robert Kroetsch has been and continues to be of paramount importance to everyone involved with Canadian postmodernism in literature. However, before considering Kroetsch's work per se, I would like to look more closely at the attention his work has received from his colleagues throughout this turbulent period.

Chapter Four

'Field Notes': Robert Kroetsch and the Critics

Robert Kroetsch's criticism and creative writing were considered so influential in the 'development' of Canadian postmodernism that in 1978 a section of one number of Essays on Canadian Writing was devoted to him, opening with his review of Harrison's Unnamed Country (1977), followed by three articles on his fiction, and preceded by an editorial in which the editors herald the change in direction which sounds the death knell of thematic criticism, most of which, according to them, can be easily dismissed as "dross" (ECW 11: 5-6). Their gesture was repeated and very much enlarged when, in 1983 and 1984, Frank Davey and bp Nichol devoted two numbers of Open Letter to Kroetsch's work, a single issue of his critical essays and a double issue of essays on his creative work. In his Introduction to the 1983 issue, Davey refers to Kroetsch's essays as "provocative incitements to read" (Davey, 1983c: 7), outstanding examples of postmodern criticism. He describes and applauds the essays, explaining why they are radically different from the criticism to which we had been accustomed.

In [Kroetsch's] critical approach the text must inevitably be 'misread'; Kroetsch treats it as a code subject to time and space, a code that changes as the moment of its creation recedes in time, as it moves from country to country, room to room; each reading

occurs in a new spatio-temporal context; in each reading the text must interact with new circumstances, a new reader. To use Kroetsch's own terminology, each reading 'reinvents' the text, each act of criticism responds not to an objectively existent and timeless textual object but to an evolving text and a subjective process of reading.

Although these are anything but essays that invoke authority, other than that of their own perceptions, Kroetsch's occasional mention of Heidegger and borrowings from Derridian [sic] critical vocabulary ('deconstruction', 'delay', 'trace', 'archaeology'⁴⁰) tell us from what philosophical tradition his criticism springs.⁴¹ (Davey, 1983c: 7)

⁴⁰ 'Archaeology' is not a Derridean but a Foucauldian term. Apparently, Davey equates Derridean deconstruction and Foucauldian archaeology, as do many other critics and theorists. (See, for example, Barbara Godard (1984), particularly page 8, where she lists both Foucault and Derrida under "deconstructionism.")

⁴¹ In "Deconstructing Derrida," Bernard Harrison describes the "basic statement of the critical theory of 'deconstruction', as that term has come to be understood among English-speaking literary critics" (Harrison, 1985: 3):

1. No text has a determinate meaning.
2. A text, though it may refer to other texts, refers to nothing extratextual.
3. Equally legitimate interpretations of a text may be incompatible with one another, or just have nothing in common.
4. Since a text gives no access to the conscious states of its author, it gives no access to authorial consciousness tout court, and therefore cannot be taken as in any sense a communication from author to reader.
5. The job of the critic is not to explain what a text means, but to elaborate it into a new text. (3)

The defenders of this 'new critical orthodoxy' recommend it "primarily on philosophical grounds, and the philosophical support in question is taken to come most importantly from the work of Jacques Derrida" (4). Harrison argues that "Theses (1)-(5) can be shown to be strictly incompatible with Derrida's philosophical position, if his work is read

The much celebrated 'death of the author' has led to a theory of 'misreading' which is believed to be subversive of the privilege and authority traditionally granted to the author. But how subversive can a theory be if it merely transports authorial privilege, or authority, from the author to the reader? Neither the concept of the Subject nor its privileged status has in any way been displaced; we have merely accomplished a reversal through which the reader is now at the centre, and worse, the reader is invited, even encouraged, to indulge herself in readings which need not adhere to the 'text.' That is, Davey finds it commendable that the text tells a story that "is not quite as Bob tells it" (Djwa (1979), quoted in Davey, 1983c: 7).⁴²

Not long after Open Letter published the issues by and about Kroetsch, Arnold and Cathy Davidson took exception to Stan Fogel's stating "that the Canadian novel is out of tune with the avant-garde tenor of the times and needs to be more experimental" (Davidson and Davidson, 1984-85: 63). In

as a connected body of thought, rather than just used as a convenient quarry from which to extract exhilaratingly sceptical obiter dicta" (4). He observes that "'[a]ctive' reading does not for Derrida . . . mean subjective reading" (22) of the sort which Davey here recommends.

⁴² This 'active role' of the reader is also stressed by Linda Hutcheon, who attempts to dissolve the privilege of the subject by making the writer and reader co-producers of meaning: "Reading becomes an act of philosophical puzzling as well as one of co-creation" (Hutcheon, 1988a: 17); "The meaning of the past is not coherent, continuous, or unified -- until we [writers and readers] make it so" (16). So where is the discontinuity, fragmentation, and disunity that postmodernism celebrates if we writers and readers together produce 'coherent, continuous, unified meaning'?

protesting against Fogel's criticism by examining Gone Indian (along with Aquin's L'Antiphonaire) as an experimental, avant-garde novel, they quote from Kroetsch -- "It is hard to hear a new voice, as hard as it is to listen to an unknown language. Where does the voice come from? What is it trying to tell us? Why do we resist hearing?" (Kroetsch (1978a), quoted in Davidson and Davidson, 1984-85: 163) -- noting that Fogel's preconceptions prevent him from hearing "whatever new voices may be sounding in the land" (163).⁴³ They "argue that Aquin and Kroetsch are two of Canada's most impressive novelists (postmodern or otherwise)" and say they "have chosen L'Antiphonaire and Gone Indian to represent . . . the originality of Canada's best experimental fiction" (164), fiction which

eschews realism, linear plot designs, and conventional first- or third-person renditions of action and presentation of detail. . . . regularly employs deceiving and self-deceived narrators in order to test, in the fiction itself, the limits of fiction, of the word, of the world. . . . explore[s] the boundaries between present and past, history and fiction, teller and tale, story and silence. Particularly in their use of titles (which countermand any notion of simple 'labelling'), setting (the sense of place and no-

⁴³ It is probable that when the Davidsons submitted the article positing Kroetsch as an example of the Canadian avant-garde of which they claim Fogel is unaware, Fogel's A Tale of Two Countries (1984) was not yet published. In that book, he devotes a chapter to Kroetsch as a "Figure of Rapprochement" whose work is experimental and 'new.'

place), characterization (the I and the Other, the Not-I and the double who is and is not the Other), narrative structure (deconstructed), and ending (the anticlimax with which each text implodes), L'Antiphonaire and Gone Indian are . . . landmarks of Canadian experimental fiction.
(Davidson and Davidson, 1984-85: 164)

The Davidsons claim that "each author is passionately concerned with the 'reality' of fiction and the 'fictionality' of everything else. . . . [T]hey double-speak the same parodic language of fictive disorder" (176). That language of disorder, parody, and doubleness is exactly the 'language' that Kroetsch had described as postmodern in interviews and essays,⁴⁴ the language which, according to the Davidsons, "indicates that Canada does have its avant-garde writers just where they should be -- out in front of the rest exploring through calculated transgressions the boundaries of fiction" (176)... Boundaries. 'The space between.' The Kroetschian paradigm which "emerges when . . . matched pairs meet and interact. . . . [to produce] a borderline world rendered metaphorically as a 'double hook' . . . which place[s] the 'equally matched opposites' . . . in relation to a . . . middle line" (Lecker, 1986: 6).

In the Preface to his book on Kroetsch, Robert Lecker also refers to the influence Kroetsch has had on our

⁴⁴ See, for example, Kroetsch in Kroetsch and Gravel, 1970; Kroetsch, 1971c; Kroetsch, 1971f; Kroetsch in Brown, 1972; in Cameron, 1973; Kroetsch, 1974a; Bessai and Kroetsch, 1978; in Brahms, 1980; in Neuman and Wilson, 1982.

readings of Canadian literature.

Robert Kroetsch has transformed our perception of Canadian literature. As a novelist and poet he has articulated new visions of Canadian experience that are distinctly at odds with those held by any of his predecessors. And as a critic he has posed vital, challenging questions about Canadian writing that have initiated a reexamination of the standards and perspectives from which Canadian literature is judged.

(Lecker, 1986: 'Preface' n.p.)

He refers to the critics' reading Kroetsch according to Kroetsch, noting "the extent to which Kroetsch's own novels and narrative theories have influenced his critics" (123).

[R]ecent criticism of Kroetsch's poetry, unlike the early commentary on his novels, tends to be inspired by Kroetsch's current critical pronouncements.⁴⁵ We find

⁴⁵ I do not agree that early critics of Kroetsch's novels did not read Kroetsch according to Kroetsch. For example, see "Robert Kroetsch and his Novels" (Ross, 1973), in which the entire commentary is directed by two quotations from Kroetsch, one from Creation and one from Alberta. These quotations reflect Kroetsch's concern with "re-creating experience in language" (101) and with "the process of naming" (108), concerns which had, at that time, also emerged in "The Canadian Writer and the Literary Tradition" (1971) and "Writing from Prairie Roots" (1971).

Also, see "Uninventing Structures" (Ann Mandel, 1978), in which Kroetsch is quoted in regard to the writer's responsibility to name, which has, by this time, become the writer's "task to unname" (Kroetsch (1973h), quoted in Mandel, 1978: 53). 'Naming by unname' and 'uncreating oneself into existence' (56) are the inseparable topics of "Unhiding the Hidden," and Mandel's discussion centres around Kroetsch's proposed "radical invention of the Canadian's past, a decomposition of all systems of language

poststructural and deconstructionist readings of his early poems, phenomenological rereadings of his long poems, reader-response critiques of his intertextual narratives, talk of fragments, différance, and meaning deferred. My (partial) list is meant to suggest the extent to which an accomplished writer-theorist can instill a new critical vocabulary in a receptive audience. There is no question that this new vocabulary--and the radical theories it implies--does free our sense of text and allow us to see literature, and particularly Canadian literature, from entirely new perspectives.

(Lecker, 1986: 123)

Somehow, Lecker's lauding of the 'new critical vocabulary,' 'the radical theories it implies,' and the 'entirely new perspectives' from which Kroetsch has allowed us to view Canadian literature implies a sense of 'progress' which we also find in Kroetsch's writing. Another aspect of this same notion of progress is the informing principle of Lecker's book, an excellent study of Kroetsch's work in

which threaten to define him and his literature, an unlearning of myth, metaphor, tradition, an uninvention of the world, and an uncreation of the self" (53) in "[a] demand for authenticity" which, Mandel claims, in accord with Kroetsch, "is not a demand for explanation" (68).

Furthermore, see "The Oral Tradition and Contemporary Fiction" (Godard, 1977) for an example of a critic's using Kroetsch's ideas about the oral tradition (from Kroetsch's comments in the Cameron interview (1978) and Creation (1970)) as a basis for reading not only his work (The Studhorse Man), but also, the work of Robertson Davies, Roch Carrier, Anne Hébert, and others.

As I see it, the major difference between Kroetsch's earlier and later critics is that the latter have laced Kroetsch's 'archaeological,' 'intertextual,' and 'deconstructive' theory with citations from Foucault, Kristeva, Derrida, and so on.

terms of his 'development' as a writer. Lecker discusses the novels in pairs, "with the obvious exception of Alibi, which has yet to be followed by its 'mate'" (Lecker, 1986: 21). Each pair is discussed in terms of one of Kroetsch's interrelated 'principles' or themes (such as 'the border,' 'unnaming,' and so on), and his parallel development as a poet is discussed in the penultimate chapter. In order to explicate his creative development, Lecker begins from the traditional premise "that there is an aesthetic centre in Kroetsch's work, a crucial tension which haunts him and influences everything he writes. The terms used to describe this tension [terms such as 'border' and so on] shift as Kroetsch's art develops, but the basic situation remains the same" (148; emphasis added). Lecker's thesis is that Kroetsch's work 'develops' or 'progresses' in tandem with his abandoning the dualities which define the tension that is central to his theory and his creative writing -- an abandonment which Lecker sees as reaching a climax in Crow; yet Lecker describes that abandonment in terms which depend upon binaries and upon the victorious conclusion inherent in any notion of binary opposition: "the central narrator is gone, the text is disembodied, fabulation takes precedence over observation, innovation seems to win" (150; emphasis added). Paradoxically, he deems "Kroetsch's weakest novel" (150) to be Crow, the one in which he achieves that for which Lecker claims he had been striving; it is the weakest "because [Kroetsch] kicks free too much, too often" (150).

Lecker concludes that "[t]his may be why [Kroetsch] returned to the predominantly binary form so central to Alibi, his first attempt to apply the concept of erotic delay to a full-length novel" (150).⁴⁶

This celebration of progress and the success with which it is necessarily associated -- notions perfectly in keeping with traditional metaphysical thought -- seem to me to cohabit rather uneasily with the postmodernists' declared rejection of metaphysics' traditional (patriarchal, nationalistic, capitalistic) linear and exploitative cult of the individual, the Self, the Subject. However, the reverence with which Kroetsch regards progress (and success) is shared by most of his critics, from those whose work appeared as early as, for example, 1978, through Arnold and Cathy Davidson, who find Canada's "avant-garde writers just where they should be -- out in front of the rest" (cited on 83), to those who publish even as I am writing.

Geert Lernout praises the progressiveness of Kroetsch's work in an essay which studies Crow "as an example of a new novelistic form that follows the post-modernist 'novel of exhaustion' and that seems to be, at least partly, a reaction to it" (Lernout, 1985b: 52). According to Lernout, "the plot has all but disappeared" in the novel of exhaustion" (nouveau roman), whereas, in the new novelistic

⁴⁶ Peter Thomas also suggests that Crow is "perhaps the end of one line of [Kroetsch's] development" (Thomas, 1980a: 124).

form (nouveau nouveau roman), the authors "fill every nook with plots, subplots, stories, bits of gossip. Their navels carry the seeds for a hundred potential novels and this makes them narcissistic" (52).⁴⁷ But these new narcissistic novels, unlike the older novels, do not concern themselves with "subjective, urban experience" (52), and, "while the earlier post-modern novel was predominantly intellectual . . . [and] self-conscious about its written quality, the [new form] is often explicitly rooted in oral tradition" (53). Although "'traditional' post-modern novels" and the new post-modern novels are all "written from the point of view of a third-person narrator" -- which leaves me wondering how Lernout would categorize The Studhorse Man and Gone Indian -- the new narrator "does not personalize himself either as writer of the fiction . . . or as first-person participant in the narrative" (53). But finally and most importantly "the self-contained nature of the [new] novel . . . becomes clear in its apocalyptic ending: in one magisterial gesture, the author closes his story and dissolves the world he has created" (53). How this magisterial gesture is possible for a narrator who 'does not personalize himself' is inexplicable to me, as is Lernout's claim that the 'earlier post-modern novels,' concerned with 'subjective experience,'

⁴⁷ Interestingly, one of the chief characteristics of the novel of exhaustion was said to have been its narcissistic nature. See, for example, MacKendrick, 1978; Hutcheon, 1980; and Thomas, 1980b.

are not narcissistic.⁴⁸ However, these problems are not my concern. What interests me is the fact that postmodernism, for all its proponents' talk of discontinuity, is every bit as caught up as modernism is with the idea of progress, and 'progress' is inseparable from notions of linearity and continuity as well as from the hierarchical structuring of binary pairs which makes possible the notion of 'success' over one's own other (or one's precursors).

Of course, the resolution of binary pairs is thought to be prevented by the postmodern (paradoxical) practice of asserting and subverting, and Robert Wilson alludes to that practice, referring to Robert Kroetsch's Alibi and Murray Bail's Homesickness; these texts "are unmistakably national: they exude their national cultures. They also transcend their obvious national affiliations" (Wilson, 1988: 93). How is this postmodern celebration of 'exuding' and 'transcending' different from the traditional critic's search for the 'universal' in the 'particular' or the 'regional'? 'Coherence in paradox' has always been the aim of traditional criticism, as of all traditional thought -- the dialectical, metaphysical thought in which criticism

⁴⁸ Interestingly, Lernout discusses the narcissistic nature of the "nouveau nouveau roman" in terms of the typology developed by Linda Hutcheon to discuss metafiction, the novelistic form which Lernout claims the "new post-modern novel" succeeds. "The typology was first developed in an article in Poetique, 29 (February 1977), 90-106, and then published as the first chapter of Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox [Hutcheon, 1980]" (Lernout, 1985b: 63, fn. 3).

grounds itself as the philosophy of literature.

Similarly, Stephen Scobie discusses one of Kroetsch's poems in terms of 'signature as performative,' ending thus:

It is . . . an act (of breath, of speech, of mourning) which Robert Kroetsch performs in the lovely poem "The Poet's Mother," which closes Advice to my Friends. "In the death of my mother," he writes, "I recite my name." My name: the name that lives on, the name of survival. It is (Kroetsch) the father's name; but in the mode of this poem, the mode of mourning, it is the mother's name, on which he lives. It comes back to him, revenant; it is what he comes back to. He comes back to it in order to recite it. He quotes the name, out of the archive and genealogy of mourning, a name which is already there. He requotes it, as a recitation, a name which is always already there. It is the site of quotation, the insight which incites us to write.

(Scobie, 1989: 164-65)

'The name of survival' is the survival of the father's name, the name 'loaned' to the mother, the 'proper name' through which the son returns to the father, even as, by ascribing the father's name to the mother, the son figuratively 'performs' the necessary parricide by which he is to achieve his 'proper,' self-sufficient identity. And he comes back to the 'mother's name' in order to cite it, recite it, say it, perform it, make it properly his own. On the 'site of quotation,' the omphalus at which the questing hero is inspired or 'incited' to write. Despite the lip-service Scobie pays to Derrida's rigorous problematizing of the

metaphysical implications of the proper name, his conclusion is a perfectly traditional affirmation of the subjectivity and privileged Voice to which the postmoderns are devoted.

Like other postmodern critics (not only Canadian), Brian Edwards equates Derrida's thought with that of Barthes, Bloom, and Kristeva (Edwards, 1987a: 92). To his credit, he does differentiate between Derrida and Foucault (93), if only to posit Foucault's archaeology as more 'optimistic' than Derrida's deconstruction, in that it "emphasizes the possibility of locating the historical condition of signifiers and particular realities of discourse" (93), thus providing "provisional insights into discursive formations and holds upon the play of textuality" (107). Edwards, like Davey and Kroetsch, is sufficiently embarrassed by the 'destabilisation of the sign' to claim an interest only in provisional meaning, just as Hutcheon claims that Kroetsch's binaries are only provisionally resolved (cited on 55), and he, like all Canadian postmodernists, emphasizes process in an attempt to resist the closure and totalization that 'meaning' implies (106). But Edwards and his colleagues do not recognize that traditional modes of thought are not as static as Kroetsch claims they are. Process has never been denied by metaphysics and, in fact, was stressed as strenuously by Hegel as it is by postmodern theorists.

Also, like Kroetsch, Edwards equates Derridean

'undecidability' with 'indeterminacy.'⁴⁹ None of the postmodernists mentioned in this chapter recognizes that Derrida's deconstruction is not Bloom's, that Derridean 'deconstruction' is not something one does to a text, whether one is a critic, a poet, or a novelist, and, finally, that 'recent critical methodologies' cannot be thought of as equivalent or identical with Derrida's thought, because none of them -- for example, Foucault's archaeology, Bloom's 'anxiety of influence,' or Kristeva's 'intertextuality' -- takes account of 'undecidability.'

That Robert Kroetsch has been highly influential in defining or determining the shape of Canadian postmodernism is attested to by his colleagues' numerous accolades to him. Another sign of his privileged position is the alacrity with which his colleagues follow Walter Pache in hailing him as the major force behind Canadian postmodernist literary practices and theories. For example, Barbara Godard claims that "Kroetsch's criticism led the way" (Godard, 1987: 43) for Canadian deconstructive criticism. Also, in the Introduction to Future Indicative, the printed version of a conference on Canadian postmodern literary theory, John Moss says of the arrangement of the conference's agenda that "[i]t seemed both reasonable and aesthetically pleasing to situate George Bowering and Robert Kroetsch at the beginning and the end of things" (Moss, 1987: 2). So does Linda

⁴⁹ See particularly Kroetsch, 1989b and Edwards, 1985.

Hutcheon 'situate' Robert Kroetsch 'at the beginning and the end of things' in The Canadian Postmodern.

But of the many proofs of the esteem with which Robert Kroetsch's colleagues regard his ground-breaking work, not least is the tendency of his critics to posit Kroetsch himself as the 'authority' according to whom his work is to be read. For example, his importance as a leading figure in contemporary Canadian literature led to Peter Thomas's excellent "introductory study" (Thomas, 1980a: 120) of his work. Thomas follows the bent that Kroetsch's critics had followed and still continue to follow: that is, to read his work according to his own proclaimed intentions (and, for later critics such as Brian Edwards, according to his theoretical interests). Thomas's "wish has been to be true to Kroetsch's imagination, as [Thomas understands] it, and to make [Kroetsch's] emphases [his]" (120). He goes on to say that

Kroetsch is a self-consciously literary, eclectic and critically engaged writer whose main field of intellectual reference is to what, for want of a better term, is described as Post-Modernism. What that means, how Kroetsch's imagination constructs its symbols, what the obsessive motifs are which control his sense of form -- these are the proper subjects, I believe, for a first critical account of his whole canon to date. (Thomas, 1980a: 120-21)

Even though Thomas does not admire everything about

Kroetsch's work,⁵⁰ he concludes that Kroetsch "is a bold artist. . . . He is writing a comic anthropogeny that is also, in its constant formal renewal, a remarkable testament to creative vigour" (Thomas, 1980a: 124).

Concomitant with the propensity of Kroetsch's critics to cite him as the authority by which his works should be read is their unquestioning acceptance of his claim that the dialectic informing his work is never resolved. As Robert Lecker puts it: "Providing a conclusion . . . to a study of Robert Kroetsch's work is a contradiction in terms. More than any other Canadian writer, Kroetsch teaches us to

⁵⁰ See particularly "Chapter Five" (on Crow), where Thomas condemns what he sees as Kroetsch's misanthropy.

In regard to Thomas's condemnation of this aspect of the novel, Lecker quotes him, agreeing that "the effect of the narrative 'is to weaken the value of individual lives, to ignore their existential weight in time, to insist upon their expendability'" (Lecker, 1986: 105). But Lecker notes that "Thomas's comment can only be seen as a critique if we accept the notion that characters must have 'existential weight in time,' that their individual lives ought to have 'value'" (105). He defends Kroetsch's stance as follows:

But Kroetsch repudiates this concept of character. His story insists that identity be freed from temporal structures; it implies that 'value' is a concept tied to a nineteenth-century view of the novel as a product of a materialistic culture in which everything . . . possesses a certain 'worth.' We simply cannot apply these standards to Crow; in fact, one of the problems inherent in the novel is that it gives us few leads as to any standards we might apply. One thing is certain; to read Crow we must enter into its spirit of play and realize that it is possible to read without an end or message in mind. (105; emphasis added)

Even while Lecker claims that Crow subverts the concept of value, he fails to notice that his own account of the novel privileges identity, the traditional value par excellence.

question endings, to refuse summation, to open meaning up" (Lecker, 1986: 148). Or, as Linda Hutcheon writes:

Consciously postmodernist, the work of [Robert Kroetsch] makes an appropriately inappropriate ending to this study-- that is, I hope that its constant paradoxical combatting of the inevitability of closure will act as the analogue for this final chapter's attempt to both tie up and unloose notions of the Canadian postmodern.

(Hutcheon, 1988a: 160)

In fact, most of the works on Kroetsch are, like Lecker's and Hutcheon's, attempts to prove his claims for the open-endedness, the doubleness, and the paradoxes by which he says he resists 'the temptation of meaning' and 'the tyranny of narrative,' with their inevitable privileging of one term of a binary pair and their closure, which is always already implied in the setting up of the opposition. Because of their acceptance of Kroetsch's claims for his work, his critics are caught in precisely the same metaphysical bind in which he is caught -- in a dialectic which confirms metaphysical closure and the traditional conventions and values which he claims to subvert.

However, because Derrida's thought and the notion of progress are infinitely incompatible, I find it most difficult to understand how critics who claim for Kroetsch's work a 'Derridean postmodernism' also find in his 'Derridean stance' the same concern for progress that his early critics

discuss. One such baffling work is Davey's Introduction to the issue of Open Letter devoted to Kroetsch's essays, where he tells us of Kroetsch's Derridean roots while applauding the progress marked by his critical essays. Another is the review of Excerpts (1986) in which Susan Rudy Dorscht begins with a quote from Kroetsch and follows critics of her time by invoking Derrida: "To borrow a term from Greg Ulmer's recent discussion of Jacques Derrida's The Post Card, Kroetsch writes (in) 'post-postal letters', (in) words -- excerpts -- which are the real world."⁵¹ Like Kroetsch, though, Rudy Dorscht is only interested in Derridean thought insofar as she can modify it in such a way that it will fit into the mainstream, into the traditional pattern of thought by which she can claim that "Derrida's deconstruction of logocentrism . . . moves us into a post-postal age." Without the rigorous contextualizing of 'influence' and patriarchal authority that The Post Card undertakes, her appropriation of his comment (from Ulmer) serves to link Derrida with the traditional ideas of progress which she ascribes to Kroetsch's work and which she latches onto in 'borrowing' Ulmer's term "post-postal" -- akin to 'post-postmodern' or nouveau nouveau roman. The 'deconstructive' flavour imparted by her catchy use of parentheses -- as in "(in) post-postal letters, (in) words," "no exception (or should I say 'excerption!')," and "these (a-)parts" -- mixes

⁵¹ Susan Rudy Dorscht, 1989a: 40; emphasis added. This is a one-page review, and all quotations are from page 40.

with Kroetsch's claim that "[a]utobiography is paradoxical: it frees us from self" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 209), in order that she may tell us that "[t]hese post-postal letters are not written by an expressive self, but by a Derridean, linguistically-decentred subject," whatever that might mean. And the progress implied by 'post-postal' finds its 'proper' place in the final paragraph:

Excerpts from the Real World is writing in a post-postal age. It offers, in Ulmer's words, "a communication network without 'destiny' or 'destination' in which mail (messages) would be addressed only 'to whom it may concern' -- a system which values 'noise' or 'invention' over transparent meanings." (emphasis added)

A network. A system. A hierarchical system at that. Yet, Rudy Dorscht ends by telling us that Excerpts "exposes the philosophical assumptions behind the writing of autobiography [and] challenges the conventions of the postal era." (What postal era? Are we to read 'the modern era'?) As it may. But, whatever Excerpts does, this review does nothing more and nothing less than to confirm the very 'philosophical assumptions' which Rudy Dorscht claims Kroetsch exposes in the work she here reviews.

Similarly, in "The Carnival of Babel: The Construction of Voice in Robert Kroetsch's 'Out West' Triptych" (awarded the George Wicken Prize for 1987), John Clement Ball brings full circle the very appropriation of deconstruction into

mainstream thought that Kroetsch's criticism and creative work achieves. In this essay, Ball insists that "Kroetsch's purpose in Words can be seen as the deconstruction of the systems that have defined prairie literature, through the integration of dualities that have always defined separateness" (Ball, 1989: 7; emphasis added). Like all of Kroetsch's critics, Ball takes at face value his claim that, in Canadian literature, Canadian life, and the Canadian imagination, 'the old dualities' are always in a state of such equal balance that stasis is our first, middle, and last name. And Ball sees Kroetsch's dialectical resolution of those 'static' and 'equally balanced' contraries as a "deconstructive approach" (14, 15) which subverts the traditional conventions of the novel with a violence that is not meaningless, but in keeping with the tenets of "The Exploding Porcupine: Violence of Form in English-Canadian Fiction," an "essay that can be read as a postmodern manifesto" (8). However, the violence which allows the integration or resolution that Ball discovers in these novels is the violence of metaphysics, the violence by which 'the old dualities' are always inevitably posited in a hierarchical relationship which allows the privileged term or self to appropriate its other within itself. The 'deconstructive approach' which Ball describes is precisely the work of dialectic, or logic, which allows and requires the quest of the Self: the very basis of traditional Western thought. And Ball explicates meticulously how this work of

the negative -- which allows the Other to be negated in order that dialectic may resolve logical contradiction -- is accomplished in Kroetsch's 'Out West' triptych.

As we might expect, and I think he is correct in this, Ball describes Kroetsch's working out of what he and others call Kroetsch's deconstructive approach (and what I call his traditional dialectical approach) as an ontological process accomplished through Voice. Ball sees Johnnie as initially characterized by silence, but, at the conclusion of the opening scene, Johnnie speaks, promising that it will rain. He "has by these few spontaneous words--and this is borne out by the events of the novel--turned himself from a nobody into a somebody" (4). He is initially "the silent link between Applecart's disembodied voice and the ears of the community," but when he speaks, he "cuts off Applecart's words, and replaces them with his own" (4). His act is "a creation of the self out of silence," and "there is an unusual correspondence . . . between the level of story and the level of book" (5-6), the story being Johnnie's and the book being Kroetsch's. The "I-creator (Johnnie as narrator) and the I-created (Johnnie as character) . . . become identical" (6; emphasis added). Moreover,

there is an association of the two I's in the same way that there is an association of the levels of story and its telling. . . . Words is in fact about this very kind of unity--the bringing together of normally separate things, the resolution of dichotomies or

dualities. . . . Kroetsch is bringing horse and house, male and female, together, and in ways that do not diminish the man's heroic stature or threaten the integrity of his role as cowboy, orphan, and outlaw.
(6-7; emphasis Ball's and mine)

Similarly, in the second novel of the trilogy:

[b]y turning the story of another man's life into the story of his own, [Demeter] defines himself. . . . By speaking himself into existence as 'D. Proudfoot, Studhorse Man' (156), he achieves a personal integration that is completely self-contained, and he does it through nothing more nor less than an act of narrative. (13; emphasis added)

That is, by means of an oral appropriation of his other, Demeter achieves a self-identical, self-sufficient Self: the goal of all quests. And in Gone Indian, Madham "takes possession of Jeremy's story and uses it as a vehicle to construct, or at least reinforce, his own reality" (15).

Ball notes that, in all three novels, "a version of carnival serves as a focal event, and as a turning point in the progress of the central character" (19; emphasis added), and that "Kroetsch comes close to the carnivalization of the prairie itself" (20). The prairie is, to Kroetsch and his critics, a frontier, a "new place, as the boundary between known and unknown" (20). As such, as "a natural location for the becoming world of carnival, it is also a natural metaphor for the larger place of which it is a part: the new, becoming country of Canada with its new becoming

literature" (20; emphasis added). With this emphasis on process, which Kroetsch and other theorists consider one of the most dominant characteristics of Canadian postmodernism, the stage is set for what Brian McHale describes as the postmodern shift from an epistemological to an ontological dominant and for what John Clement Ball describes as Robert Kroetsch's "intensely nationalistic critic[ism] of Canadian literature" (1).

However, before considering Kroetsch's critical essays, I would like to expand upon the relationship between him and his critics. I have argued that most critics of Kroetsch's work read the work according to his theoretical pronouncements and that they accept at face value his claim that, in his 'deconstructive approach,' the binary oppositions with which he is fascinated are never resolved. The point of my citing and analyzing some of these readings has been, in this chapter, to show how influential Kroetsch has been to notions of Canadian postmodernism. Now, I would like to consider some studies of Alibi, to discover (1) how Kroetsch's 'deconstructive' critics have accepted his 'deconstructive intent' at face value, and (2) how both his and their own thorough grounding in traditional modes of thought leads them to produce traditional thematic readings of the novel, even while they 'intend' to explicate its deconstructive features.

Chapter Five

'Learning the Hero': Alibi and the Critics

Because this dissertation offers a deconstructive reading, it is reasonable to expect that one of its 'aims' would be to engage in a debate with traditional literary criticism, not to annihilate it, but to trace its limits and to subvert its pretensions to mastery, to write it:

In the space in which is posed the question of speech and meaning. I try to write the question: (what is) meaning to say? Therefore it is necessary in such a space, and guided by such a question, that writing literally mean nothing. Not that it is absurd in the way that absurdity has always been in solidarity with metaphysical meaning. It simply tempts itself, tenders itself, attempts to keep itself at the point of the exhaustion of meaning. To risk meaning nothing is to start to play, and first to enter into the play of différance which prevents any word, any concept, any major enunciation from coming to summarize and to govern from the theological presence of a centre the movement and textual spacing of differences. (Derrida, 1981d: 14)

Traditional criticism, its history inaugurated (like that of literature) by Aristotle's production of the concept of literature in the Poetics (in the aftermath of Plato's determination of poetry as mimesis), proclaims the priority and precedence of the imitated over imitation and perceives literature as "reducible to its signified, its message, the

truth it expresses" (Gasché, 1986: 256). The self-effacing and deferential doubling of literature in the form of critical commentary is rooted in the "history of philosophy, determined as the history of the reflection of poetic inauguration" (Derrida, 1978b: 28). This link to philosophy explains "the security with which the commentary considers the self-identity of the text, the confidence . . . [which] goes hand in hand with the tranquil assurance that leaps over the text toward its presumed content, in the direction of the pure signified" (Derrida, 1974: 159).

However, my 'debate' is not with traditional criticism per se. (That 'debate' has been raging in Canadian letters at least since 1974, when Frank Davey declared war on thematic criticism). Rather, I am concerned with the Canadian postmodernists' claim that their criticism is neither traditional nor thematic, but deconstructive. If, by saying 'deconstructive,' they mean to say that their criticism is somehow aligned with Derridean thought -- and they do⁵² -- I am convinced that their claim is unfounded; their criticism is based upon a notion of intentionality that is ultimately and essentially phenomenological.⁵³

⁵² See, for example, Davey, 1983c, 1988; Edwards, 1985, 1987a, 1987b; Rudy Dorscht, 1987, 1988b, 1989a; Godard, 1984; Hutcheon, 1988a, 1988b.

⁵³ Barbara Godard notes that, in the early seventies, "[i]n English Canada, as elsewhere, a debate was taking place over the death of the subject, between phenomenology and structuralism. A certain division between North American and European influences on phenomenology and structuralism has tipped the balance in favour of the

All twentieth century notions of subjectivity reflect the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. In his last book, The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology (1970), Husserl describes the 'crisis' of the sciences as an ever widening gap between technology and human needs -- a gap which has been created by an emphasis on methodologies and 'facts' which is so extreme that the sciences have abandoned their subjective origins -- and he offers his transcendental phenomenology as an antidote. He proposes that the 'natural attitude' (the unexamined assumptions through which the world of objects appears to exist independently from consciousness) must be 'bracketed' or suspended in order that the phenomenologist can describe what appears immediately to her consciousness, free of any interpretation. However, to assume that 'pure' description is possible is to presuppose that 'being' is consciousness and that consciousness is intentional. As Husserl says, "the basic characteristic of being as consciousness, as consciousness of something, is intentionality" (Husserl in Taylor, 1986: 123). But this is to say that, rather than receiving objective sensations, consciousness produces them, and objectivity, as such, is a subjective construct. Thus, the distinction between Descartes' res cogitans and res extensa is dissolved, and Husserl resolves objectivity in subjectivity through a dialectical gesture which considers

former" (Godard, 1984: 9).

consciousness to be immediately and unmediatedly present to its intentional phenomena. (Incidentally, Husserl never attempts to 'bracket' the phenomenologically reduced consciousness, which he also calls the 'transcendental subject' and 'primordial intuition.')

According to Husserl's phenomenology, the only absolute given is the transcendental subject (consciousness), and the 'object' or the 'other' must be an extension and reflection of the self. Phenomenology is a philosophy of presence and, as such, is both solipsistic and irrevocably bound by notions of the absolute, of essence, of teleology, and so on. As a philosophy of presence, it is also dialectical, premised upon a series of hierarchically structured binary pairs, the resolution of which ensures the repression of difference and/or otherness. As Mark Taylor says: "The absolute knowledge made possible by the phenomenological reduction of difference to identity in subjectivity's full knowledge of itself realizes Western philosophy's dream of enjoying a total presence that is undisturbed by absence or lack" (Taylor, 1986: 3).

* * *

In the previous chapter, I noted that most of Robert Kroetsch's critics have read his creative work in the light of theoretical pronouncements he has made in critical essays and interviews. One result of this tendency is that, in

studies of Kroetsch's work, great emphasis is placed on Kroetsch's intention -- usually described as subversive or 'deconstructive.'⁵⁴ This emphasis on intention has two major ramifications: most critics are predisposed to find in the work whatever it is that they believe Kroetsch intends to be there; and this emphasis on intention is inextricably bound up with a mode of thought governed by Husserl's transcendental subject and is unavoidably aligned with Hegel's notion of the Understanding as the power which dissolves, in order that the True may be achieved in a reflection in otherness within the self. The ironic result is that critics who attempt to show how his 'deconstructive' intentions are carried out in his novels are, like Kroetsch, caught in a system of thought which necessarily commits them to finding in the work the very conclusions or resolutions which they say he resists.

Like his earlier work, Alibi has evoked criticism which is centred upon the themes and the postmodern theoretical concerns most important to him -- the theme of the quest, sexuality, the künstlerroman, parody, paradox, ambiguity/doubling, and the status of the concept in a postmodern mode of thought which rejects systems, continuity, and

⁵⁴ As the reader will have noticed, by comparing the foregoing discussion of phenomenology with Chapter Two's explication of Derridean deconstruction, the notions of intention and deconstruction are mutually exclusive; there can be no such 'thing' as a 'deconstructive intention.'

wholeness.⁵⁵ For example, Alberto Manguel's early review of the novel emphasizes "the theme of the quest (dear to Kroetsch)" and argues that "Alibi can be defined as a parodic quest in which neither the language, nor the characters nor the story itself is convincing" (Manguel (1983), quoted in Lecker, 1986: 108).

Robert Lecker argues that, because Manguel perceives Alibi's treatment of the quest theme to be parodic, and because the novel's textual erotics thwart Manguel's preconceived notions of the quest as well as his desire "to see the act before us resolved, fictionally, into closure" (109), he necessarily "misunderstands Kroetsch's intentional ambiguity throughout Alibi, a radical ambiguity that . . . renders parody irrelevant" (108) -- which is interesting, in view of Hutcheon's emphasis on parody as an important

⁵⁵ Not all criticism of Alibi can be said to intend to find Kroetsch's 'postmodern intention' borne out in his work, but I am primarily concerned with that which does. However, Eva-Marie Kröller is one critic of Alibi who enjoys an intellectual independence by virtue of which she avoids the pitfalls encountered by those who tout the postmodern 'deconstructive intention' of "Slippery Saint Kroetsch. The exploder" (Lecker, 1984a: 84). In "History and Photography in Robert Kroetsch's Alibi," Kröller suggests that

Kroetsch confronts the issue of 'the anxiety of influence.' . . . [and] integrates it into Dorf's healing self as one of his options. . . . At the end of the novel, Dorf . . . has learnt that his own--and collective--history is not a question of Manichean opposites . . . , but of a responsible acceptance of human ambiguity and weakness.
(Kröller, 1984: 73)

Interestingly, the 'deconstructive' critics of this novel are also much concerned with 'Dorf's healing self' and with 'a responsible acceptance of human ambiguity and weakness.'

feature of postmodern fiction. Lecker argues that the novel accomplishes "a denial of desire" (108). Like Peter Thomas, he considers Crow to be a turning point in Kroetsch's development; he finds in "our unfulfilled desire to find out what the crow said" an emphasis on "the connection Kroetsch makes between desire and all that remains textually, erotically, unrevealed. In Alibi this play between the unrevealed and the revealed becomes a structural focus. We must read it with a new sense of con/text in mind" (105) -- a context of desire inspired by Kroetsch's interest in the work of Julia Kristeva and, particularly, Roland Barthes.

Textual erotics seems to be a means by which ambiguity, the quest (with its sexual component), and voice are integrated in such a way that the erotic pleasure of intermittence (105) "can embarrass the text's return to morality, to truth: to the morality of truth; it is an oblique, a drag anchor, so to speak, without which the theory of the text would revert to a centered system, a philosophy of meaning" (Barthes (1975), quoted in Lecker, 1986: 109). To discuss the operation of textual erotics in Alibi, Lecker excavates ideas from Kroetsch's earliest essays: "In defying this 'centered system' Kroetsch is characteristically pulled two ways at once: he will decreate, demythologize, uninvent, unhide, undo, while he creates, remythologizes, invents, hides, puts on, covers up. Cover up: alibi" (109). According to Lecker's reading, 'the old dualities' are still present in a 'textual erotics'

governed by a metaphysical system which privileges voice as that which allows the self to become freely and immediately present to itself, as "Kroetsch's belief that 'the fiction makes us real' takes on new resonance" (112).

According to Lecker, Alibi is an expression of Kroetsch's "desire to undo the text," and that desire "is part of his deconstructive intent, his desire to shed received meaning and return to naked source" (109). The intent is to return to an original source, to pure beginnings, to "the various forms of desire which, Dorf suggests, lie at the root of true creative understanding" (115; emphasis added). We find that "Dorf describes the governing metaphor of his quest when he asserts that 'we all...desire our way back to the source of all desire, the sun itself'" (112). Dorf's desire to pursue source is "part of the deconstructive energy that prompts him to pursue desire" (112) and his pursuit of "sources, beginnings, process, and dream" are antithetically opposed to Karen's pursuit of "endings, completion, stasis, documentation" (113). And so they are, particularly if, as Lecker suggests, Karen is Dorf's "other half" (113), his alter ego. However, to posit any two sets of 'goals' or terms as thesis and antithesis is to present them as logical opposites which will inevitably be resolved through the negative, ultimately

unifying, work of dialectic.⁵⁶ It is, in Kroetsch's case, the first step toward the reversal by which he rejects history and endings in favour of an archaeological pursuit of beginnings. It is to embark upon a quest for the pure, true, and lost origin which, by virtue of the quest, becomes the goal, the end, telos. It is an old story.

Despite Lecker's claim that "Dorf signifies his role as an agent of deconstruction in one Kroetschian sense--that of moving against closure and resolution" (112) and, despite his excellent analysis of the "three distinct narrative lines" (115) which are "consciously engineered--by Karen--to destroy each other, one building a 'story' while the other destroys it, one framing an image while the other negates the frame" (116), he ultimately argues that this novel accomplishes something other than what he claims Kroetsch intends. That is, the valorization of desire, absence, and voice reaffirms our conventional notions of the self, of the 'realized through fiction' subject for which metaphysical thought quests. Lecker claims that Kroetsch "will not reveal all, will not satisfy our desire, simply because desire satisfied is desire negated" (110), which implies that desire is some concrete, self-sufficient 'thing' which can be negated or subsumed by its other.

⁵⁶ As Eva-Marie Kröller puts it, "Dorf and Karen come together in their desire for the absolute" (Kröller, 1984: 75). And "even the overall structure of Alibi contains, embedded in numerous cues of openness and alternative, evidence of sameness masked as difference" (76).

Lecker confirms the implication that desire has been reified, saying that "Dorf seeks desire itself" (112; emphasis added). To him, 'desire' is but another name for Presence, the immediate and self-sufficient Presence which is always desired by metaphysical thought -- the 'centered system' this novel is said to resist -- and absence "accounts in large part for the production of desire" (117). By defining "action by its absence" (118) and "[b]y defining Dorf's actions in terms of negatives . . . Karen invites us to concentrate on the absence she is evoking" (117); that is, she endeavours to make that absence present.

And Presence is to be attained through Voice. As Lecker says, "Dorf suggests that talking and touching are equivalent, and, moreover, that this equivalence must be established" -- that is, the two must be resolved in an identity -- "before intimacy, which is an intimacy of telling, can evolve. Talking and telling become erotic activities linked to the notion of desire" (108) in this novel which tells us that "[y]ou invent yourself each time you sit down to make an entry" (Kroetsch (1983c), quoted in Lecker, 1986: 121), and Voice attains Presence through Kroetsch's achieving an equivalence (identity) "between . . . the two controlling motifs of Dorf's journal":

"the first poem, the first poem of all,
was the cry of the osprey. Gwan-Gwan.
I remembered it, then, even then,
hearing the osprey; and I marveled at
the acuracy [sic] of the

transliteration, from bird voice into human" (238). Since an equivalence is established here between bird and book we can assume that the ospreys' flight, their own search for fulfillment, will have a direct effect on Dorf's own desire for freedom. Indeed, we find in the final lines of Alibi, the successful flight of the ospreys allows Dorf to be optimistic about his own condition and fate. (Lecker, 1986: 120)

Dorf is optimistic about his fate because "[t]hese ospreys are messengers for the undone world that Dorf so desperately wants to enter--a world divorced from history, society, and rules--one in which he would be free to take the plunge, even into nothingness" (119).⁵⁷ Nothingness, absence made present, the indifference into which Sadness plunges in Gone Indian: God. Dorf is optimistic about "the possibiity [sic] of spiritual (and narrative) rebirth in a world tied to sources, starts" (112).

Just as Lecker's article is centred in a reified notion of desire, so is Stan Fogel's reading centred in a reified notion of language, despite his opening: "'we are all exiles,' (p. 151; cf. Kroetsch's But We Are Exiles) displaced, most acutely, . . . from logocentrism, and denied what Thomas Pynchon has called 'the direct epileptic Word' and 'pulsing stelliferous meaning'" (Fogel, 1984b: 233).

⁵⁷ Cf. Gone Indian: "And they rode away seeking NOTHING. They sought NOTHING. They would FLEE everything" (Kroetsch, 1973c: 156). As Stan Fogel notes, "Kroetsch's novels are strewn with characters who are in flight, literally and metaphorically, from confinement of all kinds" (Fogel, 1984b: 236).

Underpants flesh out this motif in Alibi, but are, of course, no substitute for, or rather, are only a substitute for the flesh beneath. . . . For Kroetsch . . . the play of language and consummation, word and world, is an intricate one, a Derridean replication of substitutions that always ensnares man in alibis. (Fogel, 1984b: 233)

Fogel argues that "the 'doom in language' . . . in the lexicon of . . . Alibi, is that it is all alibi" (233) and that "Dorf writes out his story (history) knowing that it is alibi, catachresis" (240). Therefore, he claims, "Dorf's dilemma is not naively solved" (240), and the "illusory quality of language as a transparent medium" (240) is exposed as illusory.

However, in view of the intimate connections drawn in this novel between talking and touching, or language and sex -- connections which, according to Lecker, establish their 'equivalence' -- it is obvious that Fogel inadvertently argues against himself, concluding that "Dorf's bliss, in the mud, with the octopus, is always an inarticulate, which is to say a non-divisive, one" (240): that is, a complete, whole, self-identical one. 'Language' may be (nothing but) alibis, underpants, substitutions, but sex is 'the flesh beneath,' the real thing, the language that is the 'ground,' 'source,' or 'end' for which 'language' substitutes. Fogel engineers a Kroetschian reversal through which that which is to be resisted finds itself by means of a resolution through which the ostensibly denied term achieves full and immediate

presence in its 'opposite,' and différance is repressed while 'language' comes back to haunt us with a new, unspoken name. Again, logocentrism is reaffirmed, the very logocentricism from which Fogel says Alibi displaces us.⁵⁸

In Alibi, the doubling of characters which occurs in all of Kroetsch's novels, from the ego and alter ego relationship between Peter Guy and Hornyak in Exiles to the two Annas in Badlands, is repeated and intensified:

the subtle doubling of voicing that
occurs through the ironic tension
between heading and chapter [a tension
achieved by "the intrusion of a third

⁵⁸ Susan Rudy Dorscht also claims that Alibi displaces or undermines logocentrism -- with the concepts of "self, text, event, truth" that are inherent in logocentrism -- by means of a self-reflexivity that "informs the reader of [Alibi's] own deconstructive potential" (Rudy Dorscht, 1987: 82). She tells us that the novel "offers within itself a narratology that plays with the most seductive elements of deconstructive theory" (82), but the idea of the 'novel itself' leaves the concept of 'the text' unproblematicized, as we see in the following statement:

If there are events, in this anti-narrative they are textual events, scenes of writing and rewriting. By calling into question the identity of the narrator and positing many levels of narrative as scenes of writing, the text subverts our attempts at easy description of its construction; the text is about the processes of its own construction. (82; emphasis added)

Or, in the revised version, "the text is about the processes of construction" (Rudy Dorscht, 1988b: 161). We are back to Kroetsch's obsession with 'capturing process,' with being as becoming -- the Heideggerian complicity with Hegel's (both/and) process/product. The notion of an 'anti-narrative' is inescapably bound up with the negative, with the 'science' of narratology and with the logocentric concerns of the familiar patterns of thought which Rudy Dorscht claims Alibi deconstructs.

person in the often sarcastic chapter headings" into a first-person narrative] becomes the formal analogue of the entire doubling structure of a novel whose protagonist, named after two grandfathers with the same name, is Billy Billy Dorf (or, in full, William William Dorfendorf). His two daughters are named Jinn and Jan, suggesting both Ying and Yang and Jules et Jim, perhaps. Dorf is a man with two lives and two lovers; things happen to him in twos, even attempts on his life. . . . Typically postmodern, though, the novel's doubles stay separate.

(Hutcheon, 1988a: 177)

In fact, one might say that permutations of 'doubling' proliferate even more broadly than Hutcheon suggests, in that the 'already doubled' Dorf is the 'double' or even 'alibi' of Deemer, who may be seen as representing the ordering impulse we find in professorial or writing-oriented characters such as Demeter, Madham, and Liebhaber. Deemer is the collector, but Dorf is his agent; Deemer desires and pays for the items and collections constituting his Collection, but Dorf seeks out the desired objects and makes the transactions through which Deemer gains property.

Also, Dorf indeed has two lovers, but Julie is Deemer's "dangerous lady" (178), and Karen is, like Dorf, his employee. Thus, Karen is also an 'alibi' for Deemer, an agent who imposes order on randomness by creating the documentary he commissions. Moreover, Dorf becomes involved in "a bizarre sex triangle with Julie and a dwarf doctor, Manuel de Medeiros. Not content with the Dorf/dwarf verbal

doubling," the Dorf/Deemer doubling, and the Dorf/Karen doubling, "Dorf repeatedly links Manny to his other woman, Karen Strike, who shares his blond hair and narrative connotations of voyeurism, sex, and danger" (179). But this is not a sexual triangle, except in the most 'innocent' terms; that is, "the three of us became inseparable. . . . We talked. And, having talked, having spoken, we touched, our fingers joining into the conversation. We touched each other's hands, shook hands even at my instigation, as a kind of congratulation" (Kroetsch, 1983c: 130). When this intimacy becomes overtly sexual, the endlessly proliferating possibilities of 'doubling' are evoked -- "It was the marvelous possibilities of our little triangle that gave me no rest from desire" (130) -- and immediately revoked:

Manny had found his seeking; and I pushed to her hot, demanding hand, the whispered heat of her taking; the pillowed call; we gave attendance, Manny and I, to the sly ritual of her pleasure; we the attendant rut, doubled and one, the drowning of our voices into the long and meditated cry, the delicious scream of her outraged pleasure.

(Hutcheon, 1988a: 129; emphasis added)

The three-way relationships -- Dorf/Deemer/Julie, Dorf/Deemer/Karen, Dorf/Manny/Julie, and so on -- are necessary, because the triptych facilitates the self-reflection inherent in the 'thesis, antithesis, synthesis' operation of dialectic, or, as Dorf says, "only in a triangle does desire

know itself" (133; emphasis added). However, when the triangular relationship is overtly sexual, as with Dorf, Manny, and Julie, theirs is a meeting of two strictly heterosexual men with one woman, with Dorf controlling his machismo jealousy by fantasizing that he is frolicking with 'his two lovers,' both female: "I felt not the slightest touch of jealousy. Indeed by pretending just slightly that Manny was Karen,. . . I was able to add a further dimension to our already outrageous joy" (130); or "[s]ometimes, lying on one side of Julie, I would conceive a great passion to be lying on the other. I needed to be twice myself" (142). Heaven forbid that this menage à trois should condone homosexuality, even though homosexuals are one of the groups of 'ex-centrics' which Hutcheon claims is finally given voice in postmodern works. Also, to be 'twice myself' is to posit the other as one's own other, in order that the self may appropriate the other within the Self.

The male/female dichotomy, a constant in Kroetsch's novels, is resolved in the hermaphrodite, the figure who "draws 'an opening', a figure of female genitalia on [Dorf's] head, '[a]s if he'd figured a way to escape the world'" (180) -- to become, as Lecker writes, 'free to take the plunge, even into nothingness' (cited on 112)...

'Or enter it' (p. 166). . . . In accepting all the dualities and ambivalences that constitute life, Dorf can then begin to construct himself anew, literally, out of mud ['the

elemental conjunction of water and earth']. He breaks the rules of the spa: he exits naked but 'decently coated in mud' (p. 177), is reborn as part of nature, and then re-enters the cave to plunge into the mud, but this time during the women's hour. This rather obvious return to the womb results in another of Dorf's sexual experiences fraught with symbolic value, but this time the mud and the women offer love and life, not threats of death.

This is no final resolution of the ambivalences of the novel, however.
(Hutcheon, 1988a: 180; emphasis added)

In the face of this denial of final resolution, Hutcheon goes on to say that, at

Deemer's perfect spa . . . Deadman Spring. . . . Dorf works out his salvation. In a parodic inversion of Ulysses and the Cyclops, Dorf gives a nameless, one-eyed man one of his doubled names (Billy Billy), and his cure and curing seem to begin. Dorf must be led from his initial vision of life . . . to an acceptance of the body and its desires as also good and natural.⁵⁹ It is important that, up to now, what has been associated with these same natural qualities is the act of writing. . . . Writing remains the core of the novel, both in theme and in form. Desire exists in word as well as deed: 'To be intimate. To intimate' (p. 136). He tries to explain to Julie once that to touch is to talk: 'Intimacy is, finally, an intimacy of telling' (p. 136). Hence the journal; hence the novel. (180-91; emphasis added)

⁵⁹ Cf. "[B]y inhabiting his version of Plato's cave, Dorf also inhabits, finally, his own self and his history. The cave has two tunnels which are subterraneously joined, much in the way in which the two halves of Dorf's self are beginning to accept each other" (Kröller, 1984: 76).

Sex is traditionally associated with the quest and with writing, and, to Kroetsch, writing is telling. Writing and speech are 'equivalent,' because speech is privileged while writing is considered to be a fall away from speech, and writing can, therefore, be subsumed within speech.

After Deemer ("a punningly parodic re-Deemer" (181)) arrives at Deadman Spring, "the cave in the ground becomes inverted into the cosmic 'final black hole' in which touching as telling takes on its full scope of meaning" (181) in an orgy of touching/telling during which, as "we learn in the last journal entries," Dorf was "violated" (181). Then, he retreats "away from the bowels of the earth [underworld] to a cabin on a cliff in the woods," where he "composes the narrative we have just read. But the last pages are pure journal and as such work to contest traditional novelistic closure; they provide no neat, satisfying ordering or resolving, in short, no overtly fictionalized end" (Hutcheon, 1988a: 181; emphasis added).

'Pure journal' working 'to contest closure' in that these journal pages are "said to be not yet ordered or novelized, not yet reworked into narrative, structured and interpreted by hindsight" (181). Certainly, these pages are said to be not submitted to Karen's 'conscious engineering' (see 110), but, if Dorf 'composes the narrative,' how can we believe they are not 'interpreted by hindsight' or 'not yet reworked into narrative'? We can believe this, if we desire to believe that these journal pages do not represent but are

the full and immediate attainment of 'creativity at its source' (see 109) and of the Presence sought in "a centred, coherent subjectivity" (175).⁶⁰ That desire to believe permeates Hutcheon's analysis as well as her conclusion:

Writing fixes and kills, but it can also offer a means of new life through the revivifying act of reading. Alone in nature, writing, Dorf can accept ambivalence.⁶¹ . . . The doubled cry of the osprey (Gwan-Gwan) that ends the novel reasserts duality, and in so doing reasserts life--though always in the face of death. (182; emphasis added)

The paradoxical resolution "that must come from acceptance of ambivalence" (182) is Hegel's 'both/and,' the dialectic through which synthesis is believed to be achieved: the actualized Self contains both the self and the other.

⁶⁰ Cf.

Dorfendorf's journal at the end of Alibi is an attempt at cautiously synthesizing the results of his quest, at developing, as he puts it, the negatives provided by his original journal. . . . The seven days recorded in the journal evoke the seven days of creation, with a day of rest as a still centre. . . . In writing his journal, Dorfendorf connects himself to words and the ambiguity of artifact, but like a medieval monk, he works as a scribe rather than as a manipulator, the altered print . . . the closest a modern-day writer can presume to come to a monk's reverential glossing of the original text, i.e. creation.
(Kröller, 1984: 77)

⁶¹ Cf. "Kroetsch sends his 'heroes' on a spiritual quest in which they gradually learn to accept models and copies as the necessary compensation for human imperfection" (Kröller, 1984: 73).

The subject, the self, and language are concepts that are necessary for the operation of our traditional patterns of thought. As concepts, each of them is an "idea of a class of objects; a general notion" (OED) which allows us to categorize or classify objects, people, qualities, and so on, considering particular 'things' in terms of attributes of the classes to which they belong. Ultimately, concepts allow us to entertain notions of 'essence,' to create stereotypes, to deny the differences between members of a class, and to create hierarchies among various classes of objects, people, attributes, and so on.

It is from the point of view of 'the concept' that Robert R. Wilson approaches Alibi. He points out, correctly, in my opinion, that, in the novel,

there is a great deal of textual play that turns upon a single foregrounded concept: the collection. . . . [The novel] employ[s] the concept of a collection for absurdist ends but, as well . . . use[s] it as a vehicle for making serious (or seriously playful) comments upon the nature, scope and limitations of human conceptuality. First, the absurdist ends . . . may be expressed briefly: the human inclination to construct collections is often quite funny since anything may be collected in any conceivable manner. . . . The desire to collect illustrates both the tenuous frailty of human ambition and the triumphant spirit of domination and cognitive mastery.

(Wilson, 1988: 93-94; emphasis added)

This 'foregrounding of the concept' is bound up with notions

of 'knowledge,' with the mastery implied in that notion, and with both 'language and reality' as 'collections':

Second, the concept of a collection also functions quite differently to display, even to emblemize, the actual limitations of human thought and language. If it [sic] handles upon 'reality' are slippery, elusive, arbitrary and groundless as a collection (any and all), then what shall one say about that 'reality'? What remains of it? How else could it be reached? What shall one say about fiction, the tradition of European realism, for example, that presumptuously claims to represent that 'reality'?⁶²

(Wilson, 1988: 94; emphasis added)

So it is less (Western) conceptuality than traditional notions of 'reality,' and less traditional notions of reality than 'the tradition of European realism' which is foregrounded in this novel. Or, to put it in the more usual terms of Canadian postmodernists, Wilson claims that Alibi resists or disturbs the pre-postmodern literary convention of realism. Less than a discussion of the limitations of conceptuality, this article is a paean to postmodernism.

In support of this aim, Wilson goes on to write that

⁶² I will not dwell upon, but would note, the ethnocentricism inherent in the assumption that 'the human inclination to construct collections' is universal and in the concepts of 'human conceptuality,' 'human ambition,' and 'human thought and language.' To make such an assumption and to use such terms unconditionally is to presuppose that Western thought is human thought, which privileges our logocentric modes of thought even to the degree that 'other' forms of thought are entirely excluded as nonexistent.

"Postmodernist writing focusses, with a wholly inescapable explicitness, one side of a fundamental dichotomy" (94).

'Fundamental' as necessary? As absolute ground? Or both?

The 'fundamental dichotomy' to which Wilson refers is the opposition between two points of view towards literature.

In terms of this dichotomy, literature is perceived as (1)

"the body of stories that express a people's history and

culture. It is what defines them, helps to bind them

together, and it is part of their educational process" or as

(2)

a large, though indeterminate, number of forms, of techniques and conventions, that make possible the telling of any story. It is also a vast, though equally indeterminate, elastic pool of motifs, of basic story-stuff.

Literature is what makes the human capacity for narrative actual, and it is always transnational. Any convention, virtually any motif, will find its place, useful and fruitful, in any national literature. (Wilson, 1988: 94)

The first of these views (traditional) "instructs one in the deep, interwound root-system of a literature within its national culture" (94) and "in the deep specificities that bind any text to its time and to its place" (96). The second (postmodern) "instructs one in the openness, elasticity, and adaptiveness of stories" (95) and "in innumerable connections that link every literary text to the larger context of the world, human civilization, and human history" (96; emphasis added). However, this emphasis on

instruction renders the postmodern view as much a part of a people's 'educational process' as is the traditional, even though Wilson suggests that the former is superior to the latter because "[i]t opens the narrowly blinkered vision of nationalism. . . [and] calls attention to the massive currents of international influence, of model-borrowing and model-peddling, that constitute literary texts at any time and in any place" (96) and because it "rejects boundaries, escapes from them, over-leaps them. . . . Literature is transcultural, polymorphous, nomadic (perhaps vagrant), piratical" (96).

But if the traditional view is governed entirely by a "narrowly blinkered view of nationalism" and is bound by "coherence, probability, and sense" (94) within certain closed cultural contexts, how is it that Wilson explains its working 'to instruct one in the deep, interwound root-system of a literature within its national culture' by relating how "Spanish conquerors used their superior grasp of narrative to penetrate the narrative traditions of aborigines in order to exploit them" (95)? If, in fact, this traditional view of literature did not consider literature to be 'a large, though indeterminate number of forms' and was not already a 'transnational' point of view in which 'any convention, virtually any motif, will find its place,' how could those conquerors, with 'their superior grasp of narrative,' have appropriated the narrative traditions of aborigines? These two views of literature are not mutually exclusive and do

not constitute a cleanly cut 'fundamental dichotomy.'

But, then, Wilson does indirectly refer to this problem:

The problem with postmodernism can be expressed succinctly: it makes a claim to describe culture but attempts at definition normally turn upon the identification of particular conventions, devices, strategies (those, at least, that are self-conscious, parodic or self-mocking, reflexive and playful). All such particular features of a text can be shown to have been available, always and already, as long as the art itself. (Wilson, 1988: 97)

Although many problems of definition confront a postmodern theorist, "serious discussion might begin," if we accept a certain premise: it is the "contemporary distrust of language, based upon and illustrated by a history of linguistic models in this century that have shown language to be arbitrary, game like and 'fallen,' that leads to various postmodern tendencies" (97-98). However,

Much will depend upon what one understands by 'play' and what one wishes to make, playfully or unplayfully, of human playfulness. . . . In the absence of conviction with regard to the sufficiency of language to represent the world (both authenticity and reference having been demystified), then all that remains (though this is already much) is play. . . . The role of play, the scope and significance of human playfulness, clamorously proclaims itself to be the centripetal issue for any discussion of postmodernism.

(Wilson, 1988: 98; emphasis added)

'Centripetal' -- as centre? In the game that is language? Necessarily a 'godgame,' if it includes a centre. That is, necessarily, a system which has a structure and requires a transcendental meaning. And that 'meaning' is human. How is this system or game to resist systems and release us from the solipsism and repression of the 'coercive humanism' from which postmodernists such as Robert Kroetsch wish to escape? And what does this game have to do with conceptuality or, more particularly, the concept of the collection?

Its ability 'to display, to emblemize, the actual limitations of human thought and language' (cited on 122) is the aspect of the collection that

seems most to call to mind postmodern fiction. A collection symbolizes all other human activities that attempt to fasten handles upon, to grasp and hold onto the slippery groundlessness of, 'reality.' Knowledge is not of things in themselves but of notations, schemata, conceptual organizations (that is, as traditionally argued, it is of universals): understanding, of neither the particularity of things nor of their distribution across 'reality' but of, precisely, the mind's notational schemata, its armory of universal notions . . . The underlying question that . . . Kroetsch raise[s] in multiple shapes is, Was anything, ever, in an ordinary, unexamined sense, more than a collection? (Wilson, 1988: 98; emphasis mine and Wilson's)

According to Wilson, collections (particularly lists and inventories) were traditionally employed to "add depth to

fiction or enhance 'effect [sic] of the real,'" whereas, in contemporary writing, collections emphasize "the postmodernist (skeptical, intellectual, playful, writerly) perspective" (99) and expose the limitations of conceptuality by demonstrating that

all concepts are collections. . . . Collections thematize the elaborate paradoxes of categories (of conceptual nets in general): the slopping, breaking boundaries, the endless possibilities of multiple inscription, and the voracious cannibalism of categories (as when, as games do, and even texts, one category swallows another). . . . The boundaries that bound, and do not bound, 'reality' hold, and let fall, the fragments they collect. (Wilson, 1988: 99-100)

Like the difference between traditional and postmodern views of literature, the difference between traditional and postmodern uses of collections is essentially a difference in intent. Whereas the traditionalist blindly employs the slippage between categories to unconsciously accomplish the dialectical work which achieves resolution in transcendental Presence, the postmodernist consciously and self-consciously employs this slippage to show that this resolution is arbitrary. The postmodernist also uses the concept of collection to show that "among their exhibitions, museums bear/bare a massive ideology" (105). (I expect that 'museums' refers here to any 'collection,' physical or mental (such as a concept).) The postmodern use of

collections attempts to expose the ideology governed by "the curatorial ambition [to contain the world] and the triumph of cognitive powers" (107).

Deemer, Kroetsch's collector, internalizes the mad impulse to collect. . . . Dorf reflects that 'Maybe, instead of just trying to buy the world, he was hoping to buy it and reassemble it too. According to his own design, of course' (37). Assembling and reassembling are key notions: constructs, products of design, exhibitions of pattern and the blessed rage to order, there are no natural categories. (Wilson, 1988: 103)

Wilson identifies the self's reappropriation of the other as 'the voracious cannibalism of categories.' But this enlightened point of view does not take account of différance; rather, it promotes scepticism about 'reality' and obsession with language, which inevitably exalts language as the transcendental 'God term,' even though:

It may even be the case . . . that the paradoxes of sets, of categories, of all collections are analogous to those that pervade language itself. Hence the theme of a collection plays into the preoccupations of postmodern writing: collections emblemize the inherent openness of language and textuality, the netted networks [sic] of possibilities. The abyssal distance between human concepts and the things that they collect has become the recurring obsession of postmodern writing: the human grasp of 'reality' will appear, ultimately, no firmer[,] stronger, more trustworthy, than the representational validity of a collection.

(Wilson, 1988: 100; emphasis added)

"The abyssal distance between human concepts and the things that they collect has become the recurring obsession of postmodern writing" and "the gap between signifier and signified [is] the only absolute in which one may possess absolute confidence" (105). If postmodernism wishes to expose the limitations of conceptuality and the grasping, ideological nature of a metaphysics based upon knowledge, why is it that we must still seek absolute confidence in an absolute? Because the loss of faith in 'reality' has been transformed, through "a deliberate, intensely ludic, move to transform a fundamental mode of human thinking into the materials for fiction" (107; emphasis added), and the postmodern writer of fiction is, like "most of Kroetsch's . . . first-person narrators: male, involved, passionate. . . creating itself into existence by the act of narrating" (102): seeking 'presence in absence,' in the gap.

Wilson states in this article that much will depend upon what one understands by 'play.' And so it does. For all its claims to resist solipsistic humanism, systems, meaning, and so on, the postmodernism Wilson describes here is not one which considers 'play' to be 'the absence of the transcendental signified,' as does Derridean thought.⁶³ 'Play' is, for the Canadian postmodernist, synonymous with game, and, as such, is riddled with traditional notions of 'centre,' 'structure,' and 'meaning' -- with 'human

⁶³ The reader will recall that 'absence,' in this statement, is not the 'opposite' of 'presence.'

universals.' Or, as Wilson concludes: "Postmodern playfulness, whatever else it achieves, thrusts unself-conscious criteria into a fictional foreground. Play becomes . . . a lucid (brilliant, dazzling) instructive game" (108). What is 'lucid' but clear and coherent? What is 'instructive' but adding to knowledge, the very concept which lies behind the Hegelian cult of the Self and which postmodernism, according to Wilson, intends to undermine? This postmodern playfulness is indeed a serious 'game.'

* * *

Changes in methodology do not necessarily ring changes upon the thinking patterns governing one's criticism. Even though the 'new new critics' have rebelled against it, thematic criticism is "at work whenever one tries to determine a meaning through a text, to pronounce a decision upon it, to decide that this or that is a meaning and that it is meaningful, to say that this meaning is posed, posable, or transposable as such: a theme" (Derrida, 1981a: 245). A theme is the minimal unit of meaning at the narrative level,

an originary--that is--a constituted unity or substance [which, as such] exercises a totalizing function with regard to all the signifiers of a literary work . . . [it] secures a work's unitary meaning, its inner continuity. It is in the logic of thematism to be monistic, monological: therefore, the totalization to be

achieved by a theme can succeed only if
 there is no other competing theme.
 (Gasché, 1986: 262-63)

The several possible themes in a work must be reconcilable with what is determined to be the work's self-identical ultimate 'meaning': reconcilable in that they can be reappropriated by the transcendental 'meaning' or totalizing theme. Each work of criticism discussed in this chapter inadvertently finds a totalizing theme or transcendental 'meaning' in Alibi, and all of them find their 'origin' or 'motivation' in the conclusion of Judith Fitzgerald's "Structure and Coherence in Robert Kroetsch's Alibi":

Dorf undertakes a voyage of discovery of the self in terms of 'the other.' The idea of the quest involves the notion that the end justifies the means; conversely, the idea of the voyage of discovery involves the notion that the means (the journal and its greater framework, for example) implicitly justify the end. (Fitzgerald, 1984: 82)

PART II

The Writing of Robert Kroetsch

[As a graduate student] I began . . . to talk about the hero, the nature of the hero, in literature, in the modern world, in my Canadian world, and in a way I haven't stopped.

(Robert Kroetsch, in Kroetsch, 1987: 154)

Chapter Six

'A Canadian Issue': The Canadian Story

As Donna Bennett observes in her study of Canadian criticism in English, "Canadian criticism--unlike that of the United States, Britain, and Europe--lends itself to classification by goals rather than by methodology," and innovations in critical techniques and values "have remained secondary to a larger, usually cultural, orientation" (Bennett, 1983: 160). This emphasis on cultural identity has been predominant, because criticism of English Canadian literature has seemed to pass through various phases which reflect the stages by which Canada's status or 'identity' has moved from that of a British colony to that of a nation.

The earliest Canadian criticism, dating from the mid-nineteenth century, "tends to be corrective in function, addressing writers as much as readers about the need for a practical literature that would further the establishment of the Canadian community while maintaining the values, standards, and aesthetics of nineteenth-century Britain" (149). With the movement toward Confederation came the conviction that "'a national literature is an essential element in the formation of national character' [and that] 'the growth of an indigenous literature' had been stunted by 'our colonial position'" (149 [quotes from Edward H. Dewart, Introduction to Selections from Canadian Poets (1864)]). With this cause of our literature's inferiority in mind,

post-Confederation critics were bound to see the political consolidation of Canada's nationhood as allowing for 'true poets' to emerge, as William Douw Lighthall implies in his Introduction to Songs of the Great Dominion (1889), an anthology organized in such a way that it offers "unifying myths and themes that grew out of a vision of a unified culture" (150). Although Lighthall remains apologetic about the quality of Canadian literature, his praise of the 'new' poets contrasts markedly with the popular view of Canadian literature as an inferior imitation of British or American literature, and he set the stage for twentieth-century thematic criticism (via an interest in the local which Archibald Lampman posits as characteristically Canadian). And Lampman, together with Duncan Campbell Scott and Charles G. D. Roberts, initiated the Canadian poets' involvement with criticism, followed by A. J. M. Smith, Earle Birney, D. G. Jones, and so on.

The beginning of the twentieth century saw a call for change, as James Cappon protested against criticism which eulogizes in an attempt to prove that Canada has a literature (Cappon, 1905: 2) and called for "candid . . . criticism" (3) which would motivate improvement so we could one day produce the poet who would manage to get the right materials into his song in such a way that all the world would feel what it is that gives Canada character and significance among nations. By 1926, changes in approach led to Lionel Stevenson's Appraisals of Canadian Literature,

in which he takes Lighthall's earlier attempt to find unifying myths and themes one step further. He discusses the mythopoetic quality of Canadian writing and defines the distinctive cultural pattern in Canadian literature as an attempt by Canadians, who are still European, to shut out the New World wilderness -- a view that finds its way into Northrop Frye's 'garrison' theory (in the Conclusion to Literary History of Canada and The Bush Garden), D. G. Jones' Butterfly on Rock, and Margaret Atwood's Survival, after cutting its way through W. E. Collins's White Savannah's (1936) view of Canadian literature as a literature of redemption. From then until 1974, when Frank Davey declared another need for change, thematic criticism flourished, becoming increasingly less defensive and more interpretive as the canon came to be established.

With the rejection of thematic criticism has come a continuing barrage of theories from 'phenomenology' and 'structuralism' to 'semiotics,' 'feminism,' and 'deconstruction,' among others. New critical vocabularies proliferate, and postmodernism embraces them all. However, in the midst of the enthusiasm and confusion fostered by this inundation, it seems to me that the more things change, the more they remain 'the same.'⁶⁴ In support of this

⁶⁴ In 1981, John Moss had also concluded that the 'anti-thematic' critics' call for change had been 'unproductive.' In "Bushed in the Sacred Wood," an excellent article on the concept of Canadian Literature and Canadian criticism, he proclaims that "[t]he resources of English Canadian literary criticism are no longer adequate

to the achievement of the literature" (Moss, 1981a: 161). He claims that the (thematic) "[c]ritics of the early seventies more than ever before asserted Canadian nationality as both the object of critical inquiry and its beneficiary. Criticism became the expression of an ebullient chauvinism that had about it more than a touch of paranoia" (162).

These critics "served profound social needs of their time" (164) but, in so doing, "severed our tradition from those which threatened to overwhelm it" (162) and "left such a distorted perception of our literature that it will take a determined effort to offset it in the future" (164). Moss is convinced that, although the cultural conditions (our status as a colony and a 'minor' nation) which engendered this nationalistic thematic criticism have passed, our criticism has not changed. "Adversaries of the so-called thematic critics proved ineffectual. This is because they offered only the vaguest of alternatives, the most tentative of directions" (165-66).

Critics of thematic criticism like Frank Davey, the editor of Open Letter, W.J. Keith, the editor of University of Toronto Quarterly, and Barrie Cameron, editor of Studies in Canadian Literature, for all their articulate opposition, have failed to consider the implications of thematic criticism's apparent appropriateness and its undeniable success during the previous decade. (171)

Those implications include the gesture by which Canadian 'thematic' criticism has accomplished the Bloomian (metaphysical) gesture that "reduc[es] the outside world ['other' literary 'traditions'] to a level of inconsequence, simply by ignoring its existence. Our culture could stand alone--otherwise, it seemed, it would not be allowed to stand at all" (173). The results of this "Canlit syndrome" (165) are twofold:

Experimentation has been discouraged, although orthodoxy does admit exceptions: Kroetsch and Ondaatje are the best examples of formally innovative writers who have captured attention. In both cases, however, . . . invention is inseparable from a strong thematic thrust, which itself is highly conventional and very "Canadian." (167)

And:

[Literature is treated] as a system, obscuring rather than enhancing the luminescence of individual works. . . . Literature becomes the vehicle of archetypal

statement, let me say first that Robert Kroetsch's criticism is considered to be not only exemplary of, but also, largely responsible for the advent of 'new new criticism' in Canada. It is lauded as non-thematic, as de(con)structive of realism, authority, and the cult of the Subject. However, I would say that it is, against its own 'intention' perhaps, intensely thematic, with its theme and goal being that of all earlier criticism -- the creation and affirmation of a Canadian identity in literature.

I am most interested in examining the gestures and presuppositions motivating the stances Kroetsch takes in his analyses of Canadian writing. I wish to address questions such as: Why does Kroetsch insist that Canadian writing is essentially postmodern? Why does he reject history in favour of archaeology? Why does dialectic surface in all his criticism and most of his interviews? Why does he resist meaning and unity? Why are words with negative prefixes (unlearning, unnaming, unearthing, uninventing,

visions, patterns, regional idiosyncracies and socio-cultural obsessions. Art becomes secondary. Some critics consciously attempt to counter this, but so long as systems are promulgated, their needs demand to be served. (172; emphasis added)

In my opinion, Moss offers here an insightful analysis of the anti-thematicists' 'failure' to effect change as 'caused' by their failure to fully understand the causes and effects of Canadian thematic criticism. However, his article is entirely proscriptive. Unlike Frank Davey, Russell Brown and others, he does not offer solutions to what he perceives as the problems created by thematic criticism, but it does seem that, by 1987, with Future Indicative, he feels that much 'progress' has been made in that direction.

disunity, disclosing, dismembering, and so on) his favourite words, or, why is he so fascinated with the negative?

Throughout this chapter, the reader should bear in mind the 'unorthodox' nature of Kroetsch's critical essays, essays which, according to Linda Hutcheon, "challenge the borders of genre and of traditional academic argument (and its accompanying authority)" (cited on 3). Or:

In terms of the prevailing rhetorics of Canadian and Anglo-American criticism these are eccentric essays. They are provocations, incitements to read or reread the texts they respond to. Far from seeking logical coherence, they refuse to complete their implied arguments, . . . to build the implied system. . . . Generalizations in these essays are responses of the moment, not components in systematic constructions. Perception not only takes precedence over argument, but often replaces argument. (Davey, 1983c: 7)

These essays are said to dissolve the boundaries between fiction and criticism and not to present arguments, because arguments are, of course, tainted by 'meaning,' 'unity,' 'continuity,' and 'wholeness.' In my opinion, Kroetsch's essays do dissolve genre distinctions, but the story they tell could very appropriately be termed an 'argument' -- precisely the one for which Donna Pennee chastizes Linda Hutcheon. Pennee claims that Hutcheon's embracing of postmodernism is nationalistic, that she "has found 'the context'--postmodernism--that will make (English-) Canadian

literature 'significant,' or, at last, truly cosmopolitan. . . . It seems that we have always been 'postmodern' by virtue of being 'Canadian'" (Pennee, 1990: 110).

In "Disunity as Unity: A Canadian Strategy," Kroetsch cites Jean-François Lyotard's definition of postmodernism:

Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodernism as incredulity toward meta-narratives.... To the obsolescence of the meta-narrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy. . . . The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements.
(Lyotard (1984), quoted in Kroetsch, 1985b: 22)
(emphasis Lyotard's and mine)

Kroetsch proposes that, by Lyotard's definition, Canada is a postmodern country.⁶⁵ The rationale behind this proposal is that Canada has always already been beyond Nationalism, because "[t]he shared story--[assumed story or meta-narrative]--has traditionally been basic to nationhood. . .

⁶⁵ We have already seen that in Labyrinths of Voice (1982), Kroetsch claimed that there is little Modernism in Canadian writing, that we were ripe for postmodernism because Modernism was unavailable to Canadians and because our geography allowed us to enter easily into postmodernism (see 71-73). Even earlier, he wrote: "Canadian literature evolved directly from Victorian into Postmodern." (Kroetsch, 1974a: 1). He reiterates this claim in "Death is a Happy Ending: A Dialogue in Thirteen Parts" (1978) and again, at the "Future Indicative" Symposium in 1986: "Canadian writing skipped the modern period" and, "[a]s a result, Canadian writers in the sixties could write without its weight holding them back" (Kroetsch in Moss, 1987: 18).

. [but] Canadians cannot agree on what their meta-narrative is" (Kroetsch, 1985b: 21). There are several reasons for our inability to agree upon a meta-narrative, the first being that:

One of the important elements in meta-narratives is the story of the place and the moment of origin. . . . In Canada we cannot for the world decide when we became a nation or what to call the day or days or, for that matter, years that might have been the originary moments.
(Kroetsch, 1985b: 27; emphasis added)

The second reason is that "Canada is a country of margins, beginning from the literal way in which almost every city borders on a wilderness" (22). Because of this marginality, "the centredness of the high modern period . . . made us almost irrelevant to history. . . . In a high modern world, with its privileged stories, Canada was invisible" (22).

The third reason is that:

Our sense of region resists our national sense. . . . We maintain ethnic customs long after they've disappeared in the country of origin. We define ourselves, often . . . by explaining to Americans that we aren't British, to the British that we aren't Americans.
(Kroetsch, 1985b: 27; emphasis added)

Fortunately -- at least for Canadians, a hitherto invisible people in an irrelevant country -- the movement away from European empires to the current domination by the

USSR and the US -- which took place during or after the Second World War and which precipitated the death of the high modernism from which we were excluded -- "gave a new energy to countries like Canada" (22). This energy became available because "those two empires, in attempting to assert or reassert their meta-narratives, turn all other societies into postmodern societies" (22-23). As the colonial society loses its European centre, the centre defined by traditional meta-narratives -- religious, artistic, social, economic -- no longer holds, "the traditional authority of the novel itself begins to falter," and the reader is allowed "to wonder how the fictional narrative centre relates to the writer writing" (23). As a result of this decentring, the "margin, the periphery, the edge, now, is the exciting and dangerous boundary where silence and sound meet" (23; emphasis added), and historical or realistic narratives are irrelevant. Now, it is self-reflexivity that replaces realism, and "it is a kind of archaeological act that succeeds, against the traditional narrative" (25; emphasis added).

Let us briefly attend to 'archaeology,' attempting to discover why this 'method' of writing is important enough to Kroetsch to be mentioned in every article he has written since "Beyond Nationalism: A Prologue." The notion of archaeology is indissociable from genealogy and origins, or rather: "Not origins, but beginnings. Origins recede into history, history into myth. Beginnings recur" (Kroetsch,

1978b: 7).⁶⁶ Even in 1974, before he had begun to speak of archaeology, he was concerned with the 'unearthing' that he would come to describe as his concern with the archaeological 'site,' claiming that "it is [the Canadian writer's] task to un-name" (Kroetsch, 1973h: 58) and that

new writers are discovering something essentially new, something essential not only to Canadians but to the world they would uncreate. . . . they uncreate themselves into existence. . . . they will accept that the root meaning of the word truth is un-concealing, dis-closing, dis-covering, un-hiding.

(Kroetsch, 1973h: 63; emphasis added)

In the first article mentioning archaeology by name, he says:

Canadian writing takes place between the vastness of (closed) cosmologies and the fragments found in the (open) field of the archaeological site. It is a literature of dangerous middles. It is a literature that, compulsively seeking its own story . . . comes compulsively to a genealogy that refuses origin, to a genealogy that speaks instead, and anxiously, and with a generous reticence, the nightmare and the welcome dream of Babel. (Kroetsch, 1981b: 71)

We have been told that 'Canada is a country of margins'

⁶⁶ The sentences quoted here are repeated in "The Moment of the Discovery of America Continues" (Kroetsch, 1981g: 15), an article which appears to be an extensively expanded and revised version of "On Being an Alberta Writer: Or, I Wanted to Tell Our Story" (1980).

and that, by virtue of postmodern decentring, "the margin, the periphery, the edge now is the exciting and dangerous boundary where silence and sound meet" (cited on 141), which explains why the "rural or small-town setting--not the wilderness, but its edge--somehow remains the basic place of Canadian fiction, as if there must be a doubt even about where the place is. . . . there is a resistance to centres" (Kroetsch, 1986d: 46). How is it, then, in view of this postmodern decentring and resistance to centres, that "Canadian writing. . . . is a literature of dangerous middles"? Are middles not centres? Somehow, to Kroetsch, middles are not centres, if there is "only an absence at the center" (Neuman and Wilson, 1982: xii). Just as Canada's origin is an absence, and the Canadian identity is a lack, so is the Canadian 'centre' a lack or an absence.

The artist, or at least the male artist, in Canada . . . insists that the middle ground is unreadable. In Thomson's painting [The Jack Pine] that middle becomes the lake--the surface of the lake that in its mirroring of the empty sky refuses to mirror us. . . . But the lake . . . represent[s], at the very middle of things, the presence of absence.

(Kroetsch, 1989d: 38; emphasis added)

"The empty sky refuses to mirror us." Who? Canadians? People? Men? To continue: "the problem: how do we quote the unreadability that is in the middle of our... project? I've hinted that the feminist endeavour must no doubt help

us to speak the unspeakable" (38; emphasis added).⁶⁷

Absence is to Kroetsch a generative force; it is by virtue of our colonial beginnings, our lack of a determinate origin upon which we can decide and a meta-narrative upon which we can agree that we, as Canadians, were prepared to enter into the brave new postmodern world, hindered by neither a limiting centre, nor a restrictive, overriding meta-narrative, nor literary giants like Pound or Eliot. Postmodernism emerged in Canada because Canadians were discontented "with a history that lied to us, violated us,

⁶⁷ Cf. "My Book is Bigger than Yours," Kroetsch's review of the feminist 'endeavour' A Mazing Space, edited by Shirley Neuman and Smaro Kamboureli (1986).

[A]s a male writer living in the presence of this feminist enterprise, I at times felt a variety of anxiety that was all my own. It is from that anxiety that I begin this response.

In the book's long period of gestation, I at times felt what many fathers feel. I felt that, while I might somewhere in the recent past have made a small contribution to what was happening, I had become . . . irrelevant. . . .

When the published book made its appearance I read with the feverish pride and genetic curiosity that many fathers must feel. . . . In this extreme predicament, to feel paternal in any way at all was to become suspect; and by the same token, not to feel paternal was to become suspect.

This is the stuff of modern anxiety.

(Kroetsch, 1988: 195; emphasis added)

What is 'the stuff of modern anxiety'? To become irrelevant or to become suspect? Or to become suspect whether one behaves in either of two ways? Must there be only two alternatives, or, in other words, must any interest in this feminist enterprise necessarily be paternal? But more importantly, why is 'modern anxiety' exclusively male? And why need the title of this review, with its connection to Freud's "misogynist disciple, Jacques Lacan," suggest that "the female critics in this fat volume" (200) write in order to compensate for Freudian 'penis envy'?

erased us even" (Kroetsch, 1981b: 65), a history according to which we were irrelevant and invisible, unable to decide upon either our moment of origin or the meta-narrative from which our narratives would spring. We had no identity, no proper name, and our "literature . . . is the autobiography of a culture that tells its story by telling us repeatedly it has no story to tell" (Kroetsch, 1989e: 193).

But even with no story to tell, we have managed to tell the story of our having no story to tell, and this paradox lies at the heart of Kroetsch's view of our postmodernism. With a distinctively Canadian ingenuity, the source of which is our lack of a proper origin and a proper name, we have been able, through our artists and writers and our "insistence on the archaeological sense of narrative" (182), to turn that originary lack into an asset, "[f]or in our very invisibility lies our chance for survival" (Kroetsch, 1971c: 57).

Canadian writing is the writing down of a new place. . . . The interest in the question of identity speaks its presence in a curious way. That presence announces itself as an absence. Or . . . one of the peculiarities of this new literature is the recurrence of major fictional characters who have no names.

(Kroetsch, 1986d: 41; emphasis added)

Are we to understand that writing becomes in some

mysterious way 'art-speech'?⁶⁸ Yes. Our literature "comes . . . to a genealogy that speaks . . . the nightmare and the welcome dream of Babel" (cited on 142), "the feminist endeavour must no doubt help us to speak the unspeakable" (cited on 143-44) and 'the interest in the question of identity speaks its presence in a curious way.' One of the reasons for Kroetsch's constant interest in the archaeological mode is that he believes it allows for Voice, for the oral tradition, in a way that history does not; to him, our survival depends as much upon our oral tradition as upon our invisibility: "How do we lift an environment to expression? How do you write in a new country? . . . [W]e talk ourselves into existence" (Kroetsch, 1981g: 6).⁶⁹

Therefore:

Many of our best novels . . . assert the primacy of speech over the act of writing. . . . The oral tradition, become a literary tradition, points us back to our own landscape, our recent ancestors, and the characteristic expressions and modes of our own speech.
(Kroetsch, 1981g: 6-7)

Narrators as well as characters are nameless in Canadian literature. And our namelessness is by choice: In

⁶⁸ "Art-speech is the only truth." (D.H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature (1961), cited in Kroetsch, 1978a: 11). On the same page, Kroetsch writes: "I find myself agreeing, often, with Lawrence."

⁶⁹ Cf. "Individuals, communities, religions, even nations, narrate themselves into existence" (Kroetsch, 1989e: 179).

"American writing, the invisible man, or the voice that says 'nobody knows my name', those are the voices of people who feel they are being made nameless by others. The Canadian narrator makes him- or herself invisible" (Kroetsch, 1986d: 44). Invisibility and/or anonymity is not an unfortunate accident of fate which has befallen us; it is an important aspect of the Canadian narrative strategy, as "[a]rt becomes the politics of disguise" (Kroetsch, 1989e: 189): "George Bowering is one of the models of what the narrative strategy is. . . . He writes under the name George Bowering, and he writes from behind a pseudonym. . . . In a way the Canadian writer, writing, writes from behind a pseudonym. That's the narrative strategy" (Kroetsch, 1989e: 181).

The Canadian ingenuity that Kroetsch repeatedly describes is a talent for dialectical thinking through which we, or our artists for us, can use every disadvantage, every lack or absence, to speak our presence as a self-sufficient, self-identical people. We who have fought no revolution to gain independence and are therefore without a determinate origin or a unified identity find that:

If we can't be united we can't be
disunited. Our genealogy is postmodern.
Each move of a generation back into time
doubles the number of ancestors instead
of refining itself toward a sacred
moment. . . . The abundance, the
disunity, is [our] saving unity.
(Kroetsch, 1985b: 27; emphasis added)

We who as colonists were named by others

[come] reluctantly, uneasily, to the question: What is this anonymity about? What is the name for what is not named? . . . It may well be that Canadian writing owes its first debt to the model of Eve, and not to that of Adam. Eve is created into the world after Adam had been created--and after the naming has been done.

The Canadian writer in English must speak a new culture not with new names but with an abundance of names inherited from Britain and the United States. . . . The problem then is not so much that of knowing one's identity as it is that of how to relate that newly evolving identity to its inherited or 'given' names. And the first technique might be simply to hold those names in suspension, to let the identity speak itself out of a willed namelessness. (Kroetsch, 1986d: 50-51; emphasis added)

We unname in order to rename, to find our own proper name, and "we survive by being skilful shape-changers. . . . by working with a low level of self-definition and national definition. We insist on staying multiple" (Kroetsch, 1985b: 27-28). We who were without a literature until this century adopt a narrative strategy that allows us to survive and produces a self-reflexive (postmodern) writing --

Canadian writing, by that trope of concealment [the concealing of one's self from one's name . . . along with the revealing of one's self in namelessness] reveals to the reader a readerly predicament that is . . . writerly. The reader reading Canadian becomes the reader writing the writer, then writing the reader.
(Kroetsch, 1989e: 192)

-- and will lead us to truth:

That's the narrative strategy. . . . The truth is veiled. Except that we are, perhaps, being teased into looking behind the veil. Or under the veil. Except that, perhaps, we should be looking at the veil. The truth shall make you veiled.⁷⁰

That's the way it is, in Canadian writing.
(Kroetsch, 1989e: 181)

As well as being very much involved with presence, absence, truth, and voice, all of this has to do with origins or, rather, with the lack of a proper origin, which is of overwhelming importance not only to Kroetsch's notion of 'archaeology' but, also, to the gesture which motivates his arguments in all his criticism. It is a gesture which is not only characteristic of Kroetsch, or of Harold Bloom, whose 'anxiety of influence' obliges every aspiring poet (writer) to somehow misread in order to overthrow his most influential predecessor(s), or, in Kroetsch's words, of his "necessary doing of violence in order to get a space on the shelf" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 42); it is also the metaphysical gesture par excellence, the exclusionary appropriation of the other by which the self attains its

⁷⁰ Yes, "the root meaning of the word truth is un-concealing, dis-closing, dis-covering, un-hiding" (cited on 142), and Kroetsch affirms the 'truth' that is the dream of absolute presence in alēthia or unveiling. Whether one embraces notions of veiling in favour of unveiling or absence in favour of presence, if undecidability is not taken into account, we will necessarily, by virtue of the work of the negative, of the violence by which metaphysics reasserts the hierarchy of binaries, find ourselves ending by affirming the (totalizing) meaning of 'truth' as unveiling in presence, even if that presence is announced as an absence.

'identity.' In this case, it is Canada and Canadian literature which are to achieve an identity or proper name -- a singular, unique name which is our own and only ours. And that proper name is 'postmodern.' In order for Kroetsch to gain for himself the identity he desires, Canada must be a postmodern country with a postmodern literature, not, as Walter Pache (and others, such as members and critics of the TISH group) would have it, because we imported postmodernism from the United States, but because we invented postmodernism. We cannot be derivative, we must be first. Therefore, just as our writers must uninvent or decreate the world in order to create it anew (Kroetsch, 1973h), and immigrants must uninvent their origins in order to be born anew in a new country (Kroetsch, 1984f), so must Kroetsch uninvent (deny/negate) Canada's 'origins' and more than two centuries of Canadian literature in order to create us and our literature anew.⁷¹ It is this desire as much as it is his obsession with voice that motivates Kroetsch's so adamant rejection of history in favour of archaeology.

Is it fair to claim that Kroetsch's insistence upon Canada's lack of a definite origin and identity, as well as his insistence on the absence of modernism in Canadian literature, is part of a desire to see Canada and Canadian literature as somehow always already postmodern? In my

⁷¹ For ideas similar to Kroetsch's in regard to the relationship between postmodernism and Canadian nationalism, see also Moss, 1974a; Carlsen, 1984; Fogel, 1984c; Edwards, 1985; and Davey, 1988: 119-120.

opinion, such a claim is supported by his comments on novels that are not generally considered to be postmodern.

[As For Me and My House] is in effect a powerful novel about the inability to make art--it is a novel as a set of diary entries about an unwritten novel. The meta-narratives--religious, artistic, social, economic--do not hold. Even the great European meta-narrative about 'nature' does not hold here, as nature turns into wind and moving dust and an unreachable horizon.

[In The Mountain and The Valley t]he meta-narratives of art, of family, of love, don't hold. The narrative itself turns into brilliant and static passages of description, speculation, repetition. The story simply cannot move.

Both these novels are set on geographical margins. . . . Both deal with lives that the people themselves see as marginal. . . .

In both it is a kind of archaeological act that succeeds, against the traditional narrative.

(Kroetsch, 1985b: 24-25)

Similarly:

Recognizing as [Tay John] does, through the fur trade of the western mountains, the meta-narrative of empire, and recognizing through the processes of conversion the meta-narrative of the Christian myth, it goes on to explore an acceptance of the 'hiddenness' of narrative in a manner that we now call, loosely, postmodern.

(Kroetsch, 1989e: 182)

Just as Canadian novels written as early as the 1920's rejected traditional narrative in favour of archaeology, so were our writers of that time already resisting modernism: "Morley Callaghan went to Paris and met the Modern writers;

he, for Canada, experienced the real and symbolic encounter; he, heroically and successfully, resisted. The country that invented Marshall McLuhan and Northrop Frye did so by not ever being Modern" (Kroetsch, 1974a: 1; emphasis added). Interestingly, Kroetsch later makes statements contradicting this view of Frye as a 'postmodernist.' For example,

Northrop Frye is at heart a modernist, trying to assert the oneness, the unity of all narrative. But the writers of stories and poems nowadays, in Canada, are not terribly sympathetic to Frye and his unifying sense of what a mythic vision is. Against this overriding view, we posit an archaeological sense that every unearthing is problematic, tentative, subject to a story-making act that is itself subject to further change as the 'dig' goes on.

(Kroetsch, 1985b: 24)

But much later, in 1987, Kroetsch again posits Frye as a postmodern thinker, or, at least, the precursor of a postmodern thinker.

Frye suggests, in my reading, in my wilful misprision, that the moment of recognition of the possible departure is available only at the moment of recognition of the departure's impossibility. Realizing that we are already where we propose to go, we are free to go originally. Ideally, he imagines a moment when the poet, by knowing everything, is at last free to know the unknowable as well. Incompleteness is made possible only by completeness. Completeness, allowing incompleteness as its other, allows for the gap, the rupture, that is the space on the shelf, the space in the complete

library, that desires the poet's arrival
as fully as the poet desires to arrive.
(Kroetsch, 1987: 157)

In my opinion, Kroetsch's view of Frye's theories as postmodern is necessary to his version of Canadian writing as always already postmodern (despite his somewhat empty acknowledgement of a 'Victorian period' in Canadian literature). What is of much more interest is the contradiction itself and the desire which renders this contradiction necessary. Kroetsch must present Frye as both modern and postmodern; he must present Frye as postmodern in order to support his view of Canada's writers as always already postmodern, while, at the same time, he must present Frye as modern in order to allow a difference against which he can define himself and his contemporaries as postmodern: "Against this overriding view we posit an archaeological sense. . . ." Also, in the quotation from "Learning the Hero," and in support of his 'always already postmodern' theory, Kroetsch has somehow managed to transform Frye into a precursor of Harold Bloom with his 'anxiety of influence' theory of misreading. It would appear not only that Canadian 'literature' has always been postmodern, but that Canadian criticism has always been so as well.

But even more interesting is the fact that we have here, again, another of Kroetsch's typical dialectical inversions, this time couched in the deconstructive terms of 'the gap,' 'the rupture,' through which 'incompleteness is

made possible only by completeness.' But is this gap a glimmer of Derridean undecidability? No, alas. As always, with binary pairs, the powerful term, completeness, allows incompleteness as its other, as that which it is not, thus allowing the gap, the rupture, which turns out to be none other than the logical opposition which allows for what Kroetsch often describes as the necessary act of violence by which a writer can gain 'the space on the shelf' which he so relentlessly pursues. It is the violence which is necessary for, and inherent to, any metaphysics of presence.

Yet, we are to understand that postmodernism is 'the crisis of metaphysical philosophy' (cited on 139), a philosophy which, to Lyotard, depends upon the narrative function and is, therefore, put into a state of crisis by the 'fact' that "the narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements" (cited on 139). To Kroetsch, this dispersal corresponds to the multiplicity of voices that is 'the nightmare and the welcome dream of Babel' (cited on 142), to the postmodern decentring which is "the collapse, for North American eyes, of the meta-narrative that once went by the name Europe" (Kroetsch, 1985b: 23), and to the 'successful' archaeological act by which

[t]he nature of the genealogical
patterns, when tested by journey and
quest, becomes more and more elaborate,

more nearly a maze. . . . There is no single source; rather, a multiplying of possibilities. The compounding of genealogical relationship in the Canadian novel of the seventies, manifests itself in complex narrative structure Our genealogies are the narratives of a discontent with a history that lied to us, violated us, erased us even. We wish to locate our dislocation, and to do so we must confront the impossible sum of our traditions. . . . We recognize that we can be freed into our own lives only by terrible and repeated acts of perception. (Kroetsch, 1981b: 65)

Only the artist can 'free us into our own lives' by performing "[t]he mapping. The naming. The unlearning so that we might learn: the unnamed country," teaching us "How to see the vision, how to imagine the real" (Kroetsch, 1981g: 17). Hence, "the figure of the artist is obsessively present in Canadian writing; the künstlerroman is, often, its sub-genre. In the beginning is the artist, beginning" (Kroetsch, 1981b: 66). "Given the failure of ends, . . . process becomes more important than end" (Kroetsch, 1985b: 26).

The whole business . . . is one of capturing process--especially in a country like Canada where things are being shaped but aren't already shaped. . . . Some of the bad writers don't give us that sense of process. . . . [which is] more intense in Canadian writing than it is in that of an older country because we don't have models to play off against. (in Brown, 1972: 7)

We Canadians, a people without a literary tradition, are not

fettered (as Americans are) by "moon literature--arising out of the Romantic movements of the nineteenth century.

Canadian writing is sun literature--arising out of the twentieth century and the return to the sun as the literal source of our being" (Kroetsch, 1971c: 54).⁷²

So, in the end, everything is a question of ontology, and the meek shall inherit the earth. We whom European imperialism deprived of a proper origin and a proper name, we, who were to history irrelevant and to our neighbours invisible, have successfully overcome all obstacles. In our lack of an origin upon which we could decide, our lack of a meta-narrative upon which we could agree, and our lack of a literature which could find a space on the shelf, we have found a postmodern voice with which to speak our presence (as an absence) and to tell our story (of having no story to tell). And, lo and behold, now that the age of our shining

⁷² Cf. Lecker: "Dorf describes the governing metaphor of his quest when he asserts that 'we all . . . desire our way back to the source of all desire, the sun itself'" (cited on 109). Also, cf. McLuhan's "step from the dark into the light of the mind," as quoted by Linda Hutcheon and cited on 72, fn. 38. And cf. Hegel:

[I]t is not difficult to see that ours is a birth-time and a period of transition to a new era. Spirit has broken with the world it has hitherto inhabited and imagined, and is of a mind to submerge it in the past, and in the labour of its own transformation. . . . The frivolity and boredom which unsettle the established order, the vague foreboding of something unknown, these are the heralds of approaching change. The gradual crumbling that left unaltered the face of the whole is cut short by a sunburst which, in one flash, illuminates the features of the new world.
(Hegel, 1977: 6-7)

is finally arrived, we find that it is we who are closest to the sun, the source of our being -- one might say, to God. Through the multiple voices of our writers who narrate us into existence, through Robert Kroetsch's meta-narrative, identifying us as postmodern, we are at last vindicated.

Almost. We cannot yet be sure we have reached the goal of our quest, because, as we would expect, "in postmodern writing there appears a scepticism or hesitation about the meta-narrative's great voyages, its great goal" (Kroetsch, 1985b: 23), and its great hero. "Instead of answers we have questions. Instead of resolution we have doubt" (25) -- questions and doubt which cause endless debates between critics. However, these debates do not, to Robert Kroetsch, 'announce' a Derridean dissemination, but rather, perhaps, "an acceptance of, even a celebration of, multiplicity" (22) such as that which he hears in Williams' Paterson. To him, these debates are the manifestation of a 'metaphysical' multiplicity contained in Unity. Just as he claims that "in some perverse way, [the] falling-apart of our story is what holds our story together" (21), he "want[s] to suggest that the debates themselves . . . are what create 'unity'. . . . The possibility of a single or privileged voice announcing the right version of the narrative is talked away. The unity is created by the very debate that seems to threaten unity" (25). And the critic becomes poet and hero:

It is difficult, almost impossible, to
 imagine a nation without its epic poem.

Northrop Frye's work is an extended commentary on the great Canadian epic poem, a poem whose text we do not have, but whose intention and design and accomplishment he makes everywhere present in his elaborate response.

Frye's long discourse . . . [is] the epic tale of the tribe. . . .

Northrop Frye becomes . . . by that revealing of prophetic presence in absence, by that locating of the denied or at least concealed story in his own commentary, the voice of the epic we do not have. . . . he becomes our epic poet.

(Kroetsch, 1987: 161; emphasis added)

Or, in other words:

Criticism, it would seem, narrates its own intention. Traditional critical writing narrates the history of the literary past. Only in the late twentieth century has criticism attempted a narration of the future of the literature of which it is the mediating force.

(Kroetsch, 1988: 196; emphasis added)

'Criticism narrates its own intention'? Does this suggest that criticism is subject to no law but its own? Like God? Also, we may well ask who has the power to narrate the future? Only a prophet. Or the inspired poet who tells 'the epic tale of the tribe' -- a prophet. The 'temptation of meaning' has proved itself stronger than Kroetsch's power to resist, and he has posited for us exactly that which he means to abjure -- a prophetic presence, a prophetic voice.... The prophetic Voice he claims to have rejected for the voices of Babel. And the speaker, the critic, the

prophet, is the mediating force through which opposites will be reconciled in that Voice -- in the multiple-voiced debates creating the very Unity Kroetsch has forsworn.

Where, then, is the crisis of metaphysical philosophy to which postmodernism corresponds? Robert Kroetsch "has repeatedly announced himself anti-Aristotelian and anti-theological"; "he prefers multiplicity and fragmentation to Unities, the voices of Babel to the prophetic Voice" (Neuman and Wilson, 1982: xi). He is "quite aware of being without ideology" (33)⁷³ and believes in "the failure of ends, goals" (Kroetsch, 1985b: 26). Yet, his resistance to centres, to unity, to ideologies, to meaning, to origins and ends, have not the power to allow him to resist the metaphysical system he attempts to subvert. None of us can 'escape' or 'resist' metaphysics by a simple act of will, because the very metaphysics we would resist governs our language and the mode of thought with which that language is intimately, irrevocably connected. Neither can we resist metaphysics by negation, because the negative relentlessly confirms and reaffirms (with a new name) that which we deny. If we desire to involve our thought with a 'crisis of metaphysics,' we must resist by thinking the unthinkable or, in other words, by thinking Derridean undecidability.

⁷³ In writing of Kroetsch, whom he sees as a bridge between American and Canadian literature, by virtue of his incorporating the best of both (into a paradoxical 'whole'), Stan Fogel claims that "the ideological baggage, which goes with the United States, does not encumber Canada" (Fogel, 1984c: 19).

Chapter Seven

'Unhiding the Hidden':

Archaeology, Dialectic, Intertextuality, and Voice

Like Derrida, Robert Kroetsch is concerned with resisting the metaphysical implications of notions such as 'system,' 'ideology/theology,' and 'meaning.' As we have seen, Derrida approaches this project through a strategy which displaces the concept of 'presence,' the concept upon which all other concepts and implications of Western metaphysics depend. Throughout this process -- an ongoing project with which we will never be finished -- he does not attempt to neutralize the difference between presence and absence. Neither does he deny that presence is possible (as an effect of undecidability), nor does he reject or deny presence in favour of absence; to do either would be to negate presence by absence, which is the first step of the dialectical process⁷⁴ by which presence, as the logical opposite of absence, is subsumed and reappropriated within

⁷⁴ The term 'dialectic' is derived from a Greek word that means 'to converse' or 'to discourse' In Plato's Republic, 'dialectic' is the supreme kind of knowledge, which 'gives an account' (logos) of everything -- that is, explains everything -- by reference to the 'Idea of the Good'. . . . In Aristotle's logical works, 'dialectic' refers to reasoning from premises that are probable, in the sense of generally accepted. . . . 'Dialectic' is Hegel's name for the logical pattern that thought must follow. Broadly, Hegel argued that thought proceeds by contradictions, the overall pattern being one of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. (Flew, 1984: 94)

absence, thus achieving a coherence in paradox (which always indicates a desire for presence) and reaffirming transcendental, totalizing meaning in absence. But this is exactly what we have seen taking place in Kroetsch's criticism of Canadian literature; he finds for us an identity in a lack of identity and 'presence in absence' or 'presence as absence' (see 143). Moreover, presence reasserts itself (through 'attributes' such as origin, end, and unity) through the rejections by which Kroetsch defines his literary theory as postmodern. Those rejections include: 1) a rejection of ideology/ theology, 2) a rejection of unity and wholeness in favour of multiplicity and discontinuity, 3) a rejection of realism in favour of self-reflexivity, 4) a rejection of history in favour of archaeology (in the Foucauldian sense⁷⁵).

⁷⁵ For the purposes of this study, I am not as interested in Foucauldian archaeology per se as in Kroetsch's interpretation of that archaeology. However, before considering Kroetsch's version of archaeology, we should note Derrida's comment to the effect that

what we must be wary of . . . is the metaphysical concept of history. This is the concept of history as the history of meaning . . . the history of meaning developing itself, producing itself, fulfilling itself. . . . The metaphysical concept of history is not only linked to linearity, but to an entire system of implications (teleology, eschatology, elevating and interiorizing accumulation of meaning, a certain type of traditionality, a certain concept of continuity, of truth, etc. (Derrida, 1981d: 57)

At first glance, it appears that Foucault and Derrida are in agreement, as Foucault is also wary of this system of metaphysical implications. However, Foucault does not seek to displace this system by teasing out the undecidability

which inhabits it, demonstrating how the 'members' of that system are not atoms, but networks of traces. He begins by proclaiming that "there is a negative work to be carried out first: we must rid ourselves of a whole mass of notions, each of which, in its own way, diversifies the theme of continuity" (Foucault, 1972: 21). Those notions include 'tradition,' 'influence,' 'development and evolution,' and 'spirit.' He understands the problem to reside, at least in large part, in our notions of 'the book' as a unity, and he redefines the book in terms that would seem to be compatible with Derrida's notion of the general text:

The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network. . . . The book is not simply the object that one holds in one's hands; and it cannot remain within the little parallelepiped that contains it: its unity is variable and relative. As soon as one questions that unity, it loses its self-evidence; it indicates itself, constructs itself, only on the basis of a complex field of discourse.
(Foucault, 1972: 23; emphasis added)

In this theory, however, the question of unity is never problematized, shaken, or displaced -- the book, as "a node within a network," is still a self-identical entity, and a variable and relative unity is still unity. Also, the unity which Foucault unwittingly seeks is, through all his 'discourse,' grounded in 'discourse,' and his archaeology is ultimately, like Kroetsch's, phonocentric. Neither Kroetsch nor Foucault can move beyond the metaphysics they wish to reject because they do not share Derrida's conviction that there is no such 'thing' as a metaphysical concept in and of itself. As Derrida says, "No concept is by itself, and consequently in and of itself, metaphysical, outside all the textual work in which it is inscribed" (Derrida, 1981d: 57), and therefore, no 'metaphysical concept' can be simply rejected out of hand, because the hierarchy of the binaries will always reassert itself, and one 'metaphysical concept' will merely be replaced by another. In this case, history becomes archaeology, and 'discourse' replaces 'the book' as a master concept; the book, which has been considered to be a totality becomes "a node in a network," while the 'network' becomes the totalizing structure.

For a deconstructive reading of Foucault's Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason,

Foucauldian archaeology abandons studies of linear succession (historical) in favour of discoveries in depth (archaeological). Attention is turned away from "vast unities like 'periods' or 'centuries' to the phenomenon of rupture, discontinuity" (Foucault, 1972: 4) and to the "concepts that enable us to conceive of discontinuity (threshold, rupture . . . transformation)" (5). Therefore, in 'unearthing' any subject, the archaeologist discovers an ever-increasing number of strata as he or she unceasingly discourses on the relations and possible relations between the subject and 'the world.'⁷⁶ Archaeology is a 'field of discourse' by/in which, to Kroetsch, the absence at the centre is the blank space from/in which one speaks to deny continuity and unity, while celebrating the boundary.

Unfortunately, this boundary is the threshold at which the transformational synthesis of opposites has always been considered to be achieved. Hence, 'presence' constantly

see Jacques Derrida, "Cogito and the History of Madness" (Derrida, 1978b: 31-63). Also, in "Force and Signification" (3-30), Derrida discusses structuralism and its philosophical presuppositions, which may be of interest to those who consider Foucault's archaeology to be a form of structuralism.

⁷⁶ Robert Kroetsch's various Field Notes are all stages or an autobiographical undertaking which he describes as archaeological: "It may be that my journals and this interview are as close as I can get to autobiography... Field Notes. . . . I see it as an archaeological site again" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 207). The fact that the archaeologist's work is said to be unceasing, thus preventing closure, makes it rather baffling to me that the 1989 edition of Kroetsch's archaeological autobiography is entitled Completed Field Notes.

reasserts and reaffirms itself as absence in Kroetsch's work, even though his archaeology includes the notion of the active reader.⁷⁷ In choosing not to work rigorously through the metaphysical context of the notions he wishes to reject, and choosing, instead, to deny those notions, his resistance is negation -- which is, by definition, the work by which difference and otherness are effaced and opposites are reconciled in presence (whatever name presence may take).

That Kroetsch's literary theory is imbued with negativity is obvious in that his preference for archaeology over history is motivated by a desire to 'erase' "a history that lied to us, violated us, erased us even" (cited on 144-45). He embraces the "archaeological model" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 28) as a means of resisting the manifestations of presence with which history, traditional narrative, and Western metaphysics are concerned -- that is, to resist (negate): systems and/or ideologies; [the temptation of] meaning; unity in terms of 'story'; unity in terms of a single, unified cosmology; unity in terms of the self; origins and endings -- teleology. In order to effect this negation, he sets up a system of binary opposites: game versus system, discontinuity versus continuity,

⁷⁷ Shirley Neuman suggests, and Kroetsch agrees: "in [Kroetsch's] kind of autobiography . . . the self isn't an open site at all. The reader has to go in and open the site, unearth the writer's self" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 207). In view of archaeology's presumed preclusion of unity and closure, it is interesting that neither Neuman nor Kroetsch qualifies this notion of the 'writer's self.'

incompleteness versus completeness, the fragmented self versus the unified self, a whole set of cosmologies versus one unified cosmology, beginnings versus origins, and process versus end. But setting up a system of binary pairs and prioritizing one term of each pair over its 'other' can never subvert the metaphysical implications of conventional narrative, because that is exactly what metaphysics does, and presence will relentlessly reassert itself through the negation which elevates one term over 'its other.'

Beginning with game versus system, we must ask whether Kroetsch means the notion of 'game' to refer to the Derridean (limitless) play that is the movement of undecidability or to the permutations, substitutions, and transformations which are believed to take place within a structure whose centre determines it, both allowing and limiting the play which takes place within it. The latter 'play' is based on a fundamental ground, on the determination of Being as presence, and is, in fact, the play which Kroetsch affirms in order to resist systems -- a play which is part and parcel of the system he would reject: "One could say that Surrealists illustrate the difference between play and game; they play but they don't play a game. . . . Surrealism, like all writing, is true playing. By the time you write the work, you have made up the game plan" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 64). If, 'by the time you write the work, you have made up the game plan,' how can writing, or Surrealism, illustrate the difference between 'play' and

'system'? And what is 'true' playing? Play that is not false? Or play that is absolute? Kroetsch's notion of game includes the idea that one may "[build] into a system something that breaks the system" (65) -- for example, proclaiming the deuce wild in a game of cards. But proclaiming the deuce wild is simply a part of making up the game plan or system one is devising and, as such, cannot break or even threaten the system.

As for discontinuity versus continuity, Kroetsch says:

One can't escape by discontinuity itself --it contains the word **continuity**, doesn't it? It says **dis**/continuity. I am totally involved in a sense of the tradition, but I relate to it by discontinuity. Not to have that is to be absorbed into tradition or erased by it. (60; emphases Kroetsch's and mine)

In response, Neuman asks whether failing to relate to tradition by discontinuity would allow it to 'assimilate you rather than your assimilating it,' and Kroetsch replies: "Exactly" (26). It seems that his yen for 'discontinuity' is very much a part of his 'Bloomian impulse' -- the impulse which motivates his desire to posit Canadian literature as always already postmodern by denying 'pre-postmodern' literature, thus securing for himself a 'space on the shelf' by incorporating the past into his present self. However, we must also note his comment about the complicity between discontinuity and continuity. He is correct in that each

term of a binary pair is always already inscribed with the trace of its 'other,' but he does not think of this complicity in terms of originary doubling. He considers discontinuity and continuity to be binary (logical) opposites, which will always allow dialectic to reconcile them in a supposedly self-sufficient, self-identical unity. Kroetsch also takes notice of the complicity between incompleteness and completeness: 'Completeness, allowing incompleteness as its other' (cited on 152). This statement concedes that the notion of completeness or unity is always already posited by the notion of incompleteness, but it also acknowledges the priority metaphysics grants to the former.

Also, the idea that the notion of 'a whole set of cosmologies' differs essentially from the notion of a single unified cosmology is erroneous. Kroetsch claims that "falling out of cosmologies is at least an illusion of freedom" (25), because it posits a cosmology which is not enclosed. This statement is on the same level as his claim to "write against systems even if [he], ironically, end[s] up incorporating a system" (160). Can one 'write against' or subvert the notion of system while incorporating a system? Is this not also an illusion? Similarly, the notion of 'falling out of a cosmology' merely extends the cosmology (as in Paradise Lost).

Moreover, in regard to a 'whole set of cosmologies,' the words 'whole' (which repeatedly occurs in Kroetsch's conversation/writing) and 'set' concretize Unity, a concept

which Kroetsch's supposedly unenclosed cosmology leaves virtually untouched, replacing, as it does, a single 'entity' with a multiple but nevertheless unified 'entity,' the parts of which are interchangeable. The notion of 'cosmology' is not questioned and, more importantly, neither are 'unity' or the binary pair 'inside/outside' -- the spatial pair which is vital to the notion of 'system' or 'structure' and which "gives life to the opposition of subject and object" (Derrida, 1978b: 88). Further to the implications of 'set,' Kroetsch says that Margaret Laurence's Morag Gunn ("an archaeologist of her own stories") finds "a set of contradictions, sets of variations" (Kroetsch, 1985b: 26) in an archaeological site that yields up "a bewildering multitude of fragments" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 31). However, the 'archaeological act' "seems intent on making the archaeological mode literally an act of recovering" (Kroetsch, 1989e: 182), of revelation:

In Canada we insist on the archaeological sense of narrative. We find, in our experience and in our psyches, fragments, traces, possibilities, remains, shards. . . . The story is concealed from us. Only by a careful acknowledgement of that concealment do we allow for a revelation of the story.
(Kroetsch, 1989e: 182; emphasis added)

And a successful act of creation:

it is a kind of archaeological act that succeeds, against the traditional

narrative. Mrs Bentley does keep a journal, and in that journal, without recognizing it, she makes her art. In The Mountain and The Valley it is David Canaan's grandmother, hooking a rug out of the scraps of clothing that represent traces of family history, who is the successful artist. (Kroetsch, 1985b: 25)

Kroetsch speaks often of fragments and of the fragmented or divided self, but the notion of a 'fragmented self' is solidly grounded in the concept of 'self.' It depends upon the notion that there was an original unified self from which those fragments derived and to which they will return in an immediately-present-to-consciousness moment (somewhat like the fragments of light, the souls, which will return to the divine Source, according to the Gnostic view). And such a notion lies at the 'centre' of Kroetsch's view of the divided or fragmented self; he writes, "As we come to the end of self, in our century. . . . [w]e become again, persons in the world, against the preposterous notion of self. We are each our own crossroads" (Kroetsch, 1980d: 132; emphasis added). It seems that the 'self' has become suspect to postmodernist thinkers, so a postmodernist who is still caught up in logocentric thought may use the term 'person' to avoid dealing with the metaphysical implications of the concept of self, while still reassuring him or herself of the self-sufficient, unified identity to which a metaphysics of presence must always return. The problem with this evasive

strategy is exactly that to which Derrida refers when he insists that we cannot escape the metaphysical implications of 'master words' or 'master concepts' (transcendentalizing words and concepts through which the logos always gathers everything into itself) by banning the words or concepts. To do so is merely to replace the rejected (negated) 'master word' or 'master concept' with a new one, which does not disturb in the least the metaphysics governing our thought.

Proclaiming that one prefers "multiplicity and fragmentation to Unities, the voices of Babel to the prophetic Voice" (see 159) does not prevent one's thought from being caught in the metaphysical closure of Unity and the prophetic Voice, because multiplicity and fragmentation are firmly grounded in the traditional (metaphysical) patterns of Western thought. Also, by proclaiming himself anti-theological (see 159), Kroetsch involves his thought -- through the work of the negative -- with the very system he rejects; the anti calls forth, with one sweeping gesture, the dialectic of which he is so fond -- the dialectic which has all its epistemological, ontotheological, teleological roots in the logos: in presence.

Given his fascination with the trickster figure,⁷⁸ I

⁷⁸ Kroetsch defines the trickster figure as "energy independent of moral structure and moral interpretation. He's very subversive, very carnivalesque. . . . I suppose that there is a kind of sexual origin in the figure of the trickster--the prick and its vagaries" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 100). Pure energy. Sexual. Male. Kroetsch sees the trickster as an "irrational amoral impulse [which] is comparable to the writer. . . . So there's that kind of

would say that Kroetsch wishes to think in terms of différance. That is, he would like to be able to posit the binary pairs not as a reconciliation of opposites, but as a maintaining of disjunction, a 'play' of resisting forces.

the artist him/her self:

in the long run, given the choice of
being God or Coyote, will, most
mornings, choose to be Coyote:

he lets in the irrational along with the
rational, the pre-moral along with the
moral. He is a shape-shifter. . . . He
is the charlatan-healer . . . rather
than Joyce's high priest of art.
Sometimes he is hogging the show instead
of paring his fingernails. Like all
tricksters . . . he runs the risk of
himself being tricked.

(in Kroetsch and Bessai, 1978: 209)

the reader:

a character out of one of the novels the
novelist is deconstructing.⁷⁹ He

peculiar tension between the rational and the irrational that's so intriguing in both sexuality and writing" (in Brown, 1972: 11-12). The trickster is "the force that gets you out of the rational frame [by means of an "anti-logic" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 99), which is, as always, the negative]. Out of the frame-up [system]. He kicks loose" (in Cameron, 1972: 50). And both sexuality and writing are connected with "fertility" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 122) or generation, which is, according to Western metaphysics and Robert Kroetsch, male territory. "Perhaps it was Radin who said that ultimately the trickster is comparable with the penis: they're both irrational, unpredictable. They do their own things" (in Cameron, 1972: 50).

⁷⁹ From this, and from all other instances in which he uses the terms 'deconstruction' or 'deconstructing,' it is obvious that Kroetsch does not refer to a Derridean notion of deconstruction. To Derrida, deconstruction is not something which a writer produces or performs, but something which is always already occurring, by virtue of the originary doubling through which undecidability operates and

expects certain consolations: of plot, of motivation, of characterization, of conclusion. . . . And he, the old reader, must slowly unlearn concepts of character. Of motivation. Of plot and ending. He must . . . acquire Negative Capability.⁸⁰ He has entered a world where possibilities not only co-exist but contradict. Where thesis inspires antithesis. Where day and light of chapter one become the night and darkness of chapter two, where the blind see and the seeing are fooled, not only by the trickster and each other--but by seeing.

But should not the dichotomies themselves be dissolved? (209-10)

The idea that the dichotomies themselves should be dissolved is, in my opinion, typical of thinkers who realize that our

through which metaphysics achieves the synthesis which denies and represses undecidability. To Kroetsch, though, 'deconstructing' seems to be 'decreation,' which, following the American Projectivist poets, is "a basic process for the postmodern arts: human forms must first be destroyed, if we are to be open to the true sources of value manifest in the natural processes which create forms" (Altieri, 1972-73: 612). Kroetsch's 'deconstructing' is inseparable from his 'unnaming,' which, to him, is essential for the (re)naming, the true naming which makes us real and, in the end, amounts to a typically negative (in the sense of logical negation) way of saying 'structuring.' Like the notion of 'self,' the notion of 'structure' has become suspect, and, instead of dealing with the metaphysical implications of 'structure' -- which have put 'structure' into disfavour -- Kroetsch exchanges 'deconstructing' for 'constructing,' just as he exchanges 'person' for 'self' and 'absence' for 'presence.'

⁸⁰ The first writer I know of to use this term was John Keats, and Negative Capability was to him the capacity to remain "in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubt, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (Keats, 1958: I.193). Interestingly, Charles Altieri finds in the poetic theory of the American postmodern (Projectivist) poet Charles Olson "a heavy stress on Keats' letter on negative capability" (Altieri, 1972-73: 607), a stress which also appears in George Bowering's article "Avison's Imitation of Christ the Artist" (Bowering, 1982b: 5-23).

habits of thought are problematic, but who do not realize that to 'dissolve the dichotomies' is both impossible and undesirable.⁸¹ To attempt to dissolve them is to attempt to neutralize difference -- 'difference' in Derrida's sense, which is not logical opposition, but the radical alterity which prevents any 'self' or concept from subsuming or being subsumed by its 'other.' And again, as always, unless undecidability is taken into account, metaphysics catches the unsuspecting revolutionary in its never yielding grasp, because, to neutralize difference is to reduce everything to the same, to celebrate and seek identity.

It is impossible to think in terms of différance, if one considers "the binary patterns that the human mind uses to construct its day and its labyrinth" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 26)⁸² as binaries -- that is, as binary

⁸¹ Cf. Hegel:

The activity of dissolution is the power and work of the Understanding, the most astonishing and mightiest of powers, or rather the absolute power. . . . this is the tremendous power of the negative; it is the energy of thought, of the pure "I." (Hegel, 1977: 18-19)

Incidentally, dissolving the dichotomy male/female is precisely what, according to Susan Rudy Dorscht, third wave feminism (postfeminism) attempts to do. (See 64-65)

⁸² The significance of this statement is twofold. In the first place, the statement shows that Kroetsch is caught up in logocentrism, because he accepts without question that 'our day and our labyrinth' -- our thought and the systems governed by that thought -- are constructed by binary patterns. In the second place, it reveals the ethnocentrism inherent in logocentrism. It is not the case that the thought systems of all cultures are structured by binary oppositions. To say that 'the human mind' uses binary

oppositions. The opposition, the anti, controls the thought, and one cannot think in terms of thesis and antithesis without synthesis. The synthesis always already inheres in the priority/privilege/mastery accorded to the 'higher' term, that priority which we accept without question because it is 'normal,' 'natural': inherent in the structure of our language and of our thought.⁸³ The mastery

patterns to construct its thought is to exclude all humans who are or have been members of non-European cultures.

For interesting studies on systems of thought which are not based upon presence and binary oppositions, which are not governed by logic, and for which the law of non-contradiction is not a consideration, see the works of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, particularly How Natives Think (1926).

⁸³ The assumption that one term is superior to its 'opposite' even determines our choices of diction, as in the statement: "Right to the bottom, you must never say, 'I really want to screw my mother, or make love to my father" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 153; emphases Kroetsch's and mine). Which is the 'higher' term, 'mother' or 'father'?

Of course, this sexist distinction between 'mother' and 'father' is but one of the instances in Kroetsch's work in which we find the familiar and therefore unrecognized phallogentrism that is intrinsic to logocentrism. So long as we accept as 'normal' and 'natural' a system of thought structured according to hierarchized binary oppositions, and so long as we do not question dialectic, which seeks to resolve opposition, 'female' will be considered the negative of 'male' and will be excluded and effaced by the work of the negative. And so long as our attitudes toward 'the other' are determined and confirmed by such a system, "[t]he bride [who] expects to receive as well as give" will be considered to overwhelm "[t]he male who should be artist," and he will seek to "possess so formidable a woman. . . . By transgression. By substitution" (Kroetsch, 1978c: 75; emphasis added).

This transgression is not the transgression by which Derrida teases out the trace of the other within the self. It is the transgression by which the logic of identity provides for the substitution of one supposedly self-identical concept with another that is the 'same' ('identical,' according to that logic) and the violent transgression by which dialectic negates and conserves the 'inferior' term of a binary pair within its 'superior'

which is part and parcel of logocentric Western thought cannot be resisted by a decision to 'acquire Negative Capability' (cited on 172).

We cannot shake the modes of thought by which we live and read by embracing contradictory 'possibilities,' because Aristotle's principle (or law) of non-contradiction is one of the founding tenets of Western thought, and, throughout the history of metaphysics, dialecticity has been and is nothing more nor less than an attempt to deal with this principle. It is the case that 'contradiction' is capable of shaking metaphysics, if, and only if, by 'contradiction,' one means Derridean contradiction, which is irreducible. According to Derridean thought, contradiction cannot be resolved because the terms of binary pairs are not the 'opposites' (i.e., the flip sides) of each other, as they are considered to be by logic, reason, and ordinary

counterpart. It is the phallogentric violence by which 'house' (the static, passive territory of the female) and 'horse' (the dynamic, active territory of the male) are set up as a binary opposition which is satisfyingly resolved in

the horse-house. Not the barn (though a version of resolution does take place there), but whore's-house. Western movies use that resolution. Sheila Watson treats of that resolution in The Double Hook. Antonia Shimerda [in Willa Cather's My Antonia] is unhoused, almost into whoredom. Philip Bentley is unhorsed into housedom. (76)

Can we continue to believe that such coherence in paradox is 'truly' reassuring? One reader who seems not to find it so is Sandra Djwa, who notes in her response to "Fear of Women" that the novels upon which Kroetsch builds his horse/house dialectic "are more complex than the present sexist formula allows" (Djwa, 1979: 87).

language. Therefore, the terms of a binary 'opposition' can be neither absolutely reconciled nor absolutely separated; rather, for example, even though 'good' can determine itself as good only in relation to 'evil,' and vice versa, "we cannot conclude wickedness from nongoodness" (Derrida, 1974: 189). The difference between 'good' and 'evil' is irreducible, because 'evil' carries the trace of 'good' within it (and vice versa). Thus, neither 'good' nor 'evil' can ever achieve self-sufficient, full presence, and neither can be resolved within 'its' other.

But logical contradiction is altogether a different matter. For example, evil is considered to be an absence of good, and this explanation of the inferior term as a lack of the superior allows the latter, through a dialectical movement, to reappropriate its 'other' in a reconciliation of opposites through which the inferior term is both subsumed and preserved within the superior. To think that traditional thought is constructed according to binary oppositions which arrange themselves as 'equal,' co-existing pairs is to be unaware of how the terms of those oppositions violently achieve synthesis in one's own modes of thought (as with Kroetsch's Canadian meta-narrative).

Kroetsch speaks of the 'Canadian myth of stasis' (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 123), defining the 'Canadian world view' as a static collection of equally balanced opposites.

The double hook. The total ambiguity that is so essentially Canadian: be it in terms of two solitudes, the bush garden, Jungian opposites, or the raw and the cooked binary structures of Levi-Strauss [sic]. Behind the multiplying theories of Canadian literature is always the pattern of equally matched opposites.

Coyote : God
 Self : Community
 Energy : Stasis⁸⁴

The balance, whatever the specifics, is always so equal that one wonders how paradigm can possibly issue into story.
 (in Kroetsch and Bessai, 1978: 215)

This static paradigm is a more detailed version of the one he condemns when he says the reader must acquire Negative Capability, and he condemns it here as well: 'The balance . . . is always so equal that one wonders how paradigm can possibly issue into story.' But perhaps the 'total ambiguity' which Kroetsch considers 'essentially Canadian' has some mysterious influence here, and this statement also reflects admiration for a people so ingenious that we have somehow forced this static paradigm into story -- as we have told the story of our having no story to tell.

Setting aside ambiguity for the moment, though, let us consider 'Negative Capability.' I would not presume to say what Kroetsch means when he says we must 'acquire Negative Capability,' but he had used the term in an earlier essay.

⁸⁴ Others of the many Canadian "binary antagonisms that seem to lead to stasis: French against English, East against West, Ottawa against Alberta and so on" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 124-25).

DANGER: proceed at once / past this point:

...it implies a form of literature that feeds upon its own impossibility; it implies an almost violently paradoxical form of literature, one which requires for its creation the failure of language.

...What turns over in Valéry's mind...is precisely the idea of this negativity, the very inadequacy of a language becomes a resource. 'Ineffability: "words fail us"--and yet literature seeks to establish itself upon this failure. Gerald L. Bruns, his chapter 'Negative Discourse and the Moment before Speech', from his book Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language, 1974.

--negative capability--

(Kroetsch, 1980d: 123-24)

Negative capability refers here to the Hegelian power of the negative, the capacity through which, as Kroetsch would put it, in agreement with Bruns, 'the very inadequacy of a language becomes a resource,' or 'failure becomes success.' Or, as a philosopher who acknowledges her Hegelianism would put it: the power of the negative to perform the Aufhebung through which 'inadequacy' would be lifted to a higher sphere by its negation and conservation in 'plenitude' (resourcefulness). But whatever Kroetsch means to say, it is clear that Negative Capability works itself out in his work as a compulsion to resist in the sense of 'negate,' which is, in fact, the very basis of his extremely powerful desire for mastery and reappropriation -- the logocentric impulse par excellence. To him, Negative Capability seems to be 'negative power' in the sense of mastery through the

anti, through the gesture by which he attempts to reverse traditional hierarchies -- the gesture which, by virtue of its negativity, is thoroughly grounded in the logos, always to be reappropriated by the logos to confirm the very hierarchies which he wishes, on one level, to subvert.

Some effects of this recuperative power of the logos, we have already seen operating in Kroetsch's work: his apostrophe to invisibility, to concealment, celebrates revelation; his affirmation of disunity confirms unity; his disavowal of meta-narratives constructs a Canadian meta-narrative; his announcement of Canadian nonidentity proclaims our identity. That the gesture by which his negative resistance is a reversed but nevertheless potent affirmation of the metaphysics of presence is obvious in the respective titles of these essays: "Unhiding the Hidden," "Disunity as Unity," "Beyond Nationalism: A Prologue," and "No Name is My Name" (Kroetsch's emphasis, in the essay's final sentence). Kroetsch's unshakable grounding in traditional Western thought is evident in both his archaeological model and his insistence upon negative resistance or anarchy, which he equates with carnival.

The connection Kroetsch makes between anarchy and carnival is very revealing. He describes carnival as "a community thing, a shaped release. . . . from the system or from a sort of work of course which is very oppressive" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 35). In "Carnival and Violence" (1982), he quotes Bakhtin in order to establish carnival as

communal: "Carnival . . . is a pageant without a stage and without a division into performers and spectators. . . . In the carnival everyone is an active participant, everyone communes in the carnival act" (Bakhtin (1965) in Kroetsch, 1982a: 97). Kroetsch sees this as a situation in which "[h]ierarchy is destroyed. The distinction between actor and audience is erased; actor and audience, indeed, become interchangeable" (99). However, an occasion in which people "play at a shifting of roles, including that central carnivalistic shift, into representing the opposite sex" (101-2) is not a destruction of hierarchy, but merely a reversal of the terms of the hierarchy. That this is so becomes more and more obvious as the essay proceeds: "It is possible that a war of rebellion is a kind of carnivalesque upsetting of the world" -- "carnivalesque inversions of the world" (104). Kroetsch considers carnival "an anarchistic treatment of history. . . . everybody gets to participate in that reversal of order upsetting the king" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 36). He does not seem to realize that carnival, shaped as it is by the system or the king who has authority, does indeed allow that which is repressed to very briefly surface without fear of punishment; in doing so, however, it strengthens the very system which has the power not simply to authorize the breakthrough, but, also, and more importantly, to maintain the oppression. Play, in

Derrida's sense,⁸⁵ is as thoroughly repressed through carnival as it is through the orderly functioning of the system of which carnival is a part. Again, as always, what Kroetsch seeks is "the path at once to hell and to redemption" (Kroetsch, 1982a: 106), the dialectical reversal by which heaven is reached through hell and presence is achieved in absence, by virtue of coherence in paradox: "We [Canadians] are carnivalized into the possibility of our own being" (Kroetsch, 1987: 160). And again, as always, we find Voice at the centre of his immediate concerns: "the oral tradition is basic to carnival" (Kroetsch, 1982a: 100).

But what of the voices of Babel and the prophetic Voice? Let us consider first, the title and preface of Labyrinths of Voice." I realize that the preface is signed only by Shirley Neuman and Robert Wilson and that Robert Kroetsch is the proclaimed postmodernist whose theory I am committed to reading. However, nothing that appears in "An Entrance" is incompatible with Kroetsch's views toward voice and dialectic or with his comments on the figure of the labyrinth, comments which demonstrate the extent to which his fascination with "the whole thing . . . the labyrinth" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 79; emphasis added) is in complicity with the notions of game, structure, centre, unity, and, through these notions, with a metaphysics of presence. Some of those comments are as follows:

⁸⁵ The reader will recall that, to Derrida, 'play' is the absence of the transcendental signified. (See 23)

So the labyrinth is the key to the act of interpretation there. What we do as readers is to follow the threads.
(78; emphasis added)

culture itself is a kind of labyrinthine godgame. (80; emphasis added)

the prairies themselves are labyrinthine. They have been mapped like grids, all those roads, but you can get lost in them so easily. Labyrinths are mental experience, aren't they?
(80; emphasis added)

These comments touch upon Kroetsch's confusion of undecidability with indeterminacy, a confusion which is far from unique to him but which informs his lamenting the Canadian lack of 'a meta-narrative upon which we can agree' and 'an origin upon which we can decide' (see 140). This confusion surfaces also in his article on Lowry, an essay in which his constant concern with 'undecidability' is epitomized by the statement: "Even Mother cannot escape indeterminacy" (Kroetsch, 1989b: 171). Obviously, it is not Derridean undecidability of which Kroetsch speaks. Also, in the third comment, we see signs of the assurance with which traditional thought equates 'consciousness' with 'essence' and 'presence,' thus attributing to consciousness the privilege of the transcendental, which limits the 'play' that the figure of the labyrinth is presupposed to evoke.

In "An Entrance," Shirley Neuman and Robert Wilson state that

[t]hree speakers . . . rupture the

conventions of the interview, break the predictability of its question and answer format, forestall the stances of interviewee (Victim or Duelist) and interviewer (Acolyte or Grand Inquisitor); they more readily find themselves in disagreement at any given juncture in the conversation, more readily follow unexpected byways in the conversation.

(Neuman and Wilson, 1982: xi)

The figure of the labyrinth is evoked by the preface's title, "An Entrance," and by the metaphoric 'byways' that the conversationalists may follow; this figure, together with the inclusion of not only **three** participants who can repeatedly exchange interviewer/interviewee roles, but, also, of "a representative . . . series of other voices that intersect with our own, that (in their absolute fragmentariness) allude to other discourse and further possible discursiveness" (xi), and are said to 'rupture the conventions of the interview.' (Nothing can be 'ruptured' by anything that is considered absolute, and the oxymoronic nature of the phrase 'absolute fragmentariness' invokes the coherence in paradox which indicates a desire for presence.)

The conventions to be subverted are those of the conversation, the dialogue, which takes us all the way back to Plato, who worked out in his Dialogues the dialectic which has ever since governed Western thought, which found its ultimate (but not final) articulation in Hegel's

Aufhebung.⁸⁶ Those conventions are to be subverted "by the multiple voices and by the labyrinth constructed of our voices, of fragments of discourse, of 'a mouthful of air'" (xii), but we need merely to think of Plato's Symposium to remember that a 'multiplicity of voices' will not suffice to subvert the Unity that dialectic seeks to achieve. And presupposes as part of its very definition.

The labyrinth described in "An Entrance" is said to be double:

[O]ne head of the labrys points backward
to . . . the chain of prior discourse. .
. . The other head . . . points forward.
. . The voices (ours, theirs) are
fragmented by the labyrinth they build:
doubleness is in the origin and the end,
in the material and the form.
(Neuman and Wilson, 1982: xii)
(emphasis added)

The 'doubleness' to which these writers refer is precisely not the originary doubling we associate with Derrida, but, rather, the synthesizing dialectic which allows Eliot to write "In my beginning is my end" and "In my end is my beginning" (Eliot, 1971c: I.1 and V.38), and Kroetsch, to write: "Where day and light of chapter one become the night and darkness of chapter two, where the blind see and the seeing are fooled" (cited on 172 and in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 177). If the writers were at all amenable to

⁸⁶ In passing, I would note that all of hermeneutics, up to and including Paul Ricoeur, has been and continues to be premised on dialecticity.

Derrida's originary doubling, the labyrinth would have no fixed centre,⁸⁷ and their labyrinth is securely centred (the word 'center' occurs no less than three times in the first of the two paragraphs describing the figure).

This double labyrinth does not invoke a labyrinth such as the one Mark Taylor sees in "The Library of Babel, which refuses closure or completion and in which the play of mirrors is without end" (Taylor, 1984: 76). Rather, it invokes and is centred in the present, the 'Now' from which we look back upon the past and forward to the future. It evokes a traditional division of time into "[T]ime past and time future" (Eliot, 1971b: 37), which are reconciled in a full immediate present. This view can be plotted or diagrammed as a line which unifies beginning, middle, and end, and which is therefore thoroughly compatible with the circle, the unifying figure par excellence. The labyrinth which stands as a sign for the mode of thought underlying Labyrinths of Voice is a Thesean labyrinth (a figure with 'an entrance'/exit to be found with the aid of Ariadne's thread) which dreams that "only through time time is conquered" (Eliot, 1971b: II.44).

Ariadne's thread, the narrative line, "is a response to the unsettling encounter with Chronos" (Taylor, 1984: 62), marking an attempt to provide a coherence that the

⁸⁷ The reader will recall that 'centre' is a transcendental term which, according to classical thought, governs a structure while limiting 'play' in the Derridean sense; that is, it represses the movement of undecidability.

chronometric view of time (as simply a serial succession) lacks. Narrative transforms Chronos into history, ascribing meaning to scattered events by inscribing them in a plot. The verb 'plot' denotes 'to diagram' and 'to map,' to plot points "so that it is possible to join them with a continuous line" (63). The noun 'plot' denotes the plan or scheme of a literary creation, the structure which "closes the open-endedness of mere succession. This closure is intended to master chronos by uniting beginning, middle, and end to form an inclusive totality within which everything is meaningful" (64).

Even though the chronometric view of time inhabits the historical view of time, we attempt to efface/exclude/forget that anxiety-producing view by means of narrative, the centred "structure determined by one organizing principle which holds the whole line together, gives it its law, controls its progressive extension, curving or straight, with some archē, telos, or ground. Origin, goal, or base: all three come together in the gathering movement of the logos" (Miller (1976) in Taylor, 1984: 70).

Despite Kroetsch's insistent rejection of history and origin, continuity and teleology, we find that his sense of narrative is exactly that which Taylor has described:

fishing (the line without end?)
ubiquitous in Canadian writing; the act
of fishing itself (delay) as a trans-
lation of place into narrative. . . .
The caught fish, the fish, caught:

explosion, conclusion, ending, fire,
home, net, night, orgasm.
(Kroetsch, 1980d: 121-22)

It may be unfair to judge Kroetsch's sense of narrative as traditional or logocentric on the basis of a quotation from an article written in 1980, even though he spoke of deconstruction at least as early as 1976 (see Hancock, 1977; taped Feb. 1976). However, 'the line without end' and Kroetsch's desire for salvation seem to have changed very little by 1988: "In place of the timelessness of New Criticism we find in [A Mazing Space] a concern with 'the continuous present'" (Kroetsch, 1988: 199):

the terrors of the maze of space become
the hope that lives at the centre of the
maze of time. And in the maze of time,
the centre is everywhere. Entering that
maze, we leave behind the varieties of
death that are embedded in patriarchal
history. We enter into the living
history of the future.

(Kroetsch, 1988: 202)

Through a dialectical resolution by which 'Time past and time future' become One in an absolute 'eternity' renamed 'the continuous present,' "the future becomes history" (202).⁸⁸

⁸⁸ This 'deconstructive' view of time is perfectly compatible with that described by Kenneth Burke -- who not only confesses, but strongly professes, to being a 'theologian' -- in his analysis of "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

The form of thought . . . is mystical,

In his 1987 essay in honour of Northrop Frye, Kroetsch finds the effacement of time, the salvation that the narrative line offers, in both the worst and the best scenarios that history offers to Canadians.

At worst, having no moment of birth to recall, we dwell on the possibility of the death that will authenticate our existence. In Canada at times, in disguises . . . as various as trade schemes and international wars, death is the beloved, the sweet other that mothers, that mutters, our being in the world. We are tempted even to reverse the myths of agriculture. Winter, then, is the fair embrace of that assuring death, our ragged spring is another betrayal into the mere continuance of life.

But at its best, this same unrevolutionary predicament, this absence that destroys the metaphor of birth and its attendant narrative, frees us from the appalling ignorance celebrated by that birth, celebrates instead our life-inspiring decadence. Coming always to the end, we are free, always, to salvage ourselves, not by severance, but by the lovely treachery of words.

(Kroetsch, 1987: 159-60; emphasis added)

in terms of an eternal present. The Ode is striving to move beyond the region of becoming into the realm of being. . . . In the last four lines of the second stanza, the state of immediacy is conveyed by a development peculiarly Keatsian. I refer . . . to a quality of suspension in the erotic imagery, defining an eternal prolongation of the state just prior to fulfillment.

(Burke, 1945: 449-50)

According to Burke, the poem speaks "not of death, but of love for ever" (456), and he, like Kroetsch, could speak of 'leaving behind varieties of death.'

'Coming always to the end,' we find reassurance of our being in the 'lovely treachery' by which the Word (logos) gathers into itself our fortunes and misfortunes, our affirmations and our rejections, in a 'continuous present' that is our salvation. By means of an Aufhebung mediated by Voice.

It is through Kroetsch's constant prioritizing of speech or voice over writing that he is invariably drawn into the metaphysical system which he seeks to escape by negating history, by insisting upon fragmentation over unity. As we have seen, in regard to 'divided selves' and 'multiple voices,' fragmentation will unfailingly create unity, or find itself within unity, if voice is allowed the priority over writing that it is accorded by any metaphysics of presence. But Kroetsch also attempts to 'deconstruct' the 'self' by speaking of it in terms of intertextuality, his notion of which he credits to Julia Kristeva.

I started from the modernist notion,
derived from Joyce, that the artist is
behind the scenes, paring his finger-
nails or whatever, and I moved more and
more away from that toward the posture
announced by Kristeva. . . . We take
self back into . . . intertextuality . .
. because the self is just a kind of
fragment, a shifting pattern.

(in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 6-7)

But this notion cannot take account of undecidability because, for him, 'intertextuality' seems to be merely a word that replaces 'influence.'

I would separate the notion of personal influence from that grouping that you make⁸⁹ because intertextual possibilities do come in, in a very personal way, in influence. . . . And I think there is a way around that charge that the structures make it impersonal and largely unconscious: I think you have to come at it as passionately as Kristeva does. There's an incredible sense of order in Kristeva, of a rigid system, and yet there's an incredible sense of passion at the same time. I think the writer can have that kind of double view of influence. I guess I'm being very skeptical about the notion that influence is unconscious. . . . I think that what Kristeva says is that we have a number of intertexts that don't have to come together, that it's their not coming together that makes them strong because then all these possibilities can operate at this point in time through the codes of the intertexts.

(in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 17)

A double view is not necessarily disunited, discontinuous, or incomplete. Nor does it necessarily take account of undecidability or originary doubling. On the contrary, through the 'codes of the intertexts' (whatever that 'means'), 'all these possibilities can operate at this point in time,' and unity is achieved. Everything comes together in the present, the immediately-present-to-consciousness present moment (nun).

⁸⁹ This is a reply to Robert Wilson, who has said: "Whether we think in Kristeva's concept of intertextuality or in Todorov's of total significance, structuralists' analyses have made the concept of influence to be impersonal, largely unconscious, and certainly unself-conscious" (16).

For Kroetsch, intertextuality is connected with archaeology and may be what Neuman refers to as his "concept of influence in terms of archaeological open site" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 167). The archaeological aspect of 'influence' or 'intertextuality' emerges also in "The Veil of Knowing," where Kroetsch discusses 'veiled sexuality' or 'a veiling of sexuality' (Kroetsch, 1989e: 185) as a strategy of discovery, of revelation through concealment. In this article, he tacitly connects sexuality and writing by positing 'Canadian writing's' obsession with writing as another version of veiling (190). The essay ends thus:

In the story's going under the ground, not underground, it cries out: Reader, please. Open this grave book. Dig me. Accept the contradictions of my suppressed intertextuality. Read with a pleased and luminous and violent desire. Text is a three-letter word. We like it. (193-94; emphasis added)

What three-letter word? 'God?' 'Man?' 'Ego?' 'Sex?' In the context of this particular article, it appears that, in Kroetsch's view, intertextuality is not only influence but, also, some mysterious force mediating between writing and sexuality, a force which somehow turns 'text' into 'sex.' Kroetsch often relates sex and writing, as in: "[sex is] the ultimate attempt to deny the loneliness, to join the world and have consequences. Like writing" (in Hancock, 1977: 50); and "[sex] becomes highly metaphoric in my work; the

whole process of creation and the life-force are represented most explicitly by the sex urge. And I suppose I also connect the act of writing itself with some version of the sex urge" (in Brown, 1972: 11). To consider writing a metaphor for sex, or vice versa, is not unique to Kroetsch. What is of interest, though, is twofold. Firstly, Kroetsch's desire "to rejoin the world. Stitching the parts together" (in Hancock, 1977: 49) is a desire for the unity he supposedly rejects. Secondly, 'the whole process of creation and the life-force' are certainly connected with origins, just as the 'ending' and 'orgasm' of the narrative 'line without end' (cited on 186) are emphatically related to endings. Unity. Origin. End. Teleology. Always 'successful,' even when we seem to reject them. And the violence of metaphysics is the violence of dialectical synthesis and of the joining or "coupling" (in Hancock, 1977: 50) which is heterosexual sex thought in terms of the binary opposition which posits 'female' as the opposite (or lack) of 'male.' Kroetsch implies as much when he refers to "a kind of opposition, a basic contrary that is implicitly sexual in its inclination towards interpenetration: the need of violence" (Kroetsch, 1980c: 109). Again, necessary violence. But what is interpenetration?

Kroetsch's 'intertextuality' is not related to Derrida's 'textuality,' and his 'text' is not Derrida's general text, which is but a way of talking undecidability. The 'text' is, to Kroetsch, the writing on the page, the

volume, the book, the artifact and, at the same time, "not [just] artifact but . . . enabling act" (in Kroetsch and Bessai, 1978: 208), enabling the novelist to become hero. Shirley Neuman asks him whether "the **only possible heroic act becomes the telling of the story**" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 179), and he replies,

Well, I'm damn near at that point. I was supposed to be a hero; I mean I grew up somewhat privileged and with a strong sense of social responsibility--my father was a kind of community leader--and I was supposed to be a hero. And of course I read all the hero stuff so the model was in my head. And yet, as I began to deal with the world, I realized that I was caught in that story, rather than telling it. It's a very interesting point you made. That's why there is so much self-mockery in my characters; they are caught in a story which they either can't or don't want to act out. They are part of a culture that is caught in the same posture.
(in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 179-80)

Because we cannot 'act out' our story, we, Canadians, write it -- the story of having no story to tell. Success and heroism seem to be Kroetsch's raison d'être; he constantly returns to the 'archaeological act that succeeds' (cited on 151) and the 'enabling act' which will allow him to become a successful hero, despite the loss of modernism's great hero (see 139). And what is success, if not the logocentric gesture of reappropriation which manifests itself in Kroetsch's Bloomian and dialectical 'necessary violence'?

Interestingly, one of the citations from Derrida which is included in Chapter Two (42-43) is also included in Labyrinths of Voice (10), embedded in the discussion of intertextuality. The quotation in the latter reads:

... a "text" . . . is henceforth no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces.

But 'traces,' to Derrida, are not lines of influence; the Derridean trace is the irreducible mark of the other within the self which "cannot be thought without thinking the retention of difference within a structure of reference where difference appears as such" (Derrida, 1974: 47; emphasis mine and Derrida's). It is the movement of the trace which grafts all self-referral "on a structurally endless referral to other determinate texts, thus making all textual self-reflexivity ultimately impossible" (Gasché, 1986: 281). One of the hallmarks of Kroetschian postmodernity, the notion of textual self-reflexivity, is, like the concept of influence, firmly grounded in the notion of a self-identical, self-sufficient 'text' -- an artifact, a book -- to which that 'text' can refer. The notion of self-reflexivity, in its effort to close up the text within itself, within its self-sufficient identity, is concomitant with the solipsism which is inherent in all metaphysics of

presence.

The movement of the trace which renders pure self-reflexivity impossible also makes impossible the self-sufficient, self-identical 'self,' the 'I' to which Kroetsch refers: "[I]n Hear Us O Lord . . . I recognized my own 'I,' my own will towards utterance. . . . In so far as I recognized myself as the writer from Bumble, Saskatchewan, Lowry was my other" (Kroetsch, 1989b: 174). "Lowry was my Other," the other against whom 'I' reflect in order to become I, reappropriating the other into the self in order that the self may be 'whole' and self-sufficient. On the first page, Kroetsch writes,

I am a reader writing my reading. In typing the title of Lowry's story, I wrote, by accident I believe, Hear Us O Lord from Heavy Thy Dwelling Place. Already, I propose my own signature, and Lowry as mediator becomes in turn usurper, the deaf mediator who will not hear me, and I must write his stubborn story into my story.

(Kroetsch, 1989b: 163-64)
(emphases Kroetsch's and mine)

This article, ostensibly about Lowry and/or 'his' Hear Us . . . , is remarkably laden with Kroetschian autobiography, the story of Kroetsch's becoming a writer, and the same can be said of "Learning the Hero," in honour of Northrop Frye. Lowry and Frye are 'written into' Kroetsch's story; both are reappropriated in his heroic "quest not for truth or the holy grail but a quest for the self" (Kroetsch, 1971c: 55).

Kroetsch's insistence that he is a **writer** seems to evolve from a desire to put under erasure the 'modernist' concept Artist, and it could possibly be traced to the first phase of the double gesture through which Derrida puts writing under erasure, bringing to light the undecidability always already inhabiting the structure of the sign. However, Kroetsch's movement is not a double gesture for two reasons: (1) it performs only the initial gesture of deconstruction, seeking to reverse the hierarchy inherent in a binary opposition (as Derrida 'initially' inverts speech/writing); more importantly, though, (2) it merely replaces one 'superior' concept (Artist) with another (**writer**). The necessary second phase of the deconstructive double gesture is not performed and a hierarchical opposition still reigns -- writer/non-writer -- and the prioritizing of voice over writing is not affected. Despite his embracing of archaeology, Kroetsch is as much obsessed with the mystique of the Voice -- with the logos and presence -- as is any pre-postmodernist writer.

Robert Kroetsch is caught in the metaphysics he wishes to reject, partly by the Foucauldian archaeology by which he seeks to escape history and system and partly by the modifications he makes to that notion. The Archaeology of Knowledge opens with Foucault's stating that "there is a negative work to be carried out first: we must rid ourselves of a whole mass of notions, each of which, in its own way, diversifies the theme of continuity" (cited on 162, fn. 75),

and Kroetsch apparently agrees. The notions Foucault seeks to erase (in the usual sense of the word) include 'history,' 'tradition,' and 'influence.' In regard to history, we have seen how Foucault is caught in the metaphysics he seeks to reject, because he does not realize that no concept is metaphysical 'outside of all the textual work in which it is inscribed' (cited on 162, fn. 75) and, therefore, no 'metaphysical concept' can simply be banned. To attempt to erase history out of hand, without problematizing the concept 'history' -- that is, without examining the presuppositions which underlie the concept -- and reinscribing it "in order to produce another concept or conceptual chain of 'history'; a history that also implies a new logic of repetition and the trace" (Derrida, 1981d: 57) is merely to open oneself to the work of the negative within the thought and language governed by metaphysics. It is to allow the concept one means to reject to persevere, with its name replaced by another. In Foucault's case, archaeology replaces history as the 'history of meaning' -- which is to be expected, since the very notion of 'knowledge,' with its implications and presuppositions of grasp, control, totality, and mastery, is accepted without question from the outset -- without questioning the complicity with which "history and knowledge, istoria and epistémè have always been determined . . . as detours for the purpose of the reappropriation of presence" (Derrida, 1974: 10). Despite his resistance to 'history' and 'meaning,' Kroetsch sees

archaeology as 'an act that succeeds,' which holds him in the bind of metaphysics.

Concomitant with the problem of history's reasserting itself as archaeology is the problem of origins. To reject origins in favour of beginnings, without taking notice of originary doubling and the trace, is simply to rename 'origins' as 'beginnings,' which does not question the presumed fullness and self-identity of the origin/beginning. 'Origin' and 'beginning' have always been considered to be synonymous, and they continue to be so in Kroetsch's invocation of beginnings, because beginnings, every bit as much as origins, imply and require endings and thus presuppose teleology and eschatology -- the very implications and requirements which were to be avoided.

Similarly, Kroetsch exchanges the notion of influence with intertextuality, which is, for him, but another way of writing 'influence.' Influence is indissociable from tradition, and Foucault's rejection of tradition is transformed in Kroetsch's work, becoming a Bloomian impulse both to deny and to reappropriate the past in an effort to achieve a unique, proper, self-sufficient identity in the form of 'space on the shelf.' This impulse is but one form of the metaphysical gesture by which the other is subsumed and reappropriated in the self's determination of itself in absolute immediacy and plenitude, a gesture which is to be accomplished through dialectic and the work of the negative.

Chapter Eight

'Carnival and Violence': The Quest of Love

With the exceptions of Alibi and Badlands, this chapter will deal with all of Robert Kroetch's novels. The concerns of his novels are those of his criticism and literary theory: the notion of the hero and the act of 'telling the story,' the act through which the questor defines and completes himself as Hero. But Kroetsch and his critics claim that his use of parody and paradox prevents this Hegelian 'completion of the Self' from ever being accomplished. For example, Peter Thomas writes:

Centred in the sexual act and its metaphorical possibilities, [Kroetsch's] novels ring the changes upon traditional narrative forms by parodies of quest archetypes, alternating points of view and familiar character types, before confronting the unknown and unutterable in an 'open' ending. All those clever words to draw back a curtain on the void? Yet to say this is unfair to Kroetsch's serious questioning of how to speak. The author, unlike his persona, flees and returns. . . . [T]he satire upon 'print' or 'Gutenberg' men in Kroetsch's novels is part of an attempt to free voice from the suppressed tyranny of the book as a structure.

(Thomas, 1980b: 37)

However, even in asserting the openness of the novels' endings, Thomas points to the logocentric desire for presence in Voice, to the separation of speech from writing,

and to the concept of the book as a closed system, all of which inhere in the oral tradition and the quest.

Of the nature of quest, Kroetsch says: "The notion of quest fascinates me. What is quest really about? It's sexual, it's looking for that fulfillment; so I made it comic quite often. I think carnival is a way to let the secret slip out" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 23). That Kroetsch considers carnival as 'a way to let the secret slip out' indicates how he connects carnival and myth. Myth has been considered, by traditional poets, novelists, and literary critics, to be a means of revealing that which cannot merely be told; Truth, which is always paradoxical, may be embodied or come to full presence only within myth. But Kroetsch claims that his treatment of myth is not in keeping with traditional literary conventions.

NEUMAN: The telling of a particular myth in a Kroetsch novel then must be analogous to the act of deconstructing myth itself. It would not be unlike the turning of a particular myth, say the quest myth, into the activity of the writer: the activity of Demeter, rather than the activity of Hazard Lepage.

KROETSCH: That's right. You tell your way out of the story, in a sense. I think what it really comes down to is that we are entrapped in those mythic stories; we can surrender to them or we can tell our way out.

(in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 96)

That Kroetsch's version of deconstructing is merely reversal is obvious; the narrator usurps the role of hero to himself,

subsuming the ostensible protagonist's story into his own, thus becoming the novel's hero by an act of negation which renders the protagonist the narrator's 'other.' That the notion of hero and the hierarchy which requires that notion are left untouched is the basis upon which we can legitimately say that no 'deconstructing' is 'taking place.' Reversal cannot unsettle the notions of 'hero' or 'quest,' because it leaves us with a hero and a non-hero, a victor and a loser posited as a binary pair.

By virtue of this setting up of opposites, Kroetsch's fascination with (the quest) myth and with carnival is inseparable from his involvement with dialectic: "In both [myth and carnival] there is a renewal, a dialectic of transformations" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 98). The 'dialectic of transformations' is "[a]gain, again, again, the dialectic of language with its own silence, with versions of ground" (209; emphasis added), which is, even through the detour of 'its own silence,' an attempt to reduce everything to language and to exclude or efface silence as the 'other' of language. It is to invoke the synthesizing power of the logos as ground, as signified, elevating voice into the position of a transcendental signified (language) within which silence is to be interned.

Nevertheless, Kroetsch believes that dialectic will release us from the metaphysical implications of our thought by breaking down the distinctions between language and silence, subject and object, even when it works itself out

in autobiography -- biography of the self -- the 'biography' or philosophy of the Subject, which is, and always has been, the quest of metaphysics. He claims that:

Autobiography, as I conceive it, is paradoxical:⁹⁰ it frees us from self. Saying I is a wonderful release from I, isn't it? Language, then, as signifier, frees me into a new relationship with signified. Autobiography conceived in this way can free us from solipsism, can free us from the humanistic temptation to coerce the world.

(in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 209)

'Autobiography' is 'the humanistic temptation' of dialectic to 'coerce the world' into order by means of the ultimately solipsistic logic of identity. Saying I is to return, as Western thought always does, to Plato's Symposium and the dream of unity which in our blindness we call 'love' -- one of our names for the war-like gesture by which dialectic reduces the other to a reflection of the self in order that

⁹⁰ Susan Rudy Dorscht considers Kroetsch's use of autobiography to be both paradoxical and as subversive of humanistic notions of the Self as Kroetsch claims it is.

Many of [Kroetsch's] most recent poems interrogate the concept of 'experience'--and a writer's relationships to it--through an examination of the conventions of autobiography, often in the form of (always already) fictional postcards, letters, journal entries. . . . The poem as a place to 'hang a self' (a 'poet tree') is autobiography as self-affirming and self-effacing, in the most literal sense. Written with the conventions of the 'letter,' these poems exploit what is always the precondition of writing--the absence of sender and receiver.

(Rudy Dorscht, 1988b: 164-65)

'what is not I' may be reappropriated within the self.⁹¹

This 'humanistic temptation' is a violence, whether it is described in the Platonic terms of "that mythic notion of the split, the divided egg" (173) or in contemporary psychological terms:

HANCOCK: W.H. Auden considered that your ego was looking for its alternative in another hemisphere, trying to find its match in another latitude.

KROETSCH: Yes, . . . Trying to rejoin the world. Stitching the parts together... It's human loneliness. Travelling the world back together. It's a double thing.
(in Hancock, 1977: 49; emphasis added)⁹²

⁹¹ I direct the reader to one of Kroetsch's statements about 'the doppelgänger,' the inimitable and ultimate figure of metaphysical doubleness. It is of interest in regard to our inveterate habit of disguising the metaphysical gesture of reappropriation by clothing it in sentimentally reassuring and humanistic terms such as 'love.'

Eli Mandel's poem 'the doppelgänger' turns that latent schizophrenia [the 'divided consciousness' which characterizes Canadians] into a statement about love, about art itself. . . . About the predicament of the Canadian artist.

'the doppelgänger' appears in a longer book. . . [that is] a statement of Mandel's own recognition of himself become his own other.

(Kroetsch, 1987: 156; emphasis added)

To turn oneself into one's own other is the negation through which the self reduces the other to a reflection of itself, in order that the other may be subsumed within the supposedly complete self. How this violence can be called love is certainly 'paradoxical' -- and one of the 'fictions' by which we live -- and it is made possible by the necessity with which metaphysics effaces its own gestures, making us blind to our familiar and 'natural' habits of thought.

⁹² Compare Plato's divided egg, Auden's ego/alter ego, and Kroetsch's 'Lowry' or 'Frye' with Hegel's Subject's self-restoring reflection in otherness:

'Stitching the parts together' is not a 'double thing' in any Derridean sense of irreducible originary doubling; it is hermeneutical and made possible by ambiguity, the indeterminacy by which a 'double meaning' is presented in an obscure way. A 'double meaning' is always fully grounded in the desire for meaning, for a fully present and immediate meaning which is considered to include and reconcile both possibilities. Kroetsch's 'double thing' is Hegel's dialectical work of the negative, the work through which presence as being, unity, or meaning is sought as truth or the True -- even by way of ambiguity. Or polysemia, which

[T]he living substance is being which is in truth Subject, or, what is the same, is in truth actual only in so far as it is the movement of positing itself, or is the mediation of its self-othering with itself. This substance is, as Subject, pure, simple negativity, . . . the bifurcation of the simple; it is the doubling which sets up opposition, and then again the negation of this indifferent diversity and of its antithesis (the immediate simplicity). Only this self-restoring sameness, or this reflection in otherness within itself--not an original or immediate unity as such--is the True. It is the process of its own becoming, the circle that presupposes its end with its goal, having its end also as its beginning; and only by being worked out to its end, is it actual.

19. Thus the life of God and divine cognition may well be spoken of as a disporting of Love with itself; but this idea sinks into mere edification, and even insipidity, if it lacks the seriousness, the suffering, the patience, and the labour of the negative. (Hegel, 1977: 10)

All philosophies of reflection are ultimately solipsistic, because they are based upon the self, or the subject, which must perform 'the doubling which sets up opposition,' thus positing the other as its own other, an 'otherness within itself' against which it must reflect itself in order to realize or complete itself in actuality or full presence.

is another 'name' for the multiplicity which Kroetsch favours over unity, a preference which is firmly grounded in a desire for unity and presence. Derrida notes that

polysemia, as such, is organized within the implicit horizon of a unitary resumption of meaning, that is, within the horizon of a dialectics . . . a teleological and totalizing dialectics that at a given moment, however far off, must permit the reassemblage of the totality of a text into the truth of its meaning, constituting the text as expression, as illustration, and annulling the open and productive displacement of the textual chain.
(Derrida, 1981d: 44)

Polysemy is not dissemination -- which is but another way of talking Derridean undecidability. Unlike polysemy,

[d]issemination, . . . although producing a nonfinite number of semantic effects, can be led back neither to a present of simple origin . . . nor to an eschatological presence. It marks an irreducible and generative multiplicity. The supplement and the turbulence of a certain lack fracture the limit of the text, forbidding an exhaustive and closed formalization of it, or at least a saturating taxonomy of its themes, its signified, its meaning. (44-45)

Like ambiguity, polysemy presumes a transcendental meaning into or under which diverse meanings may be subsumed; that is, polysemy "requires the logic of presence, even when it begins to disobey that logic" (Derrida, 1974: 71). Just as

Kroetsch's notion of multiplicity is grounded in polysemy, which, by definition, seeks and requires a transcendental signified, so is his notion of doubleness grounded in ambiguity. Moreover, the ambiguity he invokes is always resolved through the "possibility of healing going on in the novels and I think healing is a kind of faith" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 172; emphasis added). Healing is the process by which wholeness is restored, and the desire for wholeness which invokes 'healing' motivates Kroetsch's insistence that 'process becomes more important than end' (cited on 155). But, in the end, to Kroetsch, process is not more important than end, because 'the whole business . . . is one of capturing process' (cited on 155). Capturing is but a way of saying the Aufhebung through which process and end are believed to become the One.

In speaking of The Studhorse Man, Kroetsch says that

one of the healing acts that we engage in is the transformational act--metamorphosis--the way in which you have to move out of yourself into other possibilities. . . . The basic change at the end of The Studhorse Man is . . . a parody of the biographical act, of that dangerous submission into another figure. But it's much more than that: Demeter literally gets himself together by putting those two figures--Hazard and himself--together. I guess I am haunted by that mythic notion of the split, the divided egg, whatever. Even though I'm uneasy about the reunion, I also feel uneasy about the split. Just as in Demeter there was a strange union of male and female in a way he couldn't quite deal with, so later on through

narrative, through telling the story--
 that's the secret I think--through
 telling the story he puts himself
 together. It's not an easy victory;
 it's very ambiguous. But he has to
 talk; the Ancient Mariner is the story,
 isn't it really?⁹³ (173)

As Louis K. MacKendrick notes: "In The Studhorse Man, its principal voice, Demeter Proudfoot, is a writer whose subject, a biography of Hazard Lepage, becomes himself, and who becomes his subject, the studhorse man" (MacKendrick, 1978: 18). That is, Demeter becomes a transcendental third term, or transcendental ego, by 'putting those two figures --Hazard [antithesis] and himself [thesis]--together.' How is this victory ambiguous? In that Hazard is not entirely 'erased,' is still 'present' within Demeter or his story as the 'other' which has been negated and conserved within the

⁹³ Kroetsch speaks of But We are Exiles, commenting upon one of its first reviewers' being embarrassed by the parallel to "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"; in both, "there's the protagonist and there's a narrator and they become one at the end" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 180).

KROETSCH: Other writers have said, In our time, how do you know you're alive? You can also ask, How do you know you're dead? Hornyak is still present, functioning with the crew of the boat.

CAMERON: Interestingly, when he's shipped overboard and Peter takes his place, it's not night, but a kind of blinding vision of whiteness. So the whole business of the night world and the day world has become kind of intermingled by the end.

KROETSCH: Exactly.

(Cameron, 1972: 51; emphasis added)

This eschatology which seeks unity in a successful and heroic self-identical self is precisely the 'ground' upon which, according to Kroetsch, his novels depend.

self 'in and for itself'?⁹⁴ This is the ambiguity through which dialectic operates to achieve unity, paradoxically coming to rest in the transcendental signified, whether it is called 'substance,' 'ground,' 'Subject,' 'signified,' 'God,' or 'Demeter.' It is the ambiguity by which the fissures in unity -- the gaps which undecidability always already cuts (in) 'unity' -- are denied and covered over through the unifying synthesis of dialectic. And Kroetsch does seek unity, repeatedly emphasizing the telling as the process by which presence can be attained through a hermeneutical synthesis based on dialecticity.

[T]here are often paired figures at the centre of my books as if I have split

⁹⁴ This is the final stage of Hegel's process of self-actualization, a triadic process which may be repeated indefinitely, but each stage proceeds as follows:

The spiritual alone is the actual; it is essence, or that which has being in itself; it is that which relates itself to itself and is determinate, it is other-being and being-for-self, and in this determinateness, or in its self-externality, abides within itself; in other words, it is in and for itself.--But this being-in-and-for-itself is at first only for us, or in itself, it is spiritual Substance. It must also be this for itself, it must be the knowledge of the spiritual, and the knowledge of itself as Spirit, i.e., it must be an object to itself, but just as immediately a sublated object, reflected into itself. It is for itself only for us, in so far as its spiritual content is generated by itself. But in so far as it is also for itself for its own self, this self-generation, the pure Notion, is for it the objective element in which it has its existence, and it is in this way, in its existence for itself, an object related into itself.

(Hegel, 1977: 14)

the thing but it's also the hero/teller
as one. . . . On the one hand I'm
 interested in the gap between the two
 because somebody as ineffectual as
 Demeter can be sitting there telling a
 story of high heroism. . . . So there's
 this awful split between story and self.
 . . . Yet there's some connection, they
 come together. . . . there's a gap and
 yet there is a closure. That's right.
 (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 180-81)
 (emphasis added)

That's right. 'Right' as opposed to the 'wrong,' the
 'transgression' that is dissemination -- the endless
 substitution by which the self is differed and deferred,
 never coming to rest in the transcendental signified which
 is, in Kroetsch's autobiography, the hero, the teller of the
 story. And yet, Kroetsch tries to present this act of
 'faith,' this 'healing' by which dialectic 'travel[s] the
 world back together,' as a subversive, 'deconstructing' act:
 "I suppose the biographer in The Studhorse Man slowly
 usurping the subject of his biography is unwillingly
 deconstructing the notion of a hero. He starts to see
 himself as the hero as he sits in the bathtub writing the
 book" (in Hancock (1977), quoted in Neuman and Wilson, 1982:
 179). Demeter is no more 'unwillingly deconstructing the
 notion of a hero' than Kroetsch is willingly 'deconstructing
 the novel' (see 171); through Demeter, Kroetsch 'usurps' or
 appropriates to himself the role of hero, reversing the
 hierarchy while perpetuating the structure (of hierarchy).

It is clear that Robert Kroetsch's mode of thought does

not go beyond the boundaries prescribed by metaphysics; it does not take the plunge into undecidability, even though he attempts to take that plunge by espousing incompleteness, fragmentation, multiplicity, carnival, and doubleness. But the doubleness⁹⁵ he invokes is merely ambiguity, which allows and requires presence as unity and completeness, as we can see in his comments on Gone Indian.

To go Indian: an ambiguous phrase: to become released or wild in the carnival sense. And I was playing that off against the professor (Madham) and graduate student (Sadness)--people who are into the whole notion of control...ordering, explaining. It is their extreme movement from this professorial stance into carnival that interested me.⁹⁶ Sadness arrives in a

⁹⁵ That is, Hegelian 'simple negativity,' the 'bifurcation of the simple,' or 'the doubling which sets up opposition' (see 204, fn. 92).

⁹⁶ Kroetsch says that many of his characters are 'speaking names' and that a name can be "taken seriously as a language act" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 189). For a discussion of Kroetsch's 'speaking names' ('Sprechende Namen'), see Nicolaisen (1978), who sees Madham's name as "anthroponymic rhyming slang for Mad Adam" (60). Kroetsch agrees (with Shirley Neuman) that "Madham and Sadness and Demeter [are] genuinely mad narrators," and he adds: "I still think of art as healing and madness" (Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 172). In connection with madness, and in reference to Kroetsch's claim that postmodern writing (art) is self-reflexive and not mimetic, it may also be interesting to note the following anecdote:

Sometime during the 'sixties I was directing an honor's thesis on Pale Fire; the student I was working with went mad. . . . So there I was caught up in this weird novel and yet it was no more strange than the boy who was writing the thesis and was having this strange, strange trip of his own. So life and art are behind Demeter as

carnival: he is both released and realized by that; he is completed by that,⁹⁷ even by the loss of identity and the shift into a new identity by accident, by the mixing of life and death that takes place, the kind of phallic connection.

(36-37; emphasis Kroetsch's and mine)⁹⁸

well as my head full of theories. (174)

With respect to 'life' as a signified to which the 'text' (in the traditional sense) can be 'traced,' Kroetsch says:

I think in my coming to the United States I discovered how hopelessly Canadian I am, in my sense of what reality is. . . . I really want to come to terms with my sense of this American-Canadian thing more clearly. I find that I'm going to write something about it [Gone Indian]. . . . Almost by accident, I've had this double experience, and I've got to write it out. In a comic way, perhaps; not in any sociological way.

(in Cameron, 1972: 48)

Comedy is that which 'restores' wholeness, thus performing the healing that, in Kroetsch's view, art is to accomplish. The 'happy ending' which comedy implies and requires is, in his novels, nothing more nor less than a working out of the Hegelian 'process of becoming' through which the Subject becomes itself, in and for itself, by subsuming the other within itself.

⁹⁷ Cf. "We [Canadians] are carnivalized into the possibility of our own being" (Kroetsch, 1987: 160).

⁹⁸ What is 'the kind of phallic connection' to which Kroetsch here refers? In view of the fact that Gone Indian is the third novel in the Notikeewin Trilogy, following The Studhorse Man, we might consider that Madham refers back in some subliminal way to Demeter Proudfoot, in whom (with the name of a fertility goddess), "there was a strange union of male and female in a way he couldn't quite deal with" (cited on 206). A union in which, as prescribed by the phallocentrism which logocentrism includes and requires, fertility, or, more accurately, generation, is considered to be the dominion of the male, of the phallus which releases the seed of life through an explosion which is considered to presuppose closure by virtue of the sacred insemination through which everything is returned to the father. Also, is it just by coincidence that Madham -- the narrator who gathers into himself Sadness in the final novel in the

'To go Indian.' How is this phrase ambiguous? More importantly, how does 'to become released or wild in the carnival sense' 'express' originary doubling? Particularly, how can undecidability be taken into account when we consider that the phrase becomes, in the novel's title, Gone Indian. Gone. Finished. 'Realized' and 'completed' in the past tense to bring everything to full and immediate presence in the present moment, the now.

In Gone Indian, Kroetsch works with an occasion in which people 'play at a shifting of roles' (cited on 180), to the point at which "[t]here's a complicated sense in which Madham is using or really stealing...is parasitical ...the question of symbiosis..."⁹⁹ (in Neuman and Wilson,

trilogy -- carries in his name ('a language act') the crowning victory by which the binary pair 'horse' (male territory) and 'house' (female territory) -- ubiquitous in prairie or western literature, according to Kroetsch -- is reconciled in a professorial (male) Mad(h)am who is "into the whole notion of control" (cited on 210)?

⁹⁹ In passing, I wonder how this 'using' or 'stealing' can be both parasitical and symbiotic. A parasitical relationship is one in which the parasite feeds off its host, causing the host inconvenience or suffering, while a symbiotic relationship is one in which each participant needs the other in order that it may survive. Symbiosis is a mutual affair, which could be compared with Derridean originary doubling: each member is differentiated from its other but neither member is privileged over its 'other' or seeking to subsume the other within itself; neither member can be wholly and self-sufficiently present. Parasitism, on the other hand, is not mutual, but is beneficial only to the privileged member, the parasite who makes use of the host only to maintain itself; it is a relationship of violence which is comparable with the synthesis desired and required by the logic of identity that dialectic seeks to resolve.

Also, it is interesting that, with respect to Madham, Kroetsch 'corrects' himself, offering 'the question of symbiosis' to qualify, or lessen the violent impact of

1982: 175). Kroetsch seems to propose that Sadness's identity is stolen by Madham, but the notion of stealing presents a logical problem: nothing can be stolen unless it is another's property -- uniquely 'her own.' Paradoxically, though, this 'stealing' can only be accomplished if the other's identity does not fully and properly belong to the other; if it did fully and properly belong to the other, it would be impossible for the self to steal it. This problem is solved by logic, through the negation by which the other is considered to be one's own other: 'not I.'

In Gone Indian, that negation is accomplished through a more complicated strategy than in The Studhorse Man.

Sadness 'loses' his identity as a graduate student -- an identity which is very closely related to that of Madham by virtue of their both being 'people who are into the whole notion of control... ordering, explaining' -- and, by accident, through the 'double thing' that is carnival, Sadness shifts into a new identity; he goes Indian. Order, which is imposed by authority and is implicit in carnival, is maintained through the professor, the authority figure who reappropriates both Sadness's 'American student' and 'Canadian Indian' identities when Sadness travels from the east (his point of origin and Madham's destination) to the west (Madham's point of origin), and Madham's 'eastern' self

'stealing' and 'parasitical.' When Robert Wilson responds to this comment by discussing Anna Dawe's parasitical relationship to her father's story, Kroetsch does not thus qualify, or object to, or 'correct' his comments.

is reconciled with his 'western' self in a unity which could be seen as a return to the origin, a 'realization' of "the circle that presupposes its end with its goal [origin, as purpose], having its end also as its beginning; and only by being worked out to its end, is it actual" (cited on 204, fn. 92) -- that is, fully present to itself.

In this novel which celebrates carnival and was called Funeral Games while the work was in progress, order is maintained through duplicity, just as order is maintained in carnival through the duplicity which leads us to believe that the authority which authorizes carnival has been subverted, and just as order is maintained in a logic of identity through the duplicity by which undecidability is denied. "Madham is a very devious character and I think he is also acting out the reading act, he is taking fragments --tapes . . .--and he is imposing an order: that's what readers do" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 176). In the end, which is most important to a novel entitled Gone Indian, the negation and conservation of the 'protagonist' within the 'narrator' is accomplished through the telling of the story, as it is in The Studhorse Man.

But how does 'doubleness' relate to carnival and to Gone Indian? Or, as Kroetsch asks, and answers:

So the carnivalization is what? It's happening to the characters and it's happening to the novel. It's double.

I certainly wanted to go into the whole notion of that kind of narrative

occasion of carnival where things are both happening and being talked about. That whole kind of conjunction of two forces: the wildness of action which is shaped by ceremony or festival.

(37; emphasis added)

'That whole kind of conjunction of two forces' is precisely the work of dialectic, through which the other is negated and conserved, lifted up into a transcendental signified which is, in this case, Madham, or the 'festival,' which cannot be wild if it is 'shaped' by ceremony, with all the ritual order and control that 'ceremony' brings to bear upon 'wildness.' Wildness/play/undecidability is repressed by carnival's implicit order just as surely as it is by authority's explicit order, even if the 'end' seems double: "If you want to believe the couple went over the trestle, through the ice, and drowned--that's fine. If you want to believe they escaped, went into the north to live a new life, that's your privilege too. The text doesn't resolve it as far as I'm concerned. It's left" (in Hancock, 1977: 51).

That 'the text doesn't resolve it' does not mean that undecidability is recognized. One cannot, with any degree of assurance, decide whether the couple (another synthesizing term) falls into the lake to drown or rides off into a new life. But this conundrum recognizes only indeterminacy. By definition, indeterminacy assumes and requires that there be an answer, or a Truth, even if that answer cannot be known. With undecidability, there is no

absolute answer, no absolute Truth, because all the possibilities play off one another in an endless chain of substitution and deferral which makes possible all 'answers' or 'meanings' while never allowing one or another of them to become absolute, to control the multitude of meanings Truth would reign over and contain.

Kroetsch tells us that the reader, like Madham, imposes order by resolving the question for herself and that there is nothing in that ending which prevents her from making that decision in favour of one or the other of the possibilities proposed. However, without his telling us so, would we even recognize that the ending is ambiguous?

The train comes on, indifferent. Into the indifferent storm. And they have time to see it, Jeremy and Bea. They have time to see the unbearable indifference. Unbearable and sweet. They have that much time. As the beaver might, its foot in the trap. The antelope, turning to lick the bloodied arrow. The buffalo, driven to the cliff's blue edge.

The water below is indifferent; through a labyrinth of rivers and lakes, it falls off and down, to Hudson Bay, to Baffin Island, to the drifting Arctic wastes.

They leap.

They leap from the iron path. From the spanning bridge. From the closing lights. Together they fall, clinging to nothing but each other's regret, spilling down the sudden sluice, the dark incurious flume, their eyes alive to the nail-point snow, their tongues unhinged in the whistling night.

They are lovers.

They do not even scream as they fall.

(Kroetsch, 1973c: 157-58)

If there is ambiguity in this ending, it enters in by virtue of the fact that, near the end, Jeremy "turned off his tape recorder. He punched it dead" (156). We feel confident that Jeremy has disappeared, because his disappearance is confirmed by his wife as well as by Madham, who says:

I personally feel he was a deluded
little asshole (in spite of his height)
who should have been strangled at birth.
Or set on a hillside to perish. I only
wish he had drowned in his mother's
bathtub. Or got himself killed by a
drug-hungry black in the streets of that
city from which he fled ever westward.
I sent him out there....
(154-55; emphasis added)

Because Jeremy punched his tape recorder dead, we do not have the tape's version of the 'end'; Madham ends the novel by describing what he thinks (or wishes) has happened, after saying: "It would seem apparent that the tape recorder itself, and not what was recorded on its tape, tells the whole story. The recorder was found dangling from a timber in the middle of the famous old Ketchamoot Bridge" (150-51; emphasis added). "One can conceive of their hitting, quite by chance, the pair of steel tracks in the snow" (156). The ending, which is not ambiguous, is Madham's. But then, has not the entire story been Madham's? Has he not, all along, been devious, a parasite, stealing Jeremy's story and rewriting it into his own? And is not Madham's wish for Jeremy's death -- a wish he fulfils by writing that death

-- exactly the negation of the other which is required and desired by the metaphysics that seeks to dissolve difference (into 'indifference') in identity and to 'dissolve' binary oppositions in an 'indifferent,' unified presence?¹⁰⁰

Gone Indian is the final novel in Kroetsch's Notikeewin (or 'Out West') Trilogy. As in But We are Exiles, he uses a third person narrator to tell a protagonist's story in The Words of My Roaring, but, in The Studhorse Man and Gone Indian, he uses first-person narrators to tell their own stories by ostensibly telling the protagonists'. He comments on his move to the first-person narrator:

[With Demeter Proudfoot] I was
unwittingly making that distinction

¹⁰⁰ What is 'indifference'? The lack of caring, the unconcerned indifference of the universe, which, according to existentialist philosophy, we must combat by authenticizing ourselves, which amounts to 'realizing' ourselves, in Hegel's or Kroetsch's terms? Or is it the lack of, or elimination of, difference, the repression of différance, which metaphysics performs by setting up and reconciling opposites through negation? In the end, these possibilities amount to 'the same,' and are, as Derrida points out, ultimately and essentially theological:

Only infinite being can reduce the difference in presence. In that sense, the name of God, at least as it is pronounced within classical rationalism, is the name of indifference itself. Only a positive infinity can lift the trace, 'sublimate' it (it has recently been proposed that the Hegelian Aufhebung be translated as sublimation; this translation may be of dubious worth as translation, but the juxtaposition is of interest here. We must not therefore speak of a 'theological prejudice,' functioning sporadically when it is a question of the plenitude of the logos; the logos as the sublimation of the trace is theological. (Derrida, 1974: 71)

[between story (what is told) and narration (the act of telling)]. . . .
 I've come to much more interest in the act of telling the story and that's where you have to go back to first person quite often because you have to confront who is telling the story. And why? (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 174)

As always, it is the telling, the narrative act that enables men to become heroes, which is of utmost importance to Kroetsch, despite his resistance to traditional narrative, which moves him to call this group of novels a triptych: "I don't like to call it a trilogy because its connections are not narrative ones, they are of another sort: juxtaposition, repetition, contrast" (in Brown, 1972: 2-3; emphasis added).

Let us reflect for a moment upon the 'triptych': "a picture or carving on three panels with sides able to fold over centre, set of three associated pictures so placed, esp. as altar-piece; set of three writing-tablets hinged or tied together; set of three artistic works" (OED). 'Sides able to fold over centre': three in one. Juxtaposition in a triadic form. The three pictures, carvings, or writings reflecting off and against and into one another. Philosophy of reflection? Hegel's triadic "process of coming-to-be" (Hegel, 1977: 15)? An altar-piece? Perhaps -- Kroetsch says of his work: "A lot of my material is profane. But the telling of the story about that material, the language itself, changes it in some way to what I call sacred" (in

Hancock, 1977: 47).¹⁰¹ Three: the sacred number of the

¹⁰¹ Cf.

Some of [the characters in What the Crow Said] are desperately trying to make sense by those absurd acts ...flying into the air and so on...Liebhaber shooting the bees into the skies...if he could somehow just return things to a primal myth of total fertilization, and let them start over. . . . [In] my own thinking or feeling [t]here's a scatological vision of the world...against all that will to fly into the sky.

(in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 162)

I am not sure how Kroetsch would define his 'scatological vision of the world,' but Peter Thomas deems it misanthropic:

Liebhaber's humiliation and the abundance of shit in the novel are reductive in a way that is new in Kroetsch's fiction; compounded of terror and contempt for humanity they exceed any misgivings about the validity of tragedy. It is not that human dignity need stand very high. But to bring the quest for love down to a pitiful crawl back to the womb and a matter of shit and silence makes enormous demands upon the aesthetic virtues of the novel. (Thomas, 1980a: 115)

and nihilistic:

Since What the Crow Said includes a War Between Earth and Sky, the relations of fundament and firmament are clearly in mind. The novel is a parody of metaphysics in its cosmic religious and existential dramas, seen respectively in the inane speculations of Father Basil and in Vera's orgasmic experience, a Kroetschian pun on bee-ing (WCS, p. 10) and bee-coming (WCS, p. 9). JG's reduction of language to fundament is further reiterated late in the novel by the death of Joe Lightning who falls into a cess-pit after trying to fly. Flight, aspiration, and even the Fortunate Fall are reduced to crap -- this is a powerful nihilistic strain, admittedly drawn from a complex novel. (Thomas, 1980b: 38-39)

In any case, the preoccupation with scatology that we find in Kroetsch's work, particularly in The Studhorse Man and What the Crow Said, is entirely in keeping with the eschatological 'will to fly into the sky.' Scatology may

Trinity.¹⁰² Or "three different voices which together add up -- maybe to a fourth. I don't know. You pay a high price for using first person, for getting at that awareness of subjectivity" (in Cameron, 1972: 50; emphasis added). Or, as Hegel says:

The circle that remains self-enclosed and, like substance, holds its moments together, is an immediate relationship, one therefore which has nothing astonishing about it. But that an accident as such, detached from what circumscribes it, what is bound and is actual only in its context with others, should attain an existence of its own and a separate freedom--this is the tremendous power of the negative; it is the energy of thought, of the pure "I." Death, if that is what we want to call this non-actuality, is of all things the most dreadful, and to hold fast what is dead requires the greatest strength. Lacking strength, Beauty hates the Understanding [the power which dissolves] for asking of her what it cannot do. But the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself. It is this power, not

be, on one level, merely a preoccupation with excrement, but, on another level, that very preoccupation can be seen as another way of 'getting to heaven' or of reconciling mind, body, and spirit in Spirit and thus attaining full presence simply by shedding the body as, in Kroetsch's word, shit. With JG dead, "the parlor . . . no longer smelled of shit, it smelled of dust" (Kroetsch, 1978f: 155).

For Derrida's treatment of scatology in reference to Antonin Artaud, see "La parole soufflée," in Derrida, 1978b: 169-95.

¹⁰² Geert Lernout points out that in What the Crow Said "all things come in threes: the premonitions, the cries, Vera's husbands, etc." (Lernout, 1985b: 59).

as something positive, which closes its eyes to the negative . . . [but] by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being. This power is identical with what we earlier called the Subject, which by giving determinateness an existence in its own element supersedes abstract immediacy, i.e., the immediacy which barely is, and thus is authentic substance: that being or immediacy whose mediation is not outside of it but which is this mediation itself.

(Hegel, 1977: 18-19; emphasis added)

'Indifference,' 'identity,' 'Subject,' 'I,' 'God.'
 Whatever name is given to presence, its attainment is considered magical or sacred and authentic, and this "pure 'I,'" this Being or presence is, according to Kroetsch's unrecognized mentor, Hegel, attainable only in Death. But both Kroetsch and Hegel refuse to recognize that this heroic quest of the Self unfailingly writes an autobiography which excludes difference and, thus, is essentially and inescapably solipsistic, oppressive, and exploitative.¹⁰³

* * *

In Kroetsch's opinion, the question of 'who is telling the story' (cited on 219) is more complicated in Crow than

¹⁰³ Louis MacKendrick notes that "Madham is quite the solipsist; even his covering letter to Jill about his transcriptions turns from academic propriety to a description of sportive copulation with Carol Sadness without shame" (MacKendrick, 1978: 23). Yet, he finds "in the context of the fiction. . . . the postmodern argument against absolutes and for ongoing process" (25).

in Gone Indian, but voice is so highly privileged that one might say he accords it the governing 'role' in the novel.

In What the Crow Said I was playing with that sense of multitudes of voices that become one voice; it isn't quite a third person because there's always the temptation of possible narrators there, whether the typesetter or type itself....

WILSON: It was really given to you to some extent by the literary model of magic realism, the idea of a communal or collective voice, wasn't it?

KROETSCH: That's right, that's why it was a storymaking process: how people **talk** toward a story.

(in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 171)

Kroetsch is fascinated with the 'oral tradition,' so much so that, in speaking of Liebhaber, the printer, he says, "I am tempted to say . . . there is no difference finally between written text and spoken text" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 39). To dissolve the difference between writing and speech is not to subvert, to deal with, or even to acknowledge the privilege that metaphysics accords to Voice; it is to reduce writing to voice and to confirm the governing power of the logos, exactly as Kroetsch does in all his novels. Whatever he says about multiple voices, those voices find unity in the 'communal voice' or the voice of the poet (prophet) who tells 'the epic tale of the tribe' (cited on 158) -- that single voice of the omniscient and omnipresent third person narrator. A third person narrator is necessary to this

novel, which carries Kroetsch's Bloomian quest through to its 'proper' Hegelian conclusion -- a conclusion which recognizes that the Aufhebung through which Subject is to be transformed into Spirit through absolute knowledge is achieved only through 'tarrying with the negative' (cited on 222) -- with Death. With Funeral Games.

In regard to the governing power attributed to the logos, it is interesting that Kroetsch insists that 'people talk toward a story' or 'invent each other'¹⁰⁴ according to a grammar -- a phonetic system by which language is ordered according to rules, just as Kroetschian 'play' is ordered by 'the rules of the game.' He says that, in Crow, we find a

disjunctive grammar, and a willful playing with pace. We have in our heads a sense of how long a scene should be, for instance; we have a highly defined sense of space and scene length. And I willfully throw away in a paragraph what might have been a chapter, even a novel. But I still trust that the reader is able to deal with that, once he sees how he's supposed to read; I would hope that by the time he's into Chapter III, say, in that novel, he would have seen what is happening and would be reading creatively. I think even as radical as, say, Jack Hodgins is, he is very careful to honor that sense of how long a scene is, almost exactly, the traditional length of a scene that I move through: the bees, then a little short chapter where Vera Lang almost starts over again, then another starting over with Liebhaver playing pocket pool. But you

¹⁰⁴ Cf. "What I was tuning in on in Gone Indian and What the Crow Said was the kind of self-creation that goes on orally" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 39; emphasis added).

have to send these signals very early to readers so that they begin to see what grammatical shifts they have to make.
(in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 161)

Once the reader 'sees how he's supposed to read' -- according to the 'signals' that the willful author, the authority, sends to him as part of the godgame he plays -- the reader will 'begin to see what grammatical shifts [he has] to make.' He will be an 'active reader,' playing the game according to the rules decreed by the god, the hero, who, in writing the work, has 'made up the game plan' (cited on 165). Kroetsch elaborates upon the connection between grammar, game, and play as follows:

[Crow is] really drawing on the lexicon of story, isn't it? It's dealing in fragments, assuming you know the rest of the story [the whole story]. . . . I trust a good deal to the reader of that novel, there's a good deal in every reader's head that I want him to use. There is a larger story, . . . as storyteller you have to be very good at hearing your story grammar. You take a big risk with those fragmented stories; if you aren't really hearing that grammar, a lot of readers are going to say, what's this all about? . . . And why tell it all? What are the pleasures in reading a long novel that just lays everything out? I just don't happen to be in on those pleasures. But I like the sense of game or play¹⁰⁵ and those

¹⁰⁵ The reader will recall that, to Derrida, play is the absence of the transcendental signified (see 23). Of play, Kroetsch says:

I think a kind of erasure of self goes on in

fragments are a part of play. I like the sense of active reading, of being an active reader. I like difficult texts --that's really what it comes down to, texts that demand a lot from the reader. And I accept that. It engages my sense of play.

(in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 162)
(emphasis added)

The writer must 'be very good at hearing [his] story grammar,' not only because to fail to do so would confuse the reader, but also, because to hear oneself speak is to be fully present to oneself; it is to hear "the voice one hears upon retreating into oneself: full and truthful presence of the divine voice to our inner sense" (cited on 25).

With respect to Kroetsch's use of fragments, Shirley Neuman suggests and Kroetsch agrees (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 15), that one "can't read What the Crow Said metaphorically; all your emphasis on metonymy works against such a reading" (14). The thesis here is that metaphor has to do with totality (history) whereas metonymy has to do

fiction-making. It's interesting that we **play** the **game**, isn't it? There is a double thing that goes on even in the statement which is very fascinating to me. The two words contradict each other in a signifying way. Play resists the necessary rules of the game. (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 50)

But Kroetsch's 'play' does not resist the rules of the game in the least. He says that "[writers of fiction] do act out what we can't do in the non-play world" (54), which suggests again that, to Kroetsch, play is the godgame that the writer plays with his characters and readers in his quest to become the telling hero. He says, "Since The Studhorse Man I've been much more interested in literature as an intellectual activity, as play. I say to my reader, watch me do this, this is impossible. Then I do it" (in Twigg, 1981: 113).

with fragments (archaeology). Yet, Robert Wilson suggests that the fragment or "shard represents, or can be made to represent, the whole of that from which it comes. Once you understand what the piece is, you can see it as a piece that represents the whole game," and Kroetsch responds, "Exactly" (11). Kroetsch also differentiates the postmodernist treatment of mythology from the modernist, and the difference between them is the difference between metonymy and metaphor.

I see Ovid as an example [for the treatment of mythology in What the Crow Said]. He was doing something comparable to Freud and Jung, only he was doing it in quite a different way. He just put his stories in a bag, so to speak. But he always got to the mythic basis of stories. . . . Ovid is much more metonymic and much more inclined to let myths be, to let them do their own thing, than the highly interpretive psychoanalytic schools. (113)

We have seen that metonymy is inextricably aligned with wholeness and interpretation. But we must also note that the 'mythic basis of stories' is the transcendentalizing power which allows a story to be 'more than a story,' to represent a larger universal pattern which allows and forces the 'story' to embody a Truth which can only be revealed in the events of the myth. Such a 'story' takes everything in,

leaves nothing out, and does not allow for différance.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Incidentally, I think Ovid has been somewhat misrepresented here. In the Metamorphoses, which must be the Ovidian work to which Kroetsch refers, the 'bag of stories' is narrated in what often seems to be an incoherent manner; the connections between one 'story' and the next are not always obvious -- in fact, often, there seem to be no connections. However, one must remember that the book begins with a clear statement of intention:

to tell of bodies changed
To different forms; the gods, who made the changes,
Will help me -- or I hope so -- with a poem
That runs from the world's beginning to our own days.
(Ovid, 1955: I.1-4)

The 'bag of stories' explores a central, universal theme -- the history and nature of things (beginning with creation myths) -- and the book ends, after Ovid's account of "The Deification of Caesar," with a restatement of his intention, which is as 'mythic' and metaphysical as it could possibly be, in terms of its transcendentalizing universality. Ovid very clearly states that it is in pursuit of immortality that he undertakes the quest that is his writing of the book. Even though his desire is expressed in literary terms, its ultimately religious basis and the faith upon which it rests is clearly indicated by the juxtaposition of "The Epilogue" with "The Deification of Caesar" and by the firm assertiveness of the poem's final line: "I shall be living, always."

Liebhaber's quest is exactly that of Ovid, which is made clear to us throughout the novel. Crow begins with a creation myth which is, of course, a 'tall tale,' but no more so than are any other creation myths. "Kroetsch begins What the Crow Said by conflating myths of origin and myths of 'the Fall'" (Hoepfner, 1987: 230) and "with stories of transformations" (231). The novel opens thus:

People, years later, blamed everything on the bees; it was the bees, they said, seducing Vera Lang, that started everything. How the town came to prosper, and then to decline, and how the road never got built, the highway that would have joined the town and the municipality to the world beyond, and how the sky itself, finally, took umbrage. (Kroetsch, 1978f: 7)

Throughout the novel, Liebhaber formulates various plans by which he intends to achieve immortality: (1) "'I'm not going to die,' he told [Tiddy]" (20); (2) "He stopped playing pocket pool [religious abstinence, for Liebhaber] for a

Throughout this novel, the characters appear as pairs or clusters which function as sets, as unifying devices. The most important male characters are Liebhaber, Martin Lang, and John Skandl, who are inextricably connected with each other in various ways, one of which is their interaction and interrelatedness throughout the episodes concerning Martin Lang's death, disappearance, and spectral reappearances, which is in itself a nice unity of life, death, and afterlife. The other most important way in which these male characters are 'stitched together' is through their mutual marriage(s) to Tiddy Lang -- not necessarily legal, but marriages nevertheless. We are told nothing of Martin's and Tiddy's marriage ceremony, but they were already bound as kin before their marriage. We witness John and Tiddy's wedding, but "[t]he reader doesn't always know who got married and who died" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 118), because, in this case, no one can decide whether or not the service is actually completed before Tiddy rushes off to deliver John Gustav, and no one knows whether or not

total of thirteen [one beyond the number of completion] days, and during that time he hit on the notion that he might evade death by telling the truth" (67); (3) "Liebhaber hit on the notion that he might avoid Gutenberg's fate by making a few autobiographical notes. I am become my own legend, he typed on the big machine; he was secure, there in the night, the matrices falling into place at his command. I perish. But only in a dream..." (74); (4) "Liebhaber, at that exact moment, formulated his intention of winning immortality by becoming a philosopher" (130); (5) "Liebhaber . . . hit on a way to win immortality. He, Gus Liebhaber, would be the war's victor. . . . Liebhaber, that night, was set on gaining a victory over death itself" (181-82).

the marriage is legal. Similarly, Father Basil conducts a marriage service for Tiddy and Liebhaber in the presence of three old women and in the absence of the bride and groom -- besides, he delivers "a burial sermon rather than a marriage sermon; for him the two were sometimes interchangeable"¹⁰⁷ (212). Also, Martin Lang is the father of Tiddy's daughters, and Liebhaber 'takes over' his family.

[Liebhaber] was quite simply the patriarch: a man who deserved to have a large family, friends, visitors, admirers. He began to feel a condescending pity for poor Gutenberg, crazy as a bat in a curious way, obsessed to the point of self-destruction; old Gutenberg, dying childless, penniless, friendless, anonymous, almost not invented into his own story. (73; emphasis added)

Just as Madham and Demeter invent themselves into their stories by appropriating, respectively, the stories of Sadness and Lepage, so does Liebhaber invent himself into his own story by appropriating Lang's (and Scandl's) 'story.' Just as Lang had "married a cousin and farmed her farm" (16), Liebhaber marries a 'grass widow' and appoints himself the patriarch of 'her' family, even while she is 'married' to Scandl: "When the second daughter, Rose,

¹⁰⁷ It is worth noting that much is interchangeable in this novel, and that 'interchangeability' is made possible by the copula 'is,' by Being, the ground of the logos. The notion of interchangeability works in the novel as it does with Kroetsch's "whole set of cosmologies that in turn become another elaboration of each other" (cited on 73).

announced one evening at the kitchen table that she was pregnant, Liebhaber demanded that they hold a family council at once" (66). In keeping with his view of himself as 'the patriarch,' he claims paternity of John Gustav, who is Lang's? Liebhaber's? Scandal's? son and is, thus, a figure of indeterminacy.¹⁰⁸ Embedded within the act by which Liebhaber may have sired JG, we find the following:

When the question of the father was argued, later, in the Big Indian beer parlour, Liebhaber was willing, each time, to fight to the death.

When, years later, any drunk or fool or hero had Dutch courage enough to suggest it was big John Scandl who sired the strange child, he had in the instant of his speaking to deal with Liebhaber's unaccountable wrath: the wrath of a man who could be aroused to fighting by nothing else on the face of the earth but who, in that one matter of ultimate truth, would take on a man twice his size, would take on two opponents, three. Liebhaber, with only love as his

¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, JG or John Gustav is 'killed off' in the novel, as are Martin Lang, John Scandl, Vera's Boy, and all of Tiddy's daughters' husbands and would-be husbands such as Jerry Lapanne and Marvin Straw, with the single exception of Terry's most recent suitor, Darryl Dish. In regard to Martin Lang's death, one could ask whether Liebhaber's ability to remember the future is merely a gift of prophecy or the power to 'play the godgame.' Would Lang have died if his horse had not been forced to carry both Lang and Liebhaber, who insisted upon directing the horse in a blizzard? Could Lang, alone, have given his horse his head and arrived at home before freezing to death? Does the narrator not suggest that Liebhaber 'plays the godgame' when he writes about Liebhaber's "hands this one time telling him to snatch this one man out of his own story" (18)?

weapon.¹⁰⁹ (41; emphasis added)

The female characters of significance in this novel are Tiddy Lang, her mother, and her daughters, particularly Vera, and they are connected in various ways, the most important of which is their closer than usual kinship; Tiddy's daughters' grandmother is also their great-aunt. One of the strongest symbols of identity, the very model of the elimination of difference, is the concept of incest,¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ It may well be that Liebhaber 'could be aroused to fighting by nothing else on the face of the earth,' but it is also the case that this 'love haver,' this 'Liebhaber, in love,' exemplifies the necessity with which, in a mode of thought which operates through a dialectic which is meant to synthesize hierarchical binary pairs, love must 'include' hate. Of Liebhaber, our narrator tells us:

He concentrated on hating Scandl. (45)

Liebhaber couldn't decide whether to love or to hate Vera. (63)

He hated the man for the ease with which he proposed to escape death, absolutely hated him. (206)

¹¹⁰ In regard to instances of incest included in the first draft and notes on the novel in progress, see Hoepfner (1987). In one version "Kroetsch called Vera 'Jane' and had her impregnated by her father's ghost: 'Jane- the eternal virgin, pregnant, finally, by her father's ghost'" (Hoepfner, 1987: 231) and "Gertrude Lang (Old Lady Lang) is raped by one of her twin brothers" (231). According to Hoepfner, Vera's impregnation by her father is brought about through the working out of one of "the superstitions about bees contained in Kroetsch's notes . . . that bees are the souls of the departed" (232) "hint[s] at the possibility of an incestuous relationship between Vera and Martin" (233). Interestingly, Hoepfner mentions that an incestuous society is a self-contained world" (233), and he posits Liebhaber as the "outsider" who "personifies" the "liberating force" that "can bring the civilizing influence that will 'bust her loose'" (233). In contrast, I see Liebhaber as the 'outsider,' the Self who appropriates 'his own' other -- the

and the unity inherent in that notion finds representation in Tiddy; she has a 'proper' name in the sense that it can be understood to name a self-identical self who carries the surname 'Lang' as both child and married woman, being called 'Tiddy Lang' even when she is Skandl's and/or Liebhaber's wife. However, Tiddy's 'proper' identity is of no 'value' to her, but is necessary only in order that she can serve as a means through which "Liebhaber, in love" (e.g., 39, 52, 74, 182), may "embrace all mankind" (71) -- that is, gather all the others into himself. Liebhaber is "the hero" (73), depicted most typically in his role as referee, despite his being, at times, a figure of ridicule.

Liebhaber, as referee, removed yet always there [like God]. . . . The rougher the game became, the clearer his vision. He was some kind of arbitrator, the civilizing man. He liked that. The civilizing man: at the center, and yet uninvolved. The dispassionate man at the passionate core.

(72; emphasis added)

Liebhaber, the writer/printer who is the novel's central character, is the 'shard' who represents all men (also being connected with everyone through the control mechanism of his newspaper stories).¹¹¹ Tiddy is all women,

novel's self-contained world -- into himself.

¹¹¹ Kroetsch says, "In What the Crow Said I allow that the real hero might be the poet. Liebhaber, setting type for his newspaper, might be the poet as hero" (Kroetsch, 1987: 161). And "[m]aybe character is the congruence of

partly through her intermediate position between her mother and her daughters, and partly through her being the one who always announces that "Someone must take a wife" (e.g., 18, 19, 69, 187; emphasis added), even when it is one of her daughters for whom she seeks a husband. And true to his strongly phallocentric faith, Kroetsch manages to have everything become One in Liebhaber through the sexual consummation, "in Martin Lang's bed" (28), of Liebhaber's and Tiddy's 'marriage.'

He, the having lover:¹¹² "Ho," his cry,

many stories; . . . like Liebhaber as typesetter with all those stories going through him. The stories we hear, the stories we read, are part of us as character" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 189).

¹¹² Kroetsch refers to Liebhaber as "the love haber; in other words, amateur" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 164), thus drawing upon the figurative meaning of his name. But the word's literal meaning is 'love haver; male lover; beau,' a definition which, particularly with Kroetsch's emphasis on haber, draws attention to the connection between Liebhaber and Habe (property; belongings), haben (to have), and, by association, unter sich haben (to be in control of, command), denotations which surface very obviously in this passage. Perhaps "the having lover" is Kroetsch's working out of the problem to which he refers in "Fear of Women," the problem of how to "possess such a formidable woman" (cited on 174, fn. 83). It is significant that Tiddy Lang, rather than being formidable, is reduced to a symbol of male sexual fantasies by the 'transgression' or 'substitution' through which her 'proper' first name, Theodora, is replaced by the "speaking name," Tiddy.

Robert Lecker refers to the 'speaking' character of Tiddy's name in nonsexual terms when he notes that "Tiddy is a joke; she is the product of that tidied up, tidy language Liebhaber wants to destroy" (Lecker, 1986: 216). Somehow, Lecker justifies the violence inherent in Liebhaber's appropriation of Tiddy by insisting that "[t]o argue that [Tiddy] continues Kroetsch's line of women who protect hearth and home misses the point; the line has been

as her mouth found him.

She raised her mouth away from his rising: "Sometimes you're just a little boy." She took him into her mouth again. They lay, together, in the naked circle of everything. Tiddy, then, taking every man who had ever loved her [she was courted by as many men as was Penelope: everyone]. It was dark outside. The tower of ice [Skandl's "erotic dream" (46) /tower/penis, Lang's frozen body, Liebhaber's frozen body/penis], in the depths of her present mind, flared a crystal white. The white tower was almost blue. He had been so huge, John Skandl; he smelled of horses. Her husband was plowing the snow. His arms upraised against the night, against the held and invisible horses, his hair alive in the combing wind. Those same men who had loved her. Liebhaber: "Whoa." And those she had wanted. . . . And those she had wanted to want: Vera's fated lovers. She kisses Liebhaber, hard. And hard. He, the having lover, thirty-three minutes in one best trial. Tiddy was proud of him. "Now," she said. "No." And then she said, "Now. No. Now. Child. Husband. Son. Brother. Old Man. Friend. Helper. Enemy. Lover." (215-16; emphasis added)

The men who had loved Tiddy are all connected by their

destroyed, the stereotype is dead" (104). But even if Tiddy does not continue the stereotype of the protectress of hearth and home -- a claim with which I disagree -- how can Lecker justify the fact that 'the tidied up language Liebhaber wants to destroy' is (necessarily) represented by a woman? Necessarily, because the male/female binary to which Kroetsch has always been devoted operates as surely in this novel as in any of his earlier novels, despite Lecker's insistence that it does not (Lecker, 1986: 98-99 and 100).

Also, Nicolaisen suggests not that "Kroetsch's 'onomastic strategies'" subvert traditional values or metaphysical notions of identity, but that they "order the chaotic, vouchsafe the survival of the mind, and in doing so, they serve as a eulogy, a paean to homo nominans -- Man the Namer" (Nicolaisen, 1978: 64).

proximity to horses, by their right to men's territory. And Tiddy 'takes in' all men, making them 'available' to Liebhaber through his 'taking' of her, as she calls him "Child. Husband. Son. Brother. Old Man. Friend. Helper. Enemy. Lover." 'Lover,' the English translation of Liebhaber's name, resolves all these 'opposites,' and 'in the naked circle of everything,' Liebhaber is on the way to becoming the transcendental signified.¹¹³

Once Liebhaber's (English) name subsumes within him all males, the dead and the living, the narrator draws us back to the last of Liebhaber's conscious plans for "gaining a victory over death itself" (182), to the night of his war against the sky. A war of love described thus:

¹¹³ Despite his attempt to show how, in this novel, Kroetsch abandons 'the old dualities' along with their metaphysical values, Lecker's penultimate chapter on Crow is in agreement with the reading presented here. He writes:

In truth, it is only Liebhaber who 'represents' the informing theory behind the text; the other characters exist as mockeries of what they might have been had Kroetsch 'rounded' them. . . . Yet none of these characters is ever permitted to develop in the conventional sense.

(Lecker, 1986: 105)

What Lecker fails to take into consideration is that one character's 'being allowed to represent the informing theory behind the text' (that is, the transcendental meaning which the text, 'in truth,' represents) confirms and reaffirms our metaphysical notions of hierarchy and (justified, normal, familiar) appropriation even more strongly than a traditional 'permitting' of all the characters 'to develop in the conventional sense' would do, because the one character who is 'developed' enjoys from the outset the transcendental privilege of representing the novel's meaning -- whatever name that 'meaning' might be given.

Liebhaber, in the sweat of his need,
 stooping and rising, stooping and
 rising, would fertilize the barren sky.
 Gus Liebhaber, his quick hands finding
 more powder, finding more bees, striking
 a match, lighting a fuse. Liebhaber, in
 love, holding his hands to his aching
 ears, his eyes watering themselves
 blind; in the long blind fury of his
 love, stooping and rising; in the
 passion of his greatest scheme, in his
 night-long and greatest fury against the
 death of the world, Liebhaber, shelling
 the crimson and careless sky; shelling
 the red sky black; alone and alone, he
 charged his gun. . . . Liebhaber, aiming
 to crack the intricate knot of all his
 undoing. . . . The clash of his own
sounding onto heaven's rim.

(182-83; emphasis added)

Now, with Tiddy's having spoken Liebhaber into being,
 repeating 'his own sounding onto heaven's rim,' and with no
 mention of love throughout this night-long 'love-making,' we
 are told that his quest for immortality succeeds:

And people, years later; years later
 they will say: against all knowledge, he
 fired the cannon. He fired the cannon,
 after all; it was he who dared. He took
 the bees. He pumped them into the sky
 itself, rammed them into the sky's
 night, into the sky's blue breaking. . .
 . He knocked them high, shot them into
 the one androgynous moment of heaven and
earth. He spent the queens into their
 myriad selves; he, the first and final
male, horny to die.

(216; emphasis added)

What is 'the first and final male,' if not God? The
 narrator's embedding Liebhaber's gaining immortality within

this sexual encounter parallels 'his' embedding the 'one matter of ultimate truth' (cited on 231) within Liebhaber's copulation with Tiddy. "What is quest really about? It's sexual, it's looking for that fulfillment" (cited on 200), the fulfillment that is the hero's victory -- victory over woman, over death through woman.

In this magical moment through which Liebhaber is transformed in a unity "of mind and body and spirit" (143), heterosexual intercourse is the mediating force by which the profane becomes sacred. His 'trial' of thirty-three minutes echoes his proposing marriage to Tiddy thirty-three times (187) and parodies Christ's 'earthly trial' of thirty-three years. This magical transformation is accomplished through Liebhaber's attaining absolute knowledge in the present moment, in Tiddy, who, "with her hardheaded radiance, held together the past and the future" (68).

She, with no imagination at all,
 dreaming the world. Liebhaber, finally,
understands. She only dreams what she
 has dreamed. But she is dreaming. He
knows now. . . . Liebhaber, turned end
for end in the old bed, his head to the
 foot, like printers of old, always,
 reading backwards, reading upside down.
 They lay, he and Tiddy, together, in the
 naked circle of everything. . . . Rita
 is writing. She flings the words across
 the page: he is dying, she writes. He
 is dying in the next room. He is always
 dying in the next room. She, bent to
 her tablet, her fingers tight on the
 ball-point pen; alone. Alone. All one.
 A lone... (216; emphasis added)

(Liebhaber's) understanding is the power of the negative, the power which dissolves in order to reverse, to set up opposites, to posit oneself as other -- 'backwards,' 'upside down,' or 'turned end for end' -- in order that the self can become actual or fully present through the paradoxical unity by virtue of which, "in speaking about the Many, we also refer to the One" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 129). Then, in 'absolute knowledge,' the Subject becomes Spirit, and 'the naked circle of everything' is completed. "Liebhaber is happy. He cannot remember anything" (217). Throughout the novel, Liebhaber oscillates between having mortal memory of the past and having divine or prophetic memory of the future. But now, having gained knowledge, he is fully and immediately present within the present moment, and he needs memory of neither the past nor the future.

Echoing Liebhaber's "I'm a happy man. . . . I've decided to live forever" (129), the narrator tells us that "Liebhaber is happy. He cannot remember anything. He rests his head on one side of the towel. He tastes his own semen on Tiddy's belly" (217). By virtue of the context in which we find it, Liebhaber's 'tasting' is entirely a gesture of appropriation and exclusion of the other. Liebhaber is clearly a figure of auto-affection, and Kroetsch is so far removed from resisting meaning or risking meaning nothing that not only dissemination but even insemination is resisted, through Liebhaber's possessing or 'having' Tiddy (who is all women and who concretizes Liebhaber's being all

men), only to take his own seed back into his mouth and, thus, to become 'in one androgynous moment of heaven and earth' (cited on 237), 'the first and final male' and the phallogocentric image of woman in man, Adam with all his ribs, one might say. He is the One....

"He tastes his own semen on Tiddy's belly. . . . Liebhaver is happy. After all, he is only dying" (217-18). And Hegel comes to rest in 'his misogynist disciple' who 'demonstrates,' through Liebhaver, that "the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself" (cited on 221), or, in the narrator's words: "Liebhaver . . . trapped into death, hit on the realization that he had escaped. I perish, he imagined, but only in a dream" (163).

With his Kroetschian "paracinematic [existence] or a sort of psychological depthlessness" (Wilson in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 192), Liebhaver 'acts out' "how we work....well cinematically is an interesting word, but...grammatically in the story" (Kroetsch in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 192), the story that is the sexual quest of the hero, the Self. Can we possibly believe that 'saying I is a wonderful release from I' (cited on 202)?

Liebhaver: the love Haver: in other words, amateur. We're all amateurs in the game. The game is too far ahead of

us and in that sense we are all trying to tack enough of it together; to build a boat that will help us deal with it. The book is autobiographical, including the talk about writing a novel.

(in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 164)

'Trying to tack enough of it together' is the aim of the quest which fascinates Kroetsch, and the means through which he pursues that goal is a sexual dialectic. His faith in dialectic is a 'faith' in the humanism that we celebrate because we are conditioned by the familiar, 'normal' and 'natural' mode of thought prescribed for us by metaphysics. This humanism is, unwittingly but surely, a solipsistic and oppressive 'disporting of Love with itself' (cited on 204, fn. 92). Because this humanism that we hold so close to our hearts is based upon a metaphysics of presence that is implicitly and necessarily phallogocentric -- based upon the quest of the Hero, who must be the conquering male -- it is intensely and irrevocably misogynistic.

Chapter Nine

'Fear of Women': A Misogynist Erotics

To consider Robert Kroetsch's views on the influence feminism has had on male writers is to encounter again the male anxiety to which he refers in his review of A Mazing Space, the

kind of unease that we can see almost as a sub-text behind the ways we have of picturing the world or telling a story, even writing a poem; those ways were based on male supremacy, on premises that the male experience was somehow superior to the female experience. Upsetting that has made an unease in male writers which is a very useful, a very good thing.

(in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 34)

Without dwelling upon the fact that he says, in the past tense, that those ways 'were based on male supremacy,' while referring, in the present tense, to those male supremacist ways as 'the ways we have,' I do suggest that Kroetsch's (inseparable) ways of 'picturing the world or telling a story' show no evidence of having been influenced in any substantial way by feminism -- despite his claim that the movement has caused "a re-examination of the very notion of the quest story. We realize most of us aren't on quests; male literature said we were on quests" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 34). Kroetsch's 'male literature' still says that we are on quests and that the successful hero is male.

Given that Kroetsch considers the quest to be sexual (which is to say 'heterosexual') and if the quests in his novels are exclusive to males, women can play only two roles: to serve as the muse for the male artist or, as a dutiful daughter, to search for "the disappearing father."¹¹⁴ The first of these roles is filled by Tiddy Lang and the second, by Anna Dawe. But before addressing Anna Dawe's love story, let us consider again What the Crow Said.

Tiddy is obviously not a 'bride [who] expects to receive as well as give,' a woman who might overwhelm 'the male who should be artist.' She is the woman who knows her place, the housewife who stays in the house, or at least at home, and "must alone, as always, keep the farm in its thriving" (9) while Martin tells his stories in the Big Indian beer parlour, and then, after Martin's death, must continue this work with the additional chore of caring for the father's son (after caressing frozen Liebhaber back to life), while the men involve themselves in 'heroic' activities such as erecting a phallic tower of ice, going

¹¹⁴ "The Disappearing Father and Harrison's Born-Again and Again and Again and Again West," is the title of Kroetsch's review of Harrison's Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction (1977). In that review, he writes: "The world does not end. It's hard to make literature out of that realization. But at least the father disappears. And that, out west (as opposed to down east), makes everything possible" (Kroetsch, 1978b: 9). What is "everything"? It is "[h]ow to see the vision, how to imagine the real" (9); it is the immediately present revelation which is the goal of every quest.

off to represent the community in the capital, filling the pages of the weekly newspaper, or engaging in a marathon schmier tournament for one hundred fifty-one days and nights.¹¹⁵ The parodic nature of these male quests does not in the least subvert the premise that men venture out on quests and women stay at home to keep things together for them. However humorous or ridiculous the male quests might be, Tiddy is the passive woman who serves as Muse for the male artist, for Liebhaber and the 'predecessors' whom he usurps. She is the necessary evil required by the quest which is Kroetsch's 'künstlerroman.'

In view of the way in which Tiddy serves as the medium through which Liebhaber gains immortality, it is no surprise that Kroetsch's comment on the sexual nature of the quest (see 200) leads into the following: "[T]here's a kind of obsession in my work with finding a female muse. I'm very uneasy about that because I don't want to think of a muse as passive" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 23). That statement is followed by a quotation from "Robert Kroetsch: Male":

I'm someone who believes very
consciously that the writing energy
comes out of a confrontation with the
Muse and the Muse takes the immortal

¹¹⁵ This heroic feat, the schmier tournament, is paralleled by one of the 'sub-anecdotes' of Badlands, although the one related there is more explicitly sexual. The two Annas "talked with an old man who remembered Mary Roper's place and who said, bowing graciously, 'Excuse me, ladies, but I must tell you--I was a customer 144 nights in a row, and the money well spent'" (Kroetsch, 1975a: 261).

form of immortal woman. Often one almost hates a dependence on that. But I really depend on that relationship with a woman for that writing energy.¹¹⁶
(in Twigg, 1981: 109)

Again, writing and sex are tied together by a vampiristic violence, Hegelian violence in the disguise of love. However high the pedestal upon which the Muse stands, the gesture by which woman is categorized as Muse, or, which amounts to 'the same,' reduced to a mere figure or a role, is a misogynistic gesture which robs her of humanity and life. It is to 'play with' a stereotype. It is Liebhaber's need to be "playing pocket pool, . . . dreaming a woman for himself" (15) or to "come either to the Sleeping Beauty figure or to the vagina dentata--but not to a flesh-and-blood woman" (Kroetsch, 1978c: 77). It is to come to Tiddy as Sleeping Beauty, who is "asleep. She, with no imagination at all" is no threat to the male artist, but, because she must be the immortal Muse, she is "dreaming the world" (216) for Liebhaber.

Rather than hypothesizing the différance which determines 'female' as irreducibly different from 'male,'

¹¹⁶ Cf.

Woman: muse. Cunt, if you want to be sarcastic and--No, I like that. Cunt. The mystery. The place of entering. Of creation. Of deceit. Of art. Of self-deception. Of all knowledge. Of smell and taste. Of enter/attainment and thus the excitement/pleasure of intelligence.
(personal correspondence, dated 8 Feb. 1978; quoted in Harvey, 1978: 29-30; emphasis added)

Kroetsch's 'playing' with the social construction of gender¹¹⁷ in this novel confirms and reaffirms the 'difference' between male and female as that difference has always been perceived by traditional metaphysical thought. 'Female' is determined as the other of male, as the logical opposite which can be dialectically and sexually subsumed into the male who thus achieves wholeness and fulfilment in

¹¹⁷ Linda Hutcheon claims that "Kroetsch's novels assert the male myths of the quest journey . . . in order to show the male (and female) cultural roles as fictions, as constructed by culture rather than as 'natural' in any sense of the word" (Hutcheon, 1988a: 3).

The quest journey is definitely a male myth and, as we will see in regard to Anna Dawe, the 'female' version of the quest is a 'voyage of discovery' through which a woman comes to accept and resign herself to the role prescribed for her by a patriarchal culture -- that is, a 'mediating' role in which she acts as a vehicle through which the man is enabled to succeed in his role as hero. To 'assert the male myths . . . as fictions' is still to assert male myths and concepts, and women's involvement in them can never serve to subvert those myths and concepts or the patterns of thought which depend upon them. For women to attempt to venture out upon quests can signify nothing more nor less than their acquiescence in a cultural structure defined by the male-dominated forms of thought to which we are accustomed and to the male rules which dictate to women a subservient role. In order to subvert the patriarchal hegemony, male myths and concepts (such as the concept of the quest) must be questioned, problematized, and somehow broken down, because, so long as these concepts are accepted as valid, women will necessarily be confined to subservient, male-defined roles -- as is aptly demonstrated by John Clement Ball's comments on Kroetsch's treatment of male and female territory (see 100) and by Peter Thomas' and Robert Lecker's comments on Anna Dawe's 'quest' (see 282, fn. 121 and 291, fn. 124). A 'feminist endeavour' cannot ever be premised upon acceptance and participation in the 'male game,' but must be based upon an examination and exposure of the presuppositions and assumptions which govern that 'game.' One feminist who has made such an attempt is Luce Irigaray (Speculum of the Other Woman (1985) and This Sex Which is Not One (1985)). Incidentally, for her efforts, Irigaray has been expelled from the Freudian School and from her teaching position at Vincennes.

a transcendental signified. And the setting up of opposites which this dialectical operation requires is achieved, as always, through negation, through the exclusion by which 'female' is denied the 'humanity' which links 'male' and 'female' in an originary doubling that is repressed by metaphysics in order that the difference between the two may be negated and resolved in an 'identity' which is Male. The exclusion by which this work of the negative sets up binary pairs is accomplished, in Kroetsch's novels, partly through a 'proclamation' of territorial rights which, in Crow, are blatantly 'spoken.' The territories are exactly those of which Kroetsch speaks in "Fear of Women," when he says that, according to the 'Western dialectic,' the 'horse,' with its connotations of riding out into the world, is exclusive to males, while the 'house,' with its connotations of confinement, is exclusive to females, and the two come together in the 'horse-house' or 'whorehouse.' By virtue of the sexual, dialectical nature of the Kroetschian quest and of his male characters' inability to approach 'flesh-and-blood' women, these opposites must come together in the whorehouse, which is no longer the confining, 'nurturing,' 'familial' territory of women, but, rather, the 'worldly' territory of men, a house populated with women for men.

In this novel, the exclusion of women from male territory -- which posits woman as the opposite of man -- is 'told' by the narrator and the male characters in no

uncertain terms.¹¹⁸ Near the beginning of Liebhaver's story, the narrator writes the rules governing the novel's 'play': "It was against the laws of the municipality for a woman to enter the beer parlor. Tiddy Lang was standing behind her husband, behind Liebhaver, facing Skandl. She lifted a scarf off her red hair and the snow fell on her husband's shoulders, fell on Liebhaver" (18). Liebhaver's subsuming Martin Lang is foreshadowed by the ambiguity of 'behind her husband, behind Liebhaver' and 'fell on her husband's shoulders, fell on Liebhaver.' But also, by

¹¹⁸ Peter Thomas sees the dialectics of male/female and oral/written as central to What the Crow Said (Thomas, 1980a: 101-13 and Thomas, 1980b). Geert Lernout also finds the dialectic of the oral and the written central to the novel, "although not in the way suggested by the schematic reading that Peter Thomas imposes on it" (Lernout, 1985b: 60); instead, he deals "with a general characteristic of the oral tale and of language in general that involves a dichotomy between, on the one hand, memory, and on the other, fantasy, imagination, creation" (60). In contrast to Thomas, Lernout, and myself, Robert Lecker claims that

Kroetsch has always been a writer who allowed various formal and thematic tensions to provide his work with metaphor and structure. But here the binaries have in large part been consciously ignored because Kroetsch is attempting to repudiate the realistic pole that he has always recognized--both implicitly and explicitly--as a fundamental element in his work.

(Lecker, 1986: 98-99)

Or, to put it another way, "'the old dualities' informing [Kroetsch's] richest works are abandoned in favor of a nonbinary model" (100). Yet, in his discussion of Crow as "a unique attempt to confront the theoretical problems inherent in writing a fabular tale" (100), Lecker's discussion of the novel is centred upon the binary opposition between language and silence. How would this discussion be possible, if 'the old dualities' had indeed been 'abandoned in favor of a nonbinary model'?

virtue of the laws of the municipality, the laws of our familiar patterns of thought, 'one's other' can be excluded, can be rendered 'absent,' even when that other is 'present,' which is exactly how originary doubling is denied by metaphysics.

Tiddy, again, tried to speak; the men, not letting her be there. Nothing was so important as her not being allowed to violate their secrecy [their exclusive territory, their self-sufficiency]. Liebhaber, too, in his outburst, excluded her from the misery of their terror and their loneliness. Liebhaber saw her hair, the perfect texture of her skin. She was immune to the sky, to the seasons. (20; emphasis added)

Tiddy is there but 'not there,' and Liebhaber can even speak to her while denying her as a 'flesh-and-blood woman,' because he sees her as 'immune to the sky [and] the seasons,' as 'the immortal form of immortal woman.' His seeing her as such makes everything possible for this male artist: "'I'm not going to die,' he told her" (20).

That 'love' has little to do with the relations between men and women is admitted by the men, but denied by most of the women, whose belief in male-female love is one of the means by which their subservience is maintained. Confirming the 'horseness' of male territory, the narrator says that "Tiddy had smelled the horse smell on Cathy, and knew it was serious love" (91). But when, in the midst of the schmier tournament, Liebhaber brings the news that Joe Lightning and

Cathy Lang "were marrying for love" (99), the men

cite instances of neighbours who took wives to avoid cooking or to grow their own help or to get another quarter-section of land. Eddie only shook his head. Bill Morgan and Alphonse Martz and Ken Cruickshank together named thirteen girls who got married because of the back seats of cars, one who wanted an indoor toilet, three who hated having to do the milking. Liebhaver himself couldn't resist arguing, even if it meant disputing his own assertion. . . . He argued vehemently that lust and sloth alone were the reasons for matrimony; he defied any man in the room to name a single person, in the whole history of the Municipal District of Bigknife, who married, who would marry, for anything but lust or sloth.

The men didn't believe it.

(100; emphasis added)

'Men take wives' while 'girls get married,' which conflates the binary pairs of men/women and boys/girls so as to attribute adulthood and power to men, just as their taking of wives grants them power. Women merely 'get married': bound in a state from which men are virtually free.

Eddie Brausen is in love with Cathy Lang.

Nevertheless, he interprets the men's interrupting the tournament "to go see for themselves" as a surrender to the women. "'We're surrendering, aren't we?' Eddie Brausen said" (101). And the narrator adds:

He was in pain at the thought of Cathy's wedding. He was too young to know when to lie.

'Surrender?' Liebhaber said. 'To
 what?'
 'To the women.'"
 "Never" (101).

Presumably, Brausen will grow up and learn 'when to lie.' That the lying refers to the men's denying a surrender which somehow occurs despite their denial is impossible, for the men claim their territory at the church (the basement) and continue to play their game, neither mixing with the women nor participating in or witnessing the wedding. But even while having nothing to do with the wedding -- or, one might say, with marriage per se -- they reap the material benefits of it, in the form of food and drink provided for the wedding reception they deign not to attend.

The 'house' to which the men will never surrender is Tiddy Lang's house, the farmhouse outside which the men assemble and wait, watching the man spinning on the turning windmill, while "[t]he women stayed in the house. The house was full of women; now and then a face appeared in a window, pale, drawn, curious; a face appeared, hesitated before it withdrew. The women in the house were taking care of the women in the house" (178). But that house full of women also 'doubles' as the whorehouse whenever the men enter it, as they do, swarming like bees around a queen, to court Tiddy or one of her daughters. That these 'multiple' courtships render Tiddy's house a brothel is suggested by the fact that the men never enter the house except for

'courting' and is reinforced by the the fact that the courting of Tiddy results in the birth of the son whose paternity is 'undecidable.' Also, we have Gladys's marvellous pregnancy; when Liebhaber asks Tiddy who fathered the child Gladys carries, she replies, "Everybody" (75).

However, these women are 'redeemed' by marriage, by their consenting to serve as housewife or Muse. But in this novel, we also find an unacceptable female stereotype, the Muse's 'double,' the formidable woman who will not be subordinated to the male quest, or, in Kroetsch's terms, "the Terrible Mother" (Kroetsch, 1989b: 171). That the Muse is embodied in Tiddy, the mother, while the Terrible Mother is embodied in Vera, her daughter, does not in the least upset these stereotypes, for we all know that, in a patriarchal and Christian world, daughters become mothers and the Virgin and Madonna are one. And Vera becomes a 'virgin mother' when she gives birth to 'the supernatural hero from the forest retreat' (Kroetsch, 1987: 161), the 'wolf boy' sired by bees, the very creatures whose social structure, with its male, inseminating drones and female workers, is almost parallel to that of Big Indian, with its studhorse men and women who 'keep the farms in their thriving.' But what of the Queen Bee, the matriarch of that 'lower' society? Certainly no woman rules the hive that is Big Indian. Yet, through her sexual encounter with the god come to earth in the form of bees and her resultant obsession with providing hives for them, caring for them,

and collecting the fruit of their labours, Vera does, in a sense, 'take the place of' the queen bee.

Vera is the formidable woman who threatens to overwhelm Liebhaber, the questing hero, and she does so through passive aggression -- the form of aggression which is powerful precisely because it is not acknowledged. Yet, she is treated as formidable women are treated in all 'male literature'; she is eventually forced into the submission required for the success of the male quest. Vera's greatest sin is that she scorns men and does not feed their egos by sexually desiring them or by depending upon them to determine her identity. Throughout the novel, her honesty about her perception of men as useless renders her an 'outsider,' and, through most of the novel, her willful and disdainful virginity 'paradoxically' renders her, in the eyes of the men, the whore. When she does decide to cohabit with men, those she chooses are 'outsiders,' and this preference, rather than redeeming her, adds to the insult she has always been to Big Indian manhood. And why does Vera eventually do what seems to be entirely out of character for her? That is, to marry, not once, but three times. The narrator tells us that "[i]t was Joe Lightning's laugh of death that made Vera Lang decide to take a husband" (166). This may seem a strange cause for Vera's apparent 'reversal,' but the reversal itself is perfectly compatible with the 'grammar' of the story, which requires that Vera marry, in order to portray her Terrible Mother tendencies to

the utmost (in case they are not sufficiently obvious when she throws her son to the wolves) and to prepare the reader for her final submission to Liebhaber, when she lifts Marvin Straw into the floating granary.

Liebhaber and the narrator intimate that Vera has the power to incite men to suicide. Her first husband, a literal outsider who works for Alberta Government Telephones, "in some unnameable agony, or fear, or desperation, had charged the bull" (169) which tore him apart. Her second husband is an outsider in that he is "from north of town," with "a face like a skull and most women didn't like him" (171); also, he courts and marries Vera after the death of her first husband, a death which moves the local men to ostracize her: "none of them returned to the farm. Not one" (169). He meets his death after falling through a hole he had cut in the ice, but "[t]he curious thing was quite simply that the drowned man . . . had apparently been swimming away from the hole through which he'd fallen" (172). Vera's third husband is even more of an outsider in that he works on a road gang sent to the municipality by one, or possibly both, of the provincial governments, and "Vera was very careful that no one ever learned his name for certain" (175). According to the narrator, in 'her version' (newspaper report) of his death,

Vera hinted . . . that the husband--the
windmill lover, she called him--she
claimed there was some suggestion, from

his position on the turning wheel, that he'd leapt from the small stand by the gear box, had actually fastened himself onto the wheel, had let the wind paste him against the spinning blades. (177-78)

Despite Vera's 'man-killing' tendencies, Liebhaber, the poet who cannot decide whether he loves or hates her, "liked best of all Vera's submissions, the crabbed, tight, perfect handwriting on the page of scribbler paper that told him with impartial concern" (17; emphasis added) of the local events she reports. It is significant that Vera's 'concern' is 'impartial,' for it is her very impartiality which makes her suspect in the eyes of Big Indian's men. So is it significant that, unlike Liebhaber, Vera is not a reporter, a journalist, or a printer, but merely a gossip columnist -- 'gossip' being the verbal territory of women, a form of speech which is neither a 'language act' nor a telling of stories describing important male quests. And it is interesting that Vera's sub-literary 'submissions' point already, at the beginning of the novel, to the ultimate submissions through which Liebhaber and the narrator (or story grammar, or author) force Vera into a 'helpful' or 'Muse-like' role for Liebhaber. Those later submissions are very much a part of the 'sexual quest' through which he subsumes everything and everyone as he becomes the Hero.

Liebhaber's 'War Against the Sky' synthesizes his wars against Isador Heck and Vera Lang, both of whom he hates because, in their respectively 'male' and 'female' ways,

each of them represents competition to him. According to the capitalistic ways prescribed by our familiar patterns of thought, competition is considered to be healthy in that one's own progress is achieved through the elimination of competition, through one's subsuming the other's business (or story) into one's own. Liebhaver absolutely hates Heck (see 232, fn. 109), as Heck presumes to venture out upon the very quest which Liebhaver considers to be uniquely his own: "Isador Heck proposed to include himself into heaven. To that end he'd built a cannon of the sort he'd been shot from while traveling with the circus" (181). Although Heck's proposed method is naive, it can, in a perfectly Hegelian way, be negated and conserved at a 'higher' level by Liebhaver's superior genius, just as "Vera Lang's entire fortune and her life's work [her quest] too, her dedication, her passion" (179) can be subsumed into Liebhaver's quest. Throughout the night of Liebhaver's war, through the passionate and superhumanly repeated ejaculations by which he enacts 'his own sounding onto heaven's rim,' he stoops and rises, over and over, filling Heck's cannon with Vera's bees, to "fertilize the barren sky" (182) in the heroic act which will, in turn, be reconciled with his 'taking' of Tiddy (as he is dying) in a synthesis through which he gains rebirth into immortality.

Although Liebhaver's victory over Heck is punctuated by Heck's complaining loudly that his cannon (penis) is ruined, his victory over Vera is diminished by her characteristic

'impartial concern.' When the sky releases the ejaculated bees, Vera begins to collect them, but Liebhaber's victory is seriously impaired by her refusal to acknowledge it. After "the night of his secret warring" (184),

Liebhaber drove Vera's Essex back to the farm. The few drops had become a drizzle by the time he got there. "It's going to rain cats and dogs," he shouted, hardly up the steps and onto the porch. It was not Tiddy, but Vera who first came to the door. She didn't bother to look at her Essex, returned, finally, from wherever Liebhaber had taken it. She said nothing of his theft, his vast conspiring to unhinge the world; he might have been, for all her attention, innocent. (185)

Liebhaber's 'theft' hearkens back to the scene in which he decides 'to snatch this one man [Martin Lang] out of his own story' (cited on 231, fn. 108), the scene in which we find

Tiddy Lang, speaking in that awkward, pontificating, fatal, afterthought way: Someone must take a wife. The simple statement slammed through Liebhaber's mind like an exploding rock. It had all the excitement of theft about it, a vast and terrible conspiring to unhinge the world's illusions. (19; emphasis added)

But his 'theft' of Vera's story is less complete than his 'theft' of Tiddy's and Martin's, because Vera refuses to acknowledge the theft -- she will not, of her own volition, submit to Liebhaber and his quest. So 'how does one possess

so formidable a woman?' Vera, the Terrible Mother who, it is intimated, has at least contributed to the deaths of three men, must be forced to submit, forced to subsume Liebhaber's competitors into herself for him, just as Tiddy gathers into the 'having lover' all her lovers, would-be lovers, and lovers she wishes she'd had, including Vera's. And Vera does become the tool through which Liebhaber is ridded of herself, her son, and Marvin Straw. According to the story's Hegelian 'grammar,' these three must be defeated because, of all the novel's characters, they present the most dangerous threats to the successful completion of Liebhaber's quest -- Vera, through her 'unfeminine' and impartial formidability, Vera's Boy, through his heroic status, and Marvin Straw, through his role as the hangman who represents Death.

Vera's Boy, who is never graced by the 'language act' which would confer upon him a proper name or a proper identity, is the only male progeny of Martin Lang, Lang having been his maternal grandfather, and therefore, his death enacts one of the later stages of the 'multiple' synthesis by which Liebhaber achieves his goal. But Vera's Boy is also threatening in that he is a 'hero' in the original sense of the word, according to the ancient Greek classification by which a hero is the progeny of a mortal and a god, a god who may manifest himself in any form. That Vera's Boy is a hero in this sense is emphasized by his miraculously being adopted and raised by wolves in 'the

forest retreat' (cited on 252), eventually to emerge as a strange creature with supernatural powers that allow him to somehow 'found' or 'save' the human community to which he is connected through his mortal parent. Certainly, this mythology is parodied in What the Crow Said, partly by the fact that the people are said to be unable to understand what he says. However, it is entirely in keeping with tradition that this should be so, because the flip side of the gift of prophecy has always been that the prophet is either not understood or not believed by those for whom he or she prophesies. If there is parody here, it emerges in the fact that, despite his peculiar way of speaking, the people are able to benefit from Vera's Boy's superhuman weather predictions until, in a negating reversal, he becomes unable to make those predictions correctly. But his loss of that gift merely signals the more important parody which occurs in regard to Vera's Boy. That he loses his ability to prophesy signals his unconventional reverting to a merely mortal state, and that parodic 'fall' is entirely in keeping with the Hegelian impulse through which the 'real' or 'chosen' hero, must 'steal' Vera's Boy's heroic status, subsuming that status into his own story, in order that he may 'include himself into heaven.' With Martin Lang's grandson, the hero, out of the way, Liebhaber is almost free to become the one and only successful hero.

Almost free. It is also necessary, according to the 'grammar' of Liebhaber's story, that Marvin Straw be not

killed, but nevertheless defeated, rendered impotent with regard to Liebhaber. Marvin Straw has variously been the obsessed would-be lover of Vera, Liebhaber's spokesman, and the hangman, the person who holds power over the lives of the condemned -- the person against whom the schmier players "were playing to win, and to win they had to lose" (108), just as, according to Christian theology and Hegel, men must win by losing against death. That Death itself will not just "get sick of everything and die" (131) is indicated by the fact that, even though the schmier players succeed in cancelling Jerry Lapanne's sentence of 'death by hanging,' Lapanne does die and, in fact, dies by hanging. Death must be tarried with and overcome through an individual's lone heroic quest. The fact that Marvin Straw, the mere mortal, will be subsumed into Liebhaber's story as a symbol of the death which Liebhaber defeats by submitting to his dying, is indicated in several ways. The schmier players do succeed in stealing Straw's identity as hangman by losing against him until he misses his appointment to execute Lapanne. Also, Straw becomes hopelessly infatuated with Vera Lang and cannot leave Big Indian, which reaffirms in a physical way the loss of his identity. And finally, Straw becomes Liebhaber's spokesman (118), which foreshadows his eventual succumbing to Liebhaber's power and his role in sounding Liebhaber's attainment of immortality.

But what is most important here is that it is love for Vera which causes her son to die, that it is lust for Vera

which causes Marvin Straw to disappear, and that Vera thus submits to Liebhaber by becoming the vehicle through which the three most dangerous threats to his success are simultaneously negated and subsumed into his quest. Vera's Boy is doomed because, "heroically, abandoning his own ambitions, he went to his mother's rescue" (198). Marvin Straw is doomed because he perceives Vera as "[t]he seedhouse of all [his] dark need, the world's vulva and fulfilment in one" (199), and he responds to her "motion[ing] now to the man, her final lover, flagging the black horse through the mud" (199) (the same horse upon which Martin Lang met his death). It is fitting that Vera's Boy and Jerry Lapanne die together, while each pursues a heroic quest, the former attempting to rescue his mother, the latter, attempting to rescue 'her final lover,' Marvin Straw. Both had already been marked for death, one because he was born a hero and the other, because he must pay for the hubris which compels him to invent a machine enabling him "to leap from the face of the mortal earth" (206). Liebhaber's rivals for the status of hero meet in "[t]he paddleboat and the flying machine [with] the center piling of the old CN bridge; at the exact and same instant, they were in collision. They became one" (202-203). They become one in a moment that echoes Liebhaber's "charg[ing] his [Heck's] gun. . . . aiming to crack the intricate knot of all his undoing. . . . The clash of his own sounding onto heaven's rim" (183) and foreshadows the echoing of that

sounding in the 'one androgynous moment of heaven and earth' (cited on 237) which announces Liebhaber's victory.

Vera stands naked on Scandl's floating granary, "wild with her first longing"; the bees' "presence filled her with a desire" (201), just as their presence so filled her when Vera's Boy was conceived. But now, her desire transforms itself into an autoeroticism which is a desire for death, "a desire she did not even wish to understand" (201).

She urged two fingers, quickly, between her thighs.

The black horse saw the break in the bridge. The black mare stopped in the middle of the bridge; Marvin Straw went head over heels, into the river. He was gone for a long time. Marvin Straw was gone for a long time. Then he burst to the river's surface; his head came up shining, clean and strong, out of the water's rip. He swam like a man who had never in his life needed or known water, and yet who now, in an act of creation born of the water itself, invented motion itself. He threshed his way toward the granary. (201)

Marvin Straw's being gone for a long time is repeated, emphasizing his bursting anew to the river's surface, and that disappearance and rebirth of Liebhaber's spokesman, the hangman, is symbolic of Liebhaber's overcoming of death in immortality. Marvin Straw, this novel's symbol of death, cannot die, but he can be tarried with and overcome by the questing hero. He cannot, however, be overwhelmed or even resisted by Vera, who now welcomes him, unwittingly

welcoming death and her inevitable role as 'the world's vulva and fulfillment in one' or 'the immortal form of immortal woman' -- the role which Vera, the only 'flesh-and-blood woman' in the novel, has hitherto resisted.

And Vera Lang reached out a hand. Naked and beautiful and wild with her first desire, she reached a perfect hand to the swimmer. She helped him up into the doorway. In his terror or in his need, under the water, he had torn loose from all his ragged clothes. They passed the barrier of the bridge, Vera Lang and Marvin Straw; their floating granary sailed through the gap in the broken bridge. (201)

With death, Vera sails 'through the gap in the broken bridge,' having finally done her duty to the patriarch. Not knowingly or willingly, but nevertheless, completely. That the bridge (between heaven and earth) is broken surely signals to the 'active reader' that her end is no reward, as, indeed, according to all the fictions we live by, it should not be, for her submission is not voluntary, but is forced upon her by the grammar of the Hegelian story Kroetsch here presents. And we may well ask where the influence of feminism could possibly leave its mark upon Liebhaver's quest or how Kroetsch's "wrestling with [the] notion of erotics" has led him "beyond mere role into a kind of human-sexual intertextuality" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 21), an 'intertextual erotic' that is not "male aggression" but "total exchange" (24).

Chapter Ten

'The Disappearing Father': Anna Dawe's Quest

Robert Kroetsch says that Badlands expresses his positive response to feminism, that the 'male anxiety' feminism had caused him has motivated a 'feminist' stance which, in that novel, upsets the notions of male supremacy inherent to our culture, to our modes of thought, and to the notion of quest. Of the novel, he says:

I was playing with the woman's first person narration and with the whole notion that a story speaks in what I call the male story. The knight out (the night out!) questing or hunting. The knight, leaving his love in the castle, going out to kill or be killed, and in the process generating desire. A story has its own energy which carries it along and I was letting this happen so that I got a double effect, a playing off between the story and the woman's narration, almost a discomfort for the reader who wonders where the story comes from.
(in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 170-71)¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ It would appear that Kroetsch's attempt to provoke discomfort has been successful in that readers do feel confused, or, at least, cannot agree about the effects of the 'double' narration. For example, Connie Harvey notes:

Although the main narrative seems to be written from the standpoint of an omniscient narrator, Anna indicates in the initial commentary that she is the narrator: 'Why it was left to me to mediate the story I don't know.' Anna, then, is both the narrator and the commentator. Formally, however, there are two voices: the third-person omniscient narrator of Dawe's journey and the first-person subjective commentator and narrator of Anna's story. These two, although they differ in style,

The 'woman's first person narration' is broken into fragments embedded like fossils or dinosaur bones in 'the male story' and occupies thirty-five pages of a novel of two hundred seventy pages.

Because Badlands is a 'male story,' governed by the phallogocentric modes of Western thought, it is necessary for Anna to write herself into her father's story in order to have an 'identity.' In this novel, and in the male-dominated culture which motivates it, men are recognized by their 'uniqueness,' even though it takes different forms in the perceptions of women and men. As we have seen in respect to Proudfoot, Madham, and Liebhaber, men recognize a man according to the violent and heroic feats by which he gains a fully present, self-sufficient identity. But because women stay at home and are not concerned with the

tone, and point of view, show similar characteristics in their use of language.
(Harvey, 1978a: 29)

In contrast, Sherrill Grace writes the following:

Badlands employs two narrative voices, the largely impersonal camera-like narrator who tells the story of Dawe's 1916 expedition, and the first-person voice of Anna, who tells her own story, as well as mediating her father's by containing and commenting upon it. (Grace, 1981: 29)

Unlike Harvey and Grace, I will argue not that Anna is the narrator of the main narrative or that her 'story' contains her father's, or, with Susan Rudy Dorscht, that Anna's "mediation of the story is a deconstruction of male privilege" and that "her father's story was always already (a) 'her' story" (Rudy Dorscht, 1988b: 86), but, rather, that the omniscient male narrator is the author of both the 'male narrative' and Anna's 'first-person narration.'

quest of the 'knight out,' they recognize a man by physical features or personality traits which are unique to him. That this is so becomes obvious as Anna Dawe tries to remind "that other Anna" (Kroetsch, 1975a: e.g., 26, 259, 266) of her father's 1916 expedition; even though Anna Yellowbird 'accompanied' William Dawe on that expedition, she refuses to remember him. It is only when Anna Dawe says "He was a hunchback" (26) that 'that Anna' responds. As we might expect in a novel by Kroetsch, her response is sexual: "The Indian woman straightened. She stretched her legs, moved them apart, as if even the memory of that man is enough" (26). It would appear that sex is the only 'language' that women are considered capable of understanding, and that both men and women recognize a woman only by the roles she assumes in relation to men and not by any 'unique identity' which is 'proper' or exclusive to herself. Therefore, Anna Dawe, who feels she has never been acknowledged as her father's daughter, must write Anna Yellowbird into her story in order that she may subsume the 'whore,' 'wife,' and 'mother' roles into her 'daughter' role, thus assuming all of those roles, as Tiddy Lang does, in order to become complete -- or at least as complete as a woman is allowed to become, which is to act, in her 'multiple' role, as the 'immortal woman' whom the questing male negates and subsumes in his attempt to become the immortal Hero.

In the first of Anna Dawe's 'autobiographical' notes or soliloquies, she immediately attempts to define a space for

herself in her father's story, to define herself according to an identity which only her father can determine for her. The passage opens thus: "I am Anna Dawe. I am named Anna because my father, eleven years after that season of 1916, remembered the Indian girl, Anna Yellowbird" (2). The season of 1916 is William Dawe's first season as an archaeologist, and it is that continuous male story, the omniscient narrator's story, in which Anna's 'story' is embedded. When she identifies herself again in that first section, Anna emphasizes the importance of her father's role in determining her identity: "I am Anna Kilbourne Dawe, 45, unmarried, conceived by William Dawe out of the woman he was no longer living with but upon whom he occasionally imposed himself" (3). Already we have a woman whose identity is defined according to whether or not she is married to a man, and we have a genealogical chart written in the language of the studhorse catalogue; Anna is but a registered filly, 'conceived by a stallion out of a mare.' At forty-five, though, a woman can no longer be considered a filly, but is, in Anna's case, a failed brood mare, an unmarried middle-aged woman who says of Anna Yellowbird's having been a wife and a widow that that is "a feat I have not accomplished in a lifetime" (26). That Anna perceives herself as a failure becomes obvious throughout her 'story' and is suggested here by the lonely sterility of the life she describes as her own: "I was there alone with only my parents' financial acumen to guard me, and I bought my gin by the case, bought

and read my books by the parcel, imagined to myself a past, an ancestor, a legend, a vision, a fate" (3). The ancestor she imagines for herself is, of course, her father. The legend is his legend, the one Anna will create for him by surrendering to the fate she imagines for herself -- to immerse herself in "old hoards of field notes" (2), because "it was left to [her] to mediate the story" (3).

This novel is so permeated with the male conventions determining the roles allowed to males and females that Anna must attempt to justify this 'archaeological act which succeeds.' She doesn't know why it was left to her to mediate the story, because "women are not supposed to have stories. We are supposed to sit at home, Penelopes to their wars and their sex. As my mother did. As I was doing" (3). Even mediating her father's story seems to her an illicit infringement upon male rights or territory. Moreover, we might ask by whom it is 'left to her' to so mediate; she never tells us that her father makes such a request.

I don't know that I ever received a letter from my absent father. He sent us instead, left us, deposited for me to find, his field notes. . . . Those cryptic notations . . . [of] the only memories [he] would ever cherish: the recollections of [his] male courage and [his] male solitude. (2)

Women 'are supposed to sit at home,' as Anna 'was doing' before setting out upon her 'quest'; even while attempting

to tell us she is not a Penelope, she tells us she is: "And yet I was not Penelope because no man wagered his way towards me. The one who did, ever--the man who violated my inherited dream of myself, if not me--assuming I did not seduce him into it--was gone, not travelling, but into death" (3). Again, as when she identifies herself as 'Anna Kilbourne Dawe, 45, unmarried,' she tells us that men's actions determine a woman's identity.

The quest is sexual, to Kroetsch, even when the woman is the hero's daughter; 'the one who did' 'wager his way toward' Anna is her father. She says, "the man who protected my honour from human decency was not a husband but a father. An absent father. And when the stranger came to my shore, he, my father, was that stranger" (45). She "was fifteen" (262), the same age as was Anna Yellowbird when William Dawe, "in her days of grief found her: ignored her, and used her in her grief, and then let her vanish again" (26), just as he does with her namesake. The connection created by both women's being fifteen years old is strengthened by their grief; one Anna mourns the husband killed in a war she does not understand, and the other mourns the imminent death of her mother.

I was fifteen, my mother was dying: he showed up on a blustery day in late October . . . and he came to my room instead of going to my dying mother, his dying wife; and he lay down on the bed beside me; he held me in his arms, held me, and "Anna," he said, "Anna"; and

then, in the midst of his maudlin crying he told me; "You were named for that Anna, and she was fifteen, then, too; your mother dying then, too, always dying--"; and he kissed my neck, my shoulders, my young breasts. And I told that Anna. "I was frightened. But I touched his back. And he kissed my breasts--"

And Anna interrupted me. "He was a great one for the nipples." . . . "I let him suck by the hour. If that's what he wanted."

And I had to ask her then. I was pulling up my panties. (262-63)

Both Annas touch Dawe's back, although it is to Anna Yellowbird that he says, "I have a hunchback" (190). How far Dawe's waging his way toward his daughter proceeds is momentarily left indeterminate, by virtue of Anna's interruption, but Anna Dawe does soon say, "I'm a goddamned virgin. I'm forty-five and I wouldn't know a prick--" (263; emphasis added). But the most important aspect of this encounter is the daughter's perfectly conventional and misogynist perception of the event's cause and her shouldering of the blame by "assuming [she] did not seduce him into" (3) violating her, an assumption which, by virtue of its being mentioned, suggests, as phallocentric thought always does, that, indeed, she did 'seduce him into it.'

Occasionally, this forty-five year old 'goddamned virgin' displays anger towards her father and towards the misogynist culture which employs the "narrative tricks of a male adventure: the lies that enable the lovers to meet" (27), the tricks and lies to which she assumes Anna

Yellowbird will be faithful in her "formal telling" (27). However, her anger does not suffice to expose or subvert those tricks and lies. In the first place, we see in her opening soliloquy that Anna redirects her anger toward herself by taking the blame for her father's double violation of her, his violation of her right to be an individual who may identify herself according to her own merits and his violation of her body through sexual overtures, the latter reinforcing the former. She also manages to indirectly repress that anger, by condemning Web's parricide and his denial of the past: "There is nothing else, Web. That you should misunderstand is unfortunate; on that one issue, on that issue only, my father perceived correctly" (4). That one issue is the past, the past with which William Dawe is obsessed because he can dig it up to gain a "handsome profit" (4), not only in terms of its commercial value, but also, in the same capitalistic and Bloomian spirit, in terms of the heroic stature accorded to him by the legend through which his name will live on in the Daweosaurus he discovers in 1916, the 'son' that Anna should have been, that "his surname must deserve" (109).

In the second place, Anna's angry attacks cannot subvert the misogynist conventions of the male story because her protests are nothing but empty words, words which her actions, the story's grammar, and Anna herself contradict even while she speaks them, as, for example, when she denies

and assumes the Penelope role and when she expects Anna to adhere to 'narrative tricks' and 'lies,' even while she condemns them. In her first soliloquy, Anna already 'succeeds' in subsuming her personality -- and/or the story she might have had, had she not been a male-identified woman -- into her vision of her father's story. His story is the one in which she, 'ignored' and 'used' and 'let to vanish,' desperately wishes to 'appear,' to be negated and conserved. That the 'story grammar' overwhelms Anna's resentful outbursts becomes particularly obvious in the 'whorehouse' episodes, those which include the 'real' brothel and those which deal with Anna Yellowbird, the widowed child who is 'used in her grief.'

As the men arrive at Drumheller, the male story is interrupted by an 'Anna Dawe' section in which Anna reiterates Kroetsch's analysis of the quest as a 'knight out (night out!)' that satisfies the male need to avoid surrendering to women.

My father, there, in that brand-new town, found the word fugitive, and lovingly underlined it in his notes. Good Good, how men do love their symbols. Each of them, every man, symbolic of another. Fugitive. From all the women in the world, no doubt. Those men, expeditionary, running upon their own running, had found . . . a cluster of wives and children. Women as desperately alone, there together on that civilized street, as the woman in her stony ranch house. As sadly alone as the women who, as cloistered as nuns, ran the half-dozen whorehouses on the

lower side of town: unless those women were happy. (63)

'Wives,' women defined by "the bosses sweetly advocating order, work, taxes, tradition, family, possession of house and wife" (63). Why are they 'desperately' and 'sadly alone'? Because no men appear on the street? Because the company of women does not count?... Unless which women were happy? Those who 'ran the half-dozen whorehouses'? If so, the lives they live provide a strange source of happiness, a masochistic 'happiness' which justifies to men the cruelty they inflict upon women in their exploitation of them.

[Web] opened the door; he stood stock still.

He had found her, after all; unexpectedly he had found her when he had forgotten that he was searching: she lay on her right side, apparently naked under a single white sheet on the narrow bed, her left eye blackened, the left side of her face skinned and swollen and crusted. She lay in an oddly broken position, away from the light that pressed through the small and blind-drawn window behind her.

Awkwardly, not expecting to, he said: "America?" . . .

Again, he tried: "America?"

The sleeping, broken figure did not stir.

And Web thinking: Goddamn, like those pictures on the piano. The fucking bride. The first night. That piano player keeps on like that, I'll go out there and club him over the head with a bone-on. If I get one. Opportunity of a lifetime. . . . Studying the stars in America's messed-up hair. With his left hand brushing at his new mustache, with his right giving himself an encouraging

tug. "Hey, America. Look what we got here." But the woman went on sleeping. Too many worries; they're turning me into a corpse. What's the word for fucking a corpse? Don't believe it. Unless it's warm. . . . He noticed the long, narrow mirror on the back of the closed door. Like those pictures: those wedding pictures, the smiling brides, the proud husbands. He stood in front of the mirror: eighth wonder of the world, he told himself.

(87-89; emphasis added)

In perfect accord with the chapter's title, "Scarlet Lady Sound Asleep," the 'opportunity of a lifetime' is the opportunity 'to fuck' a corpse, a Sleeping Beauty, a 'smiling bride' who has already been beaten into submission or, like Anna Dawe, will submit by "invent[ing] no end of girlish poses that allowed [her] to be small" (232) and, therefore, is no threat to the 'male artist,' the man with 'a bone-on' who/which is 'the eighth wonder of the world.'

In this novel, sex is 'male aggression' and not the 'total exchange' (cited on 263) that Kroetsch claims it is. That this is so is underscored by the narrator's choice of diction, whether he writes as the narrator of the male story or as Anna Dawe. Sexual intercourse is referred to as 'fucking,' and it is always the man who 'fucks' and the woman who is 'fucked' or, like Anna, fantasizing about "getting fucked by a man" (260). I find it rather strange that Anna, a forty-five year old virgin, verbalizes her fantasy in the language used by the narrator and the male characters to describe the sexual exploits of the

expeditionary men. Furthermore, the 'signature' of the omniscient narrator signs itself in the fact that Anna's fantasy is a 'female' version of the male fantasy of the Sleeping Beauty or 'immortal form,' because the man by whom she considers 'getting fucked' is "a man whose name I did not know, whose face I could not quite remember, and would never see again" (260). However, this 'female' fantasy is not even a gender-switched version of the male fantasy, because it is a version foisted upon her by the 'male story' which ordains that she must be 'getting fucked.'

Anna also has thoughts about the sexual habits of these expeditionary men, habits which demonstrate attitudes toward sex which she contrasts with those of women.

I suppose the curious thing about all those men on our frontiers is the sexual lives they lead. Where the two most obvious answers to their presumed needs are to love each other or to share a woman, they will do neither. They avoid violent relations with each other by violence; the squaw wrestling of their pale bodies is meant to deny the wrestling of their spirits together. And the notion that a woman is not to be shared is one of their notions also.

We have the instinct of community, will share or be shared: the avoidance of Anna was no idea of Anna's. (162)

It is interesting that 'to love each other' becomes, in the following sentence, 'violent relations with each other,' the 'loving' thereby being negated by a transformation that parallels the transformation of feelings by which these

homophobic men violently repress and deny, prohibit and inhibit 'the wrestling of their spirits together.' It is also interesting that, although the possibility of male homosexual activity is mentioned and negated, the possibility of female homosexual activity is carefully avoided, even as Anna contrasts 'male' and 'female' sexual options and attitudes. Men have the options of 'fucking' women or each other, but women may only 'be fucked' by men.

Again, a woman is regarded as property, a property to be exclusively 'possessed.' And Anna reveals that her version of the difference between male and female sexual attitudes is shaped by the 'male story' which requires women to believe that they 'have the instinct of community,' an 'instinct' which is touted as normal and natural but is clearly conditioned by a culture that requires the 'wife' to submit to 'sharing,' to condoning the husband's "committing adultery with a squaw" (198) or a whore, or "fornicating with a child" (198), while requiring the 'whore' to submit to 'being shared.' That Anna Yellowbird's submission is presented as her own preference demonstrates not the 'communal instinct' of women, but, rather, the extent to which her attitudes and expectations are determined by the 'story grammar,' the man-made rules governing her life.

Both Annas are conditioned, by these rules, by that male story grammar, to passively accept, condone, and even excuse men and "the sexual act as [William Dawe] provoked it, in his diabolical and organized and executed fashion,"

and they must excuse them because that sexual act "was intended to foreclose on randomness itself" (109), as are "the bosses sweetly advocating order, work, taxes, tradition, family, possession of house and wife" (cited on 273). Women, the harbingers and symbols of death and irrationality, must excuse male violence because it is the violence of logic and reason, the violence by which the dangerous, irrational other is negated and subsumed and sacred order is magically maintained. Order, tradition, and violence must be respected and revered by woman, even when the woman is Anna Yellowbird, who tells Anna Dawe that "Grizzly, he wasn't like that Billy [Dawe], crying out 'Mammal,' in the middle of it all" (263). William Dawe, like all of Kroetsch's questing heroes, is unable to approach a 'flesh-and-blood woman,' but Anna Yellowbird, whom both Dawe and his daughter call on several occasions "a squaw" (e.g., 11, 199), he cannot even approach as an 'immmortal form' or a Sleeping Beauty. According to his 'scientific' habits of mind, he must relegate her to the animal 'kingdom' at the height of his 'passion.' Yet Anna seems to bear no resentment toward him.

In the 'Anna Dawe' section concerned with Dawe's "one victory over Grizzly" (187), Anna tells us that perhaps, by bowing to Dawe in the moment of his own defeat,

in that self-effacing gesture, if it was that, [Grizzly] redeemed himself from the depths in the instant he made his

entrance....In his not resisting....In his letting be, perhapshe already knew what Anna was learning, what the others would never learn--. (187)

The 'others' will never learn self-effacement and submission -- presented here in the lofty terms of 'not resisting . . . letting be,' which mocks the Buddhist faith that Grizzly possibly follows -- because they have no need for such lessons. But because Grizzly is a "chinaman" (e.g., 7, 10(2), 13(2), 14) living in a society dominated by white males, he must learn what this novel tells us all women must learn. The difference between Anna's and Grizzly's lessons is that the 'chinaman' must submit to having 'his woman' stolen, while the woman must submit to being stolen, taken, possessed. Because the hero's quest is a sexual one for which woman is ostensibly the prize, she must learn that "if that corridor to the afterworld of hers, the hell of mine, was lined, commanded, and domineered by rutting men" -- and it is -- "then she knew what she must do; remembered the folly of each man's hunger and posture and body's outline" (260) and remembered to cater to those 'follies,' as Vera Lang refuses to do. That she learns her lesson well becomes obvious when Anna describes her father as "the head of an expedition" (25), and then, as having "a black beard, with eyes to match, and a heart to match the beard and the eyes" (25). Anna Yellowbird "would say nothing to the speeches [Anna] had been rehearsing for so long" (26); when she does

admit to remembering William Dawe, "a hunchback" (26), the first words she speaks invoke an interesting repartée.

"He did what he did," Anna said.
That other Anna.
"He did what he wanted," I corrected
her.
"Then he is not the man I knew,"
Anna said.
Even after fifty-six years she would
defend the man--her recollection of the
man--who in her days of grief found her:
and ignored, and used her in her grief,
and then let her vanish again.
"He did as he pleased," I corrected
her.
"I did not know that man, she said."
 (26)

This exchange is related in the second italicized section entitled "Anna Dawe" and demonstrates that Anna Yellowbird has learned the lesson which Anna Dawe has come to the Badlands to learn. The older Anna serves as the female version of the Jungian 'old man,' the guiding spirit who makes possible Anna Dawe's coming to terms with her father and her relationship with him in such a way that she becomes the 'dutiful daughter' she longs to be. That is, Anna Yellowbird serves as the whore/mother/wife who will be subsumed into the daughter when the women join as one in Anna Dawe's awakening, her joyful receiving of the symbolic phallus which 'completes' her as a woman.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Anna Yellowbird's 'status' as 'wife' is confirmed by her telling Anna Dawe that she has had 'four or five' children, all named Billy Crowchild (and all dead, by the way). Anna Dawe responds to this information by asking,

But how does Anna Dawe respond to that other Anna's account of 'that Billy's' repeated and demeaning outbursts? In keeping with her 'father-defined' attitudes, the rage with which she describes her father's 'diabolical' provocation of sex is utterly overwhelmed and subsumed by her reaction to Anna Yellowbird's tale. She writes:

And I was ready to laugh then. I was not laughing, but I was ready to laugh. Not the pained and uneasy and nervous laughter of a lifetime of wondering, of trying to recover and then reshape and then relive a life that wasn't quite a life. I was ready for real laughter.
(263-64)

This newfound capacity for laughter, for joy, precipitated by that other Anna's memory of Billy's using her while denying her as a person, marks the beginning of the sea change which I suppose we are meant to interpret as Anna Dawe's new beginning, her new lease on a life unfettered by her obsession with her father.

When the two Annas decide not to go to Tail Creek, where the 'male story' of the 1916 expedition began, but to journey instead "to the . . . high source of the river," Anna says, "Let's do it for Web." The older Anna corrects her, saying, "Fuck Web. . . . Let's do it for us" (264), and the Annas set out upon their own 'quest,' one that 'male narrative conventions' permit to women. They embark upon

"Any relations of mine, mother?" (262).

the 'journey of discovery' through which Anna will resign herself to the role of dutiful daughter, but it is presented in such a way that Anna seems to experience an epiphany that frees her from her fixation upon her father and from the male-defined constraints imposed upon women in a patriarchal culture. This duplicity is not necessarily 'intentional,' but the patriarchal conventions and attitudes governing the 'story grammar' render it inevitable.

Anna begins this journey carrying Dawe's field book, the emblem of her fixation upon him. But finally, the "ghost of Grizzly" (265) appears in the form of a grizzly "in a nylon net" (267), slung from a helicopter, imprisoned as Anna has been. He is a "great, shaggy beast . . . about to be born into a new life" (268), as is Anna. The women watch him, "so comically human and male" (269), finding him comical because he "had awakened too soon" (268) and is panic-stricken, "running in the air" (268) in his tangled, imprisoning net. Anna Yellowbird's response is a coalescing of her reaction to Anna Dawe's telling her that Dawe was a hunchback (cited on 279) and of Anna Dawe's response to 'that other' Anna's telling her of Billy's "crying out 'Mammal,' in the middle of it all" (cited on 277): "Anna fell backwards, laughing, off the fallen tree; Anna lay fallen, her skirt up, her legs spread, her body shaking with laughter" (268). As we might expect, the sexual overtones crescendo as the old Anna's spread legs are joined by the younger Anna's holding out her arms and fists, reaching up

to "the galloping, flying bear" (268), and the two women share a joyful, magical moment inspired by an overtly phallic image. The Annas laugh "[them]selves into a tear-glazed vision of the awakening old grizzly, lifted into the sun, his prick and testicles hung over us like a handful of dead ripe berries" (268-69).

Anna Yellowbird had been preparing to show her protégé the only extant photographs of Dawe and his "illustrious crew" (71). Now, with the women's having shared a phallic 'vision',¹²¹ rendered sacred by the bear's ascent into the sun, the symbol of the Good and the Holy, this wise woman

¹²¹ In regard to this phallic vision and the freedom it affords the two Annas, Ann Mandel comments:

two Annas, Dawe's daughter and the Indian woman who has guided them both, held by the vision, not of bleached subterranean bones, but of a living, sexual animal, a grizzly, "comically human and male," suspended above them. Caught in this vision, the two women, laughing, drunken, bacchic, are free to throw away all they have of Dawe-- documents of the past, photographs and field-notes--and walk away from that past and all it held them to. (Mandel, 1978: 53)

Similarly, Rosemary Sullivan writes that both Annas "are finally freed by a comic apotheosis. . . . The women finally release themselves from their Penelope obsession with heroism by uncreating the father; they burn his fieldnotes, his hold over his dynasty" (Sullivan, 1978a: 175).

Peter Thomas disputes these female critics' readings, saying that "[t]he grizzly . . . is perhaps more complex a symbol than is suggested here, and the freedom of the two Anna's more ambiguous" (Thomas, 1980a: 83). Although Thomas insists that "[t]he male / female contention is never resolved in Kroetsch's work," he nevertheless concludes that, "despite herself, Anna serves William's story" (83; emphasis added).

raised her photographs; she flung them out at the approaching helicopter. She flung them up at the bear's balls. . . . she was laughing: she flung up the pictures into the moving air: like so many vultures they hung, descending, onto the still water of the river's source. (269)

Thus, the teacher, the 'old woman' leads her willing student to the release which we are to believe finally frees her from her father and the male constraints, rules, wars, and games he represents:

And then I could do it too. I opened my purse, took out the field book I had carried like a curse for ten years. . . . And I took that last field book with the last pompous sentence he ever wrote, the only poem he ever wrote, a love poem to me, his only daughter, and I threw it into the lake where it too might drown.
(269-70)

However, I am convinced that Anna Dawe's being born into a new life is in no way indicative of a feminist stance. Her epiphany is a resolution, a dialectical synthesis through which she becomes the dutiful daughter who writes herself, in the 'autobiographical' notes embedded in her father's story, into her father's story.

Anna has spent "a lifetime of wondering, of trying to recover and then reshape and then relive a life that wasn't quite a life" (264). This statement is ambiguous in that the life to which she refers may be her own or her father's,

but that ambiguity is resolved, as ambiguity always is. By means of the 'quest' through which she 'recovers' and 'reshapes' her father's life, Anna is 'born into a new life,' a life contained within his. To put it in terms of 'love,' the magical word which denies the violence inherent to that marvellous reconciliation, she becomes able to forgive her father's incapacity for love and convinces herself that he did indeed love her, but was, as all men are expected to be, merely unable to express love. And the 'new' Anna, the Anna who is now her father's daughter, finds in "the last pompous sentence he ever wrote" -- "I have come to the end of words" (269) -- a love poem to herself.¹²²

Her quest is to "find and free the imprisoned ghost" (199) of a loving and not absent father who is now dead, just as Anna Yellowbird's quest was 'to find and free the imprisoned ghost' of her dead husband. Having found this loving father by reshaping his life in such a way that her story is embedded or subsumed within his, she is finally able to forgive and excuse him -- even to 'love' him, which, for a

¹²² Peter Thomas finds in these words an echo of Hamlet, which

is surely intentional, and with it the kinds of resonating questions concerning language and selfhood posed by the play. Dawe's fieldnotes are consistently narcissistic; an attempt to provide an historical record of devotion to scientific aims which is really Dawe's 'heroic' self-projection. The language of the notes vacillates between the cryptic and the poetic as Dawe struggles to maintain his fictive self, necessarily exclusive, against the claims of human relationship and love. (Thomas, 1980b: 34)

woman, means to allow herself to be posited as the negative, the 'not male,' in order that the male may succeed in fulfilling himself as a hero, becoming immediately and fully present to himself for himself by negating and conserving within himself the 'complete' female as 'mother,' 'daughter,' 'whore,' and 'wife.' That this is the case has already been foretold:

he locked me up in the house I had inherited. Or was inheriting....He locked me up in an education I might as well have inherited, it was so much mine before I realized it was given me; he locked me up in the money I did not know until years later, too late, was not even his to give.

Who could I learn to love, but him? And how, but in his manner? Loving loss as he loved it, finding no live world that was absolute enough to be worth the gaining, he would seek only the absolute of what was gone. (110)

It is the privilege and duty of men to lock women up, possess them and imprison them, because this imprisonment is the means by which men are believed to show their love, their concern, their 'protective instinct.' Anna Dawe rewrites the story of a father who could not be bothered with her, attributing to him this proper demonstration of 'love' that a decent daughter expects from her father -- even to claiming that he 'locked' her in silence:

[The two Annas] drove and talked and sometimes laughed outrageously, that

Anna so unthinkingly and absolutely obscene that I could only stop the car and laugh until the tears ran down my cheeks; and then I dared it too, tried those words on my mouth: and glanced at her face and saw she was letting me try in the same way that my father had stopped me-- (259)

Anna's newfound capacity for speech, her supposed 'feminist' freedom, is the means by which she finally achieves 'wholeness' in a role which allows her story to be contained within her father's. This 'woman's first person narration' is nothing more and nothing less than a means by which Kroetsch may relieve the 'male anxiety' feminism has caused him and, at the same time, may 'usurp' Dawe's story, which contains Anna's, into 'his own story,' the 'male story' told by the omniscient narrator who 'writes' or tells everything, both the numbered chapters of the acknowledged male story and the italicized, fossilized bones of 'Anna's' story.

Of feminism, Kroetsch says: "males are a little uneasy about it all. We're not supposed to know, in a sense; the movement has been kind of exclusive of males, at least in its initial stages; there's the same kind of unease one might feel in writing about minority groups" (in Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 34). Despite his being "exposed to a lot of feminism," his having "heard about it and read some of it" (34), Kroetsch's 'misreading' seems to have missed feminism's major points. For example, women are not 'like a minority group,' but are a minority group, minority having

nothing to do with numbers -- as the blacks in South Africa know very well -- but having everything to do with the minority group's being considered the inferior other of the 'majority group' which holds power over the 'minority' and assumes that that oppressive, exploitative power is its natural, normal right. Also, how could feminism, 'at least in its initial stages,' be anything but exclusive of men, who are the powerful, oppressive majority with which feminists seek to gain equality? However, in view of the fact that feminism attempts to teach men, as well as women, that women are equal to men, what could it be that males are 'not supposed to know'?

In Badlands, though, as in all of Kroetsch's novels, it is women who are excluded, excluded from male territory and from the 'sexual' quest which can only ever be male, because the conventions, the grammar, of that quest requires that woman serve as the other that is to be negated by and conserved in the successful hero. Except for when she can be used elsewhere, Anna Yellowbird is excluded by being left to walk alone to the archaeological site and then, by being relegated to her "cabin of bones, her fossil tipi" (Kroetsch, 1975a: 144). Anna Dawe is excluded by her fate and her character, both 'female': "It was in my fate to dream a father, in my character to wait" (138). She waits for her absent father in the house he locked her into, the house owned by her mother, the Penelope who cannot be someone whom Anna can 'learn to love.' As women, neither

Anna's 'natural' mother, who, according to her father, was 'always dying' (cited on 270), nor Anna Yellowbird, nor Anna Dawe could be expected to have a 'life' or a 'story' which Anna could 'quest' to 'recover,' 'reshape,' 'relive,' tell, or even 'mediate.'

The sections of the novel comprising 'the woman's first person narration' are unfailingly headed "Anna Dawe," while the sections comprising 'the male story' are headed with chapter titles such as "Web's First Discovery" (5) and "William Dawe in Command" (6), titles which mark those sections as stages of a quest in a story which "sponsor[s] the curious little narrative tricks of a male adventure" (27). Why is it that Anna's italicized 'autobiographical notes' are not headed with such titles? Because 'Anna Dawe' emphasizes the fact that, by writing these notes, Anna is attaining an identity? Perhaps. But the 'composite' identity she attains is not 'properly' her own, but, rather, is dependent upon and supportive of her father's. Could 'Anna Dawe' be the 'mark' or 'signature' of the omniscient narrator who thus informs us that he writes under a pseudonym which allows him to signal his 'presence' through his 'absence'? Possibly. 'His' signature could serve to assuage the 'discomfort [of] the reader who wonders where the story comes from'? A 'discomfort' which is very slight, because Anna's interruptions do not in the least disturb the continuity of this male story, this novel which Kroetsch claims is characterized by "blatant discontinuity" (in

Neuman and Wilson, 1982: 25). The exclusion of women from male territory and the male quest, the "CHRONOLOGY" that comprises the novel's first page, and the fact that each of the italicized interruptions comments upon the section of the male story which it follows or precedes protects the 'real' story's continuity from interruption.

Despite the attempts of Kroetsch and many of his critics (particularly some of his female critics) to give Anna a story of 'her own' at the end of the novel,¹²³ Anna's story is her father's. Her 'quest' is to achieve for her

¹²³ For example:

Through an examination of her imaginative recreation of her father's story, Anna comes to understand and accept her father as an individual and a male, and to realize herself as an individual and a female. The commentaries are the record of her self-discovery and the creation of a new perception. (Harvey, 1978a: 33)

Also, Rosemary Sullivan claims that:

The book is about the relations between men and women, the daughter's release from the father, the woman's from the man. . . . The men are motivated by a myth of male courage and male solitude and by the quest for fame and immortality. The women decreate that myth and effect their own recovery. (Sullivan, 1978a: 175)

Sullivan sees Badlands as the means by which Kroetsch "deconstruct[s] the very binary structures that inform his thinking in order to seek genuine mediation" (174), thus releasing his thought from the "terrifying and total solipsism" (171) in which Backstrom finds himself at the end of Words. She proclaims that, in Badlands, "[h]omecoming will be understood as a spiritual achievement and the modern woman become the vehicle of mediation" (174). I would ask, how does this mediatory image of 'the modern woman' in any way 'decreate the myth of male courage and male solitude' or 'deconstruct the binary structures that inform [Kroetsch's] thinking' in such a way that solipsism is avoided?

father his 'presence' in his 'absence' and to reaffirm, celebrate, and make obeisance to the male story grammar controlling her life. She accomplishes this 'feminine' task just as, in Kroetsch's opinion, Canadian literature accomplishes its attainment of an identity: by telling the story of having no story to tell. The novel does not subvert male story grammar or phallocentric attitudes, as Kroetsch claims it does, but celebrates 'maleness' through negation. In the end, the 'born again' Anna(s)

walked through the night, stumbling our way by the light of the stars; we looked at those billions of years of light, and Anna looked at the stars and then at me, and she did not mention dinosaurs or men or their discipline or their courage or their goddamned honour or their goddamned fucking fame or their goddamned fucking death-fucking death. . . . We walked out of there hand in hand, arm in arm, holding each other. We walked all the way out. And we did not once look back, not once, ever. (270)

'Present in their absence' are not only the 'dinosaurs' which symbolize "the male will to knowledge (and power)" (Hutcheon, 1988a: 7-8), but also, the exclusively male 'discipline,' 'courage,' and 'honour' which characterize a successful hero. And, of course, 'their death-fucking death' names the Aufhebung through which the quest succeeds in immortalizing the invariably male hero who, in this case, is the absent father whom Anna Dawe immortalizes by doing exactly what the omniscient narrator has her say she does

not do. That is, she looks back in order to 'relive' and 'reshape' William Dawe's life as she writes her part of his story in the retrospective 'autobiographical notes' embedded within the story of his quest.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ In her attempt to believe that Anna does not 'look back,' Connie Harvey would have it that "[t]he actual descent from the mountains . . . comes after [Anna's] act of writing. It would seem, therefore, that the novel, and its narrative recreation of Dawe's expedition and Anna's comments, is written after her journey to the mountains, but before the final descent" (Harvey, 1978a: 51). But even Harvey sees the ending of the novel as "a completion of Dawe's quest based on the acceptance [Anna's acceptance] of the past" (50; emphasis added).

Robert Lecker refutes Harvey's "conventional approach to the novel [which] sees Anna freed at the end" (Lecker, 1986: 80).

"And [they] did not look back, not once, ever" . . . is the most ironic statement in the book, and also its greatest lie--one that should alert us to the beginning of a grand inversion process. For no sooner has Anna announced that "we did not once look back" than she proceeds to tell us the story that brings her to the point at which she tells us she did not look back. The story, we realize, is not created in process; it is recollected, and apparently built on Anna's imaginative reconstruction of Dawe's notes. . . . But if Anna never looks back ("not once, ever") . . . why is it that they appear with such insistence to form the imaginative core of her story? The truth is that she has only looked back, that she has not thrown away the notes, that she wants to provide an ending appropriate to her intent, but an ending she cannot live. At the end of the novel, she is left in a vicious narrative circle, forever creating the story she will never be able to forget. But at the same time, she defines the story she will tell and untell. In this she does declare the freedom embodied in her narrative.

(Lecker, 1986: 81)

Certainly, Lecker considers the fact that Anna must look back to tell the story, but, in his assertion of her 'defining the story she will tell and untell' and in her 'declaring the freedom embodied in her narrative,' his reading differs not at all from Harvey's 'conventional

In this novel, the disappearance of the father indeed 'makes everything possible' (cited on 243, fn. 114). Anna's complaint about why it was left to her to 'mediate the story' (2) only emphasizes the fact that her story is not hers, that her purpose is to uncover or 'recover' the 'love' through which the dialectical opposites of male and female may be reconciled within the superior male. She longs to be 'her father's daughter,' to posit herself as 'his own' other against whom he can become immediately and fully 'the father,' and her 'quest' is her attempt to do so.¹²⁵ The 'feminist' message Kroetsch presents is that a father need not be bothered to subsume his daughter's story into his own -- and why should he? He has more important 'male' quests to pursue. Besides, 'his' daughter will write herself into his story 'on her own.' Badlands

re-reads Lacan's transposition of the Oedipal scenario into linguistic terms to make clear that, for the daughter, what is at stake in the entry into language is her separation from her mother, and the suppression of female sexuality, the female subject, and a female relation to language.

(Neuman in Moss, 1987: 101-102)

In this statement, Shirley Neuman points out exactly the

approach to the novel.'

¹²⁵ His own other, or, as Connie Harvey suggests, an aspect of his countersexual Jungian anima (Harvey, 1978a: 36), as is Anna Yellowbird.

extent to which feminism has influenced Kroetsch's thinking and the manner in which that influence directs his treatment of the 'first-person female narration' in this novel. The feminist concerns to which Neuman refers are precisely those which are at stake for Anna Dawe, if she will dare to speak or to 'enter into language,' which is, in this patriarchal culture in which we live, the exclusive domain of men. Women are allowed only Tiddy's 'tidied-up language' (cited on 235, fn. 112) which will not in any way 'diminish the man's heroic stature or threaten the integrity of his role as cowboy, orphan, and outlaw' (cited on 100), because, like Anna Dawe, that 'language' rejects and denies the mother and suppresses 'female sexuality, the female subject, and a female relation to language.' Because Anna 'succeeds' in doing so, she is, unlike Vera Lang, rewarded by being allowed to live¹²⁶ and to 'speak' in an authorized voice, in the words attributed to her by the omniscient male narrator who writes her traditionally 'female' and decidedly nonfeminist story.

¹²⁶ I realize that some readers may think I am attributing a certain 'Lawrentian streak' to Kroetsch's writing by suggesting that Vera is not allowed to live because she refuses to succumb to the roles allowed to women by a patriarchal culture and that Anna Dawe is allowed to live because she does so succumb. Actually, I am merely referring to the appropriation of the other which metaphysics and its quest requires. However, in the light of Kroetsch's treatment of sexuality in his novels and of his stating that he "agree[s], often, with Lawrence" (cited on 146, fn. 68), it is possible that a reader who is interested in tracing 'influence' may find such a streak in his work.

PART III

Canadian Postmodernism and Difference

Some days though I want, still,
to be like other people:
but then I go and talk with them,
these people who are supposed to be
other, and they are much like us,
except that they lack the sort of thing
we think of as a voice.
We tell ourselves they are fainter
than we are, less defined,
that they are what we are defining,
that we are doing them a favour,
which makes us feel better.
They are less elegant about pain than we are.
(Margaret Atwood,
"The Words Continue Their Journey,"
in Atwood, 1984: 82)

Chapter Eleven

Concluding Comments

Although many theorists have confessed to the difficulty of finding or devising a concise and accurate definition for the term 'postmodernism,' all agree that postmodernism's major concern is to disturb or displace, to somehow resist, our traditional values, conventions, and modes of thought and, thus, to challenge and subvert the patriarchal, repressive hegemony which depends upon those patterns of thought to determine and control our attitudes towards ourselves and each other, as well as our social, political, and cultural interactions with one another. Canadian (literary) advocates of postmodernism seem to agree that postmodern writers achieve this subversion by a paradoxical practice of asserting/subverting which is based upon preferences for multiplicity, fragmentation, and discontinuity over unity, wholeness, and continuity. Moreover, these theorists posit Derridean deconstruction as the 'philosophical basis' upon which their asserting/subverting is to accomplish the dismantling of the repressive humanism which they seek to disturb at its 'unifying, transcendentalizing core.' However, the notions of 'deconstruction' which we have seen operating throughout Robert Kroetsch's work and the work of his critics are notions which, in their dissolving of the differences between continental theorists or philosophers such as Michel

Foucault, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, and Roland Barthes as well as American deconstructionists such as Harold Bloom, already begin to accomplish a dialectical (metaphysical) gesture by which difference is repressed and denied. Beginning with such a gesture, their 'deconstructive' attempts to undo the metaphysical implications of 'wholeness' and 'unity' inevitably result in a practice which cannot 'assert and subvert,' but must unfailingly reassert and reaffirm the metaphysical notions and the repressive hegemony which, on at least one level, they wish to subvert or disturb.

According to Jacques Derrida's usage of the term, 'deconstruction' is related to différance, to undecidability and originary doubling, to the radical alterity which is always already operating in our thought, our 'language,' our 'writing.' To put it simply, when we think according to logic -- which is how we must think because our patterns of thought and our language are structured according to logic -- we think in terms of hierarchically structured pairs which dialectic resolves into identity, with the 'inferior' member of the pair being dissolved within the superior, and this resolution is always achieved in paradox. Because we know no other way of thinking, we accept the notion of paradox and are satisfied that our propositions, arguments, and resolutions of opposites are logical and coherent. Indeed, we have only to think briefly of the poetry of Donne, Marvell, or T. S. Eliot to realize that we do not

merely accept paradox; we ascribe to it a theological significance and consider it to be magical or sacred because it is through paradox that transcendence is believed to be achieved. However, dialectic -- the logical process by which this identity is believed to be accomplished -- can only work by repressing and denying radical alterity, by excluding difference. That is, if we were to 'think' irreducible difference, we would realize that, although each member of a binary pair can never stand as a self-sufficient 'presence,' unmediated by 'its' other, neither can the two be resolved in a 'third' or 'transcendental' term which dissolves the difference between them. 'Deconstruction' is simply the operation by which that (logically repressed) irreducible difference is always already surfacing to prevent identity and presence from ever being fully and entirely achieved. The work of the deconstructionist is to push logic to its limits in order to find the places where that repressed difference erupts, forcing the speaker or writer to speak against his or her argument or 'intention.'

'Deconstruction' is not to Kroetsch what it is to Derrida. In Kroetsch's usage, 'deconstruction' is a 'destruction' of the old (narrative conventions, myths, stories, etc.) to make way for the new. Kroetsch, the 'deconstructing novelist,' dissolves the old 'story' in order that it may be reappropriated within his new. As I have shown throughout this dissertation, this 'meaning' of 'deconstruction' is inseparable from Bloom's image of the

'new' poet struggling against his 'anxiety of influence.' It is inseparable from notions of 'creativity' which can be traced directly to Coleridge's view of the imagination as that which "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify" (Coleridge, 1907: 202). It is inseparable from Hegel's view of "the activity of dissolution" as "the power and work of the Understanding, the most astonishing and mightiest of powers, or rather the absolute power" (Hegel, 1977: 18). It is inseparable from the notion of intention, which is a phenomenological notion concerned with the perceiving consciousness and its essential relationship with transcendental subjectivity. And all of the above are philosophies of the subject, philosophies of identity which are based upon the myth of the questing hero. Hence, it is no surprise that the quest of the ('deconstructing') hero is invariably Kroetsch's theme, whether he is writing criticism or novels or speaking about his novels.

Derridean deconstruction is a strategy of reading which points out 'the necessity with which what [an author] does see is systematically related to what he does not see' (cited on 19), which is what I have attempted to do in this dissertation. The question I have repeatedly asked is not 'what does this statement, this essay, or this novel mean?' but, rather, 'what are the presuppositions from which it is being made?' To put it another way, I have examined the

relationship between what Kroetsch 'intends' -- which is to resist the 'tyranny of narrative' and of 'meaning,' to subvert traditional values, attitudes, and conventions -- and what his presuppositions compel him to produce.

Frank Davey, who claims for Kroetsch a Derridean 'influence,' says of his critical essays that they do not seek logical coherence and that they refuse to complete their implied arguments or to build the implied system (see 138). Of course, Davey's analysis is correct, so far as it goes, which is to consider Kroetsch's essays from the point of view of his 'intent.' However, because even writing criticism is a quest for Kroetsch, and because metaphysics cannot be resisted by merely a conscious intent, those essays find for themselves a logical coherence that neither he nor Davey see, and the 'implied system' is built into his 'intensely nationalistic criticism of Canadian literature' (cited on 101). As I have shown in Chapter Six, the Bloomian quest of the successful, heroic poet is extended to a national level and 'the tradition' is first 'erased' (in Kroetsch's sense, which is 'dissolved' or negated) and then reappropriated into a 'postmodernism' which Kroetsch claims was always Canadian.

However strenuously Linda Hutcheon insists that the gesture which characterizes Canadian postmodernism is a simultaneous asserting and subverting, it is the case that Robert Kroetsch's rejection of history for archaeology, of origins for beginnings, and of unity for fragmentation are

reversals or negations which are perfectly in keeping with our traditional metaphysical modes of thought. As I have shown throughout this dissertation, each of his rejections is perfectly compatible with the rejection of presence which permeates his readings of Canadian literature. Just as, in those readings, 'presence' comes back to haunt us as a 'presence of absence,' so do all of the concepts he theoretically rejects come back to haunt us, with all their metaphysical implications intact, in the name of that for which he rejects it: 'history as archaeology,' 'meaning as process,' 'origins as beginnings,' and so on. And always, through his 'dialectical theory,' the transcendentalizing term to which he relentlessly returns is Voice, that through which the transcendental subject finds 'itself,' or, rather, 'himself.' In the 'voice' of the 'deconstructing novelist,' the creative subject or author become writer is believed to attain full and unmediated 'presence,' because 'the telling of the story is the only heroic act.' So long as Robert Kroetsch continues to believe that 'the old dualities' are the basis of 'human thought,' his thinking will inevitably seek 'universals' (transcendentalizing terms) and will be governed by the 'coercive humanism' he seeks to resist. It will be dialectical and metaphysical, logo-, ethno-, and phallo- centric, as well as inescapably solipsistic, racist, and sexist. Or, to put it another way, it will be repressive of the irreducible difference which is the concern of Derridean deconstruction.

Moreover, so long as Kroetsch's critics consider his work as a realization of his intentions, they will be caught in 'his' (our, Western thought's) bind. Regardless of how sincerely and passionately they 'intend' to write criticism that is not 'thematic,' they will, 'unwittingly,' find resolution in the very 'themes' and 'conclusions' that they claim do not govern Kroetsch's novels: the successful quest for identity, the valorization of language and voice, rebirth, redemption, and so on. More importantly, so long as Kroetsch's disciples tout his backhanded support of the repressive modes of thought and the patriarchal hegemony under which we live as 'new,' 'subversive,' and 'liberating,' Canadian postmodernism will not 'reflect' or incite any 'crisis of metaphysical philosophy' (cited on 139) and will never 'amount' to anything but a 'period' in 'literary history.'

Linda Hutcheon seems to be in agreement with Mark Taylor when she claims for postmodernism a concern with difference -- with a liberating move away from the repression of difference and otherness which any philosophy of identity must inevitably accomplish. And she, along with other Canadian theorists and critics who are concerned with postmodernism, consider Robert Kroetsch to be at the 'cutting edge' of that 'movement.' Moreover, they consider Kroetsch's work to be concerned with difference and otherness because his thought has been 'influenced' by Derrida's thought and is, therefore, 'deconstructive.'

However, the difference to which Taylor refers and with which Derrida is unceasingly concerned is radical difference or irreducible alterity. That is, difference which cannot ever be reduced to identity by any operation of logic or dialectic, the difference which precludes the possibility of the other's being perceived as 'one's own other' or a reflection of the self. If we were to seriously think irreducible difference, we could not posit 'the old dualities' and could not reduce members of those hierarchical binary pairs to identity in a comforting unity. We could neither think of 'female' as the inferior other of 'male,' nor dissolve the two in a 'postfeminist' s/he. Unfortunately, as it is 'manifested' in the work of Robert Kroetsch, the postmodernist interest in 'the different' is not concerned with radical alterity and does not finally allow for the recognition of "previously silenced ex-centrics: those defined by differences [inferiorities] in class, gender, race, ethnic group, and sexual preference" (cited on 11-12). If Kroetsch's criticism, literary theory, and fiction epitomize Canadian postmodernism, as his colleagues claim, Canadian postmodernism is every bit as repressive of 'ex-centrics' and supportive of those with power as are our traditional modes of thought.

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