

THE ROBERT KROETSCH ALPHABET BOOK:
SKETCHES OF A THESIS

By

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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard:

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April 1991

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Department of ENGLISH

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date APRIL 30, 1991



ABSTRACT:*The Robert Kroetsch Alphabet Book: Sketches of a Thesis*

Robert Kroetsch, a contemporary Canadian novelist, poet, and critic, can often be found investigating systems of ordering: he examines their contrasting characteristics of symmetry and arbitrariness; necessity and inanity; their potential to be both banal and surprising. My thesis on Robert Kroetsch's aesthetic comprises twenty-six chapters, each corresponding to a letter of the alphabet.

Kroetsch's work has increasingly come to be affiliated with the "language poets"; his absorption with system invariably leads him back to the nature of the linguistic sign, and the possibilities and limitations of significance. For example, both Kroetsch's most recent novel, What the Crow Said, and "The Sad Phoenician," a long poem in which he reflects upon his identity as a writer; focus on the alphabet. In Crow, the nature of the alphabet as a paradoxically enabling and confining structure is explored thematically; in "Phoenician," the alphabetization of stanzas forms the enabling and confining structure of the text. Thus, the form of my thesis responds to those of Kroetsch; it is a form which becomes, finally, a thesis in itself.

The Instructions for the Presentation of Graduate Theses hand-out provided by the UBC Faculty of Graduate Studies asks that abstracts supply a problem, a summary of methods of investigation and the general conclusions. If any one "problem" can be said to be the focus of this thesis, it is the foregrounding of the arbitrariness and reductiveness of just such linear and teleological methods of research and interpretation. This thesis does not purport to solve any problems, but merely to offer steps toward fuller recognition of them. As the subtitle "*Sketches of a Thesis*" implies, I have simply looked at Kroetsch's work from a variety of different angles--making brief pencilled studies, if you will--without attempting to paint the portrait itself. If any conclusions are to be found here, they must be dis-covered, investigated and interpreted by my archaeologist/reader.

ACF
April 25, 1991

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS*

ACC	M.E. Turner, "Canadian Literature and Robert Kroetsch: A Case of Canonization"
BL	Kroetsch, <u>Badlands</u>
BO	Robert Lecker, "Bordering On: Robert Kroetsch's Aesthetic"
C	Kroetsch, et al., <u>Creation</u>
CANAM	Canada AM: An Interview with Robert Kroetsch (27.28.3)
CJ	Kroetsch, <u>The Crow Journals</u>
CP	Linda Hutcheon, <u>The Canadian Postmodern</u>
Crow	Kroetsch, <u>What the Crow Said</u>
EP	Kroetsch, "The Exploding Porcupine"
FN	Kroetsch, <u>Completed Field Notes</u>
FOW	Laurie Ricou, "Field Notes and Notes in a Field: Forms of West in Robert Kroetsch and Tom Robbins"
FWPF	Kroetsch, "The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction: An Erotics of Space"
GI	Kroetsch, <u>Gone Indian</u>
LTW	Kroetsch, <u>The Lovely Treachery of Words</u>
LV	Shirley Neuman and Robert Wilson, <u>Labyrinths of Voice: Conversations with Robert Kroetsch</u>
MCNE	Louis MacKendrick, "Robert Kroetsch and the Modern Canadian Novel of Exhaustion"
MDAC	Kroetsch, "The Moment of the Discovery of America Continues"

*Bibliographical Note: I have abbreviated the titles of only those works which I cite with relative frequency. Complete citations for these and all works cited may be found in the bibliography. Quotations from Kroetsch's papers are referred to by category, box, file and (where catalogued) page number.

- MNS A. R. Kizuk, "Meaning and Narrative Strategies in the Novels of Robert Kroetsch"
- NYJ Kroetsch, "Towards an Essay: My Upstate New York Journals"
- PDM Peter Thomas, "Priapus in the Danse Macabre"
- P&E Kroetsch, "For Play and Entrance: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem"
- PF Brian McHale, Postmodernist Fiction
- R Walter Anderson, Reality Isn't What it Used to Be
- RDT John Marshall, "from THE REMEMBRANCE DAY TAPES"
- SHM Kroetsch, The Studhorse Man
- SHN George Bowering, "Stone Hammer Narrative"
- SOS Roy Miki, "Self on Self: An Interview with Robert Kroetsch"
- UH Kroetsch, "Unhiding the Hidden"
- UST Robert Wilson, "Robert Kroetsch: An Uncompromising Spinner of Tales"
- VK Kroetsch, "The Veil of Knowing"
- WOMR Robert Kroetsch, Words of My Roaring

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people contributed to bringing this project to its present form. To each of them, I can only offer in return my deepest appreciation and these few words of thanks:

To Appolonia Steele and the staff members at the University of Calgary Library, Department of Special Collections, for their kindness and assistance while I was researching there;

To the many friends and colleagues who gave so tirelessly of their advice and support, particularly, Karen Boyes and Cherry Davies, who shared with me their homebaked cookies, their wonderfully cuddly pets, and their insights into areas of myth and philosophy which I had not before explored; Ray Edney, who never once uttered a cliché; Sherrill Grace, who first introduced me to Kroetsch's work and who offered helpful suggestions along the way; Mava Jo Powell, who taught me about metaphor; Kerry Sloan and Erin Soros, who tirelessly listened to crisis after crisis and read draft after draft; and Diane Travnik, who devoted so much time to solving my multitudinous computer problems...a wonderful support network of generous, caring individuals;

To the students whose willingness to explore "Stone Hammer Poem" and Badlands with me helped me to question my questions;

To the members of my thesis committee, Richard Cavell and William New, who had the courage to support this project when even *I* wasn't certain of it, and who provided such helpful suggestions;

To Laurie Ricou, my sometime-supervisor, sometime-counsellor, and always mentor and friend, without whose constant support this project might never have reached inception, let alone completion (I think I know where I'm going Laurie, but I will be forever grateful for your contribution to lighting the path);

And, of course, to Robert Kroetsch, for generously allowing me *carte blanche* in quoting from and reproducing excerpts from his papers, and whose kindness and wit--to say nothing of his literary genius--turned a daunting scholarly enterprise into a whole lot of fun.

One very special acknowledgement remains: to my parents, Marlene and Raymond Fero, who gave me the strength and conviction to pursue my goals, who taught me the true value of education, and to whom this thesis is dedicated.

The alphabet intrigues me, the sense of the
absolute rigour that we have to learn ABCDEF.
It's not like numbering--it's a complete
arbitrariness.

Robert Kroetsch
to Shirley Neuman and Robert Wilson

. . . A pressure towards madness. And against it:
photographs, collages, analyses, protests of accuracy and
source, afterwords.

Robert Kroetsch,
"For Play and Entrance"

Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted;
person attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons
attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.

Mark Twain,
Huckleberry Finn.

ARCHAEOLOGY

The poet as (inspired? shamanistic? mad?) archaeologist.

* * *

The metaphor of archaeology provides a theoretical framework or ideological method which informs Kroetsch's work. It is not, however, as complex or scholarly or esoteric as such jargon would imply. Indeed, when teaching Kroetsch's "Stone Hammer Poem" to first-year students, I begin simply by asking them to brainstorm on the word "archaeologist" (sometimes I tell them they are constructing a semantic field; sometimes I leave even that bit of jargon out). As a group, we usually end up covering the blackboard with a scattering of phrases that looks something like this:

pre-historic		skeletons	
	digging		artefacts
research		bones	
	fossils		ancient civilisations
mummies		dinosaurs	
site			art objects
	museums	reconstructions	

heat fragments tribes
 models tools
 functions
 icons Egypt/Greece/Rome/Peru
 sifting discoveries ruins
 dust clues
 picks and shovels tombs and burial grounds
 hieroglyphics speculations layers
 caves rubble
 decipher excavate
 interpret unearth evidence
 temples
 pyramids
 shards borings
 surveys primitive tablets

Once we get to this point in class discussion, I tell students that they have figured out the poem. They usually do not believe me (actually, they usually laugh at me) and it generally takes a couple of hours of lecturing and further discussion and connection-making to convince them, but I firmly believe that anyone who has some grasp of what an archaeologist does for a living possesses the tools necessary to comprehend the strategies of the writing (and reading) of Robert Kroetsch. Grab a shovel and we'll dig in.

I'm going to write a novel with a fossil-
 hunter somewhere at the center. Most (Many)
 of the dinosaur bones in the American
 Museum of Natural History come out of the
 Red Deer River Badlands. The men who went
 out there were wonderfully mad, gambling
 their lives to haul bones out of the
 wilderness.

The site into which I intend to delve in this thesis is the work of Robert Kroetsch--all that he has written and much of what he has spoken--beginning here with his continuing poem, Field Notes, appropriately named after the "field notes kept by the archaeologist, by the finding man, the finding man who is essentially lost" (P&E, 103). This concept of *lost-ness* is extremely important to any discussion of Kroetsch's archaeology metaphor for it implies the absence of hypothesis or goal or pre-conceived end-point. The archaeologist gambles that the patch of land on which she has staked her claim will yield something--she knows not what. The archaeology metaphor subjugates what is sought to the process of seeking and the possibility of finding; it demands the abjuration of theses and plans and teleology in favour of "a perpetual delay as we recognise the primacy of the forthcoming and as yet unmade discovery" (P&E, 93).

Kroetsch's title, Field Notes, speaks to another of the important aspects of archaeology as methodology. Field notes are "the unrealised raw material of art, not the achieved object (FOW, 120). Miming the shards and pieces of fossils and pottery whose discovery they record, field notes are fragmentary, disjointed, only sketches of, glimpses at, the potential picture which may exist or once existed. No matter how fully Kroetsch may describe his "find" in his notes, there will always be pieces missing, pieces which can only be filled in by the reader, who is also archaeologist in this process, who must

God help us we are a people raised not on love letters or lyric poems or even cries of rebellion or ecstasy, but rather on old hoards of field notes. Those cryptic notations made by men who held the words themselves in contempt but who needed them nevertheless in order to carry home, or back if not home, the only memories they could ever cherish: the recollections of their male courage and their male solitude.

reopen the site and speculate on/participate in the finding.

George Bowering's "Stone Hammer Narrative," is perhaps the most eloquent example of reader participation and archaeological method in the canon of Kroetsch criticism. Bowering begins simply by stating that "this will be a narrative of my reading of the "Stone Hammer Poem" (131); he offers no thesis, applies no theory, enforces no rigid criterion. He just digs into the poem, section by section, and carefully, beautifully, records what he finds. Bowering's narrative is *field-noting* of the first order, exploring every possibility, leaving no "stone" unturned.

"Stone Hammer Poem," a small *tour de force* which serves as the prologue to Field Notes, can be read as a map or field guide to the archaeological metaphor Kroetsch extends to his reader, a testament to the process of discovering. The poem's numbered sections recall the labelling and recording into inventory of the archaeologist's fragments--importantly, in the purely arbitrary order of finding, not the enforced order of chronology or history. In section one, the reader encounters the initial physical presence of the stone hammer:

This stone
 become a hammer
 of stone, this maul

is the colour
 of bone (no,
 bone is the colour
 of this stone maul).

The rawhide loops
 are gone, the
 hand is gone, the
 buffalo's skull
 is gone;

the stone is
 shaped like the skull
 of a child (FN, 1)

The archaeologist identifies his find: it is a stone/hammer, a hammer made of stone, a stone "cut to a function" (2). He notes its shape and colour, correcting himself when realising the magnitude of his discovery (the stone, the minerals of which it is composed, clearly prefigures the human hands which shaped it). The archaeological sketch then follows: the speculation on missing fragments, purpose, significance, perhaps also the possibility that further

digging will yield some trace of the "rawhide loops," if not the missing Indian hand or the skull of the extinct buffalo on which the Indian thrived.

This *field-noting* continues in section three, where the archaeologist theorises on the means by which the stone/hammer came to the site where it was found:

Grey, two-headed,
the pemmican maul

fell from a travois or
a boy playing lost it in
the prairie wool or
a squaw left it in
the brain of a buffalo or

it is a million
years older than
the hand that
chipped stone or
raised slough
water (or blood) or (2)

This segment of course strays beyond the purely scientific and precise records that field notes pretend to be. I think it useful to read them as the interior monologue of the archaeologist, excited beyond all belief at his discovery, wildly scanning his mind for all of its possible ramifications. Indeed, the

extended spacings ("a boy playing lost. . ."; "a squaw left. . .") would seem to indicate the breaks in thought, the silences as he collects himself, groping for ideas. As well, the whole section has a certain breathless quality, conveying a sense of delight and immediacy.

Dawe stepped off the grass. He went onto his knees. He straddled the hard, slippery ridge; with the ridge of clay between his legs he put his hands forward, lifted his body, thrust forward and down, moved his hands again. He proceeded out, downward, three feet, four feet, the naked, unscalable walls of the ridge falling off on either side. . . . Slowly, carefully, Dawe worked his way down, his legs swinging free, his body thrusting; then his knees catching again at the slick clay, his hands moving forward, the raindrops pelting and sliding away He turned and shouted up to Tune: "It's a bone."

From a more overtly ideological perspective, the archaeologist, the lost finder of fragments, understands that all of the possible ramifications will never be found, that the fragment disallows such totality of vision, that the very notion of the *possible* precludes such finality and closure, as indicated by the "or" which ends, or, perhaps, refuses to *end* five of the lines. The site/poem is open and is intended to remain that way. The archaeologist recognises that some answers will never be found--that perhaps the only course available when trying to discern "?WHAT HAPPENED" (4) is to question the question. The poet thus invites the reader to draw her own sketch, offer her own speculations, make her own discoveries. The sense of fragmentation in the text not only encourages this kind of reading, but quite literally demands it.

Kroetsch has said that perhaps "the only way we can proceed from an archaeological site is into language" (LV, 167); thus his recognition of the multiplicities implied by archaeological method is actualised in his use of language: the fragmentation of field notes, the refusal of transition and the subversion of continuity, the open-ended lines and brackets, and the ever-present word-play which prevents even the closure of meaning involved in etymology and definition. An example is found in section five of "Stone Hammer Poem," where we are told that the stone is

as old as the last
Ice Age, the
retreating ice/the
recreating ice,
the retreating buffalo, the
retreating Indians (3)

The ice retreats and recreates as do the Indians and the buffalo: each goes back over the territory it once covered, changing it, making it over, and perhaps even playing as it does so. And all of these possibilities are equal and/or simultaneous, as implied by the virgule which insists on the open interpretation. The decision-making role has been handed on to the reader, who must read "bloody hard" (LV, 9) to find "the grammar of the fragments" (EP, 60).

Kroetsch's commitment to the archaeological metaphor seems to me to involve more than just method or ideology. Kroetsch seems to see in the

archaeologist a kindred spirit, a similar kind of risk-taker. A parallel can be drawn between confronting an isolated patch of land, shovel in hand, and staring at a glaringly white, blank page: the archaeologist has only a gut instinct that there may be a something worthwhile buried metres beneath the soil; the poet has only an idea that maybe what he is thinking will have the makings of a verse or stanza. Each, if he is going to last at his chosen career, must have a love of the process of the work involved, because there is no guarantee of product. And, each must rely on some instinct or inner voice that cannot be encapsulated in mere words.

This stone

become a hammer (1)

The opening of "Stone Hammer Poem" can be read in a number of ways. The line can be regarded as invoking the absence that is part of archaeology, the searching for what is not yet found, as signified by the "missing" modal: i.e. has become? will become? perhaps even can become? Conversely, the line can be read as an imperative (Stone BECOME a Hammer!), revealing the desperation of the archaeologist, scrutinising every rock he finds, hoping that it will be more than just a rock, hoping that it will have the marks of an artefact, a genuine discovery. So too does the poet react to each carefully orchestrated line break, each chosen subject; thus the opening lines can be read as an invocation to the (archaeologist) muse.

And, here, the poet and archaeologist merge: the real and imagined presence of the stone/hammer is muse to them both, inspiration for the work, a glimmer of hope to ease the struggle and daily grind, a *raison d'être*:

Sometimes I write
my poems for that
stone hammer. (7)

He let himself cry out: "They'll find us here, Anna, you, me, all of us, bleached bones, bones bleaching in the blaze of the sun; they'll find us and wonder what happened, what we looked like, what brought us to this end."

BIOGRAPHY

A biographer is a person afflicted with sanity.

MENTAL
MEAN DERING

1945
1946

ROBERT KROETSCH
62

I have lived my life alternating between various parts of the frontier or wilderness and various universities. I was born in 1927 in Heilester, Alberta, where my father and grandfather homesteaded after leaving the family water mill in Bruce County, Ontario. I attended the University of Alberta; upon graduating I flew north to the Slave River to work as a labourer on the Fort Smith portage.

For the following two seasons I sailed on the Mackenzie River riverboats, running from Fort Smith down to the Arctic coast. Then I went east to take a course in the history of English prose at McGill University under Hugh MacLennan, and I began writing short stories. They appeared in The Montreal Canadian Forum, The University of Kansas City Review, and in Maclean's Magazine.

After a stint at Goose Bay, Labrador, putting out a newspaper for the U.S. Air Force, I entered Middlebury College, Vermont. I received my M.A. in 1956, and married a girl from North Carolina. That same year I took a teaching assistantship at the University of Iowa. By the time I received my Ph.D. I had begun to write poetry, the poems appearing in Grass, Grass, and Canadian Forum.

In the summer of 1962 I once again left academia and returned to the Mackenzie River--to begin work on a novel. I completed the novel, THE HORN HEAD, while living in England on a fellowship awarded by the State University of New York.

Presently I am an Assistant Professor of English at Harper College, Binghamton, the principal liberal arts center in the State University of New York. I am at work on another novel.

Canada looked awfully good last weekend. I went to Ottawa to receive a GG. The Governor General's daughter Laura Laurier, a beautiful thing. My people live in land where spend their time visiting with friends.

GRADUATE COLLEGE
STATE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

PLAN OF STUDY FOR THE PH.D. DEGREE

Name of Student **Robert Paul Krostach**

Major Department **English** Minor (if any)

Approximate date degree is expected **February, 1961**

Title of Ph.D. thesis (if determined): **The Unpossessed, a novel**

.....

If you have a Master's degree, give name of school and date **Middlebury College, 1956**

Master's thesis topic (if none, so state) **None**

GRADUATE COURSES ALREADY COMPLETED

Please check (V) title of courses transferred as advanced standing from other institutions.

1. In Major Field				2. In Minor Field			
If SUI list Dept. and Course No.	Title	Sem. Hrs.	Grade	If SUI list Dept. and Course No.	Title	Sem. Hrs.	Grade
	Aspects of the Short Story	2	A	8:106	Elizabethan Drama	3	A
	Hardy and Conrad	2	A	8:221	Survey: Reg. Classical Drama	2	A
	Modern Irish Prose and Verse Drama	2	B	8:300	Bibliography and Research	2	A
	Literary Criticism	4	II	8:380	Teaching College English	2	A
	English Prose Expression	6	2	8:113	American Realistic Literature	3	A
	Representative Contemporary Novels	2	A	8:105	Renaissance	3	A
	Chaucer	2	A	8:302	Special Project: Renaissance	3	A
	The American Novel in the 20th Cent.	2	A	8:111	Age of Romanticism	3	A
	Shakespeare	2	B	8:112	Age of Johnson	3	A
	The Modern Short Story	2	A	8:112	Shakespeare: Later Plays	2	A
	Metaphor, Symbol and Myth	2	B	8:121	Age of Dryden and Pope	3	A
	The Art of Fiction	2	A	8:213	Survey: Transcendentalism	3	A
8:201	Old English	3	A	8:301	Special Project: American Lit.	3	A
8:239	Study of Language	3	A	8:301	Special Project: Victorian Lit.	3	A
8:124	Fiction Workshop	6	A	8:301	Special Project: The Novel	3	A
8:202	Beowulf	3	A	8:311	Special Project: Victorian Lit.	3	A
8:203	Middle English	3	A	8:231	Survey: 18th Cent. British Lit.	2	A
8:124	Fiction Workshop	6	A	8:116	Milton	3	
8:111	Shakespeare: Early Plays	2	A	33:111	Myth and Reason	3	
8:104	Chaucer: Minor Poems	3	A	8:301	Special Project: Criticism of Drama	3	
8:103	Chaucer: Canterbury Tales	3	A	8:301	Special Project: Lit. to 1500	3	

Total credits completed in Major **119**

Total credits completed in Minor

I had an incredible sense of freedom which I think governs my response to the world to this day, and any kind of infringement on that kind of freedom to think on that kind of very dreamy kid. They used to tease me about it. I was always daydreaming, because I realise now I was very much a story maker. I had made up a little cosmos of my own that I lived in which had elaborate narratives in it of the inhabitants and so on.

YOUR LAST NAME - FIRST NAME - MIDDLE NAME	
Kroetsch, Patricia Jane	
YOUR ADDRESS OR LAST ADDRESS, IF YOU HAVE MOVED, AND YOUR PRESENT ADDRESS	
Medlar, Alberta	
DATE OF BIRTH	PLACE OF BIRTH (Country)
16 April, 1905	Canada
YOUR CITIZENSHIP AND RECORD FROM PREVIOUS CITIZENSHIP	
CANADIAN	
YOUR PRESENT LAST NAME - FIRST NAME - MIDDLE NAME	
Kroetsch, Patricia Jane	
DATE OF BIRTH	PLACE OF BIRTH (Country)
OCCUPATION	
YOUR PRESENT LAST NAME - FIRST NAME - MIDDLE NAME	
Kroetsch, Patricia Jane	
DATE OF BIRTH	PLACE OF BIRTH (Country)
OCCUPATION	
FATHER'S NAME	
Kroetsch, John	

... I only learned by the act of reading that I had long been writing the autobiography of my refusal to be grateful to a generous world.

SEX	NAME	AGE	RELATIONSHIP	OCCUPATION
F	Patricia Kroetsch	22	Daughter	Stenographer
F	Shella Kroetsch	20	Daughter	Student
F	Jane Kroetsch	18	Daughter	Student
F	Ray Kroetsch	16	Daughter	Student
RELATIVES LIVING IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES (including relatives by marriage)				
RELATIONSHIP	NAME	AGE	CITIZENSHIP	LAST HEARD FROM
RELATIVES IN GOVERNMENT OR MILITARY SERVICE (United States or Foreign)				
RELATIONSHIP	NAME	COUNTRY IN WHICH	TITLE OF POSITION AND DUTIES	
Cousin	Orville Kroetsch	Canada	Infantryman	
Cousin	W. J. Kroetsch	Canada	Infantryman	
<input type="checkbox"/> SINGLE <input type="checkbox"/> MARRIED <input type="checkbox"/> SEPARATED <input type="checkbox"/> DIVORCED <input type="checkbox"/> WIDOWED <input type="checkbox"/> WIDOW				

Castle Hayne, N. C.
Nov. 5th, 1965.

Dear Son:

Your book arrived Wednesday, many thanks for sending us one, an congratulations. Hope it is a REAL SUCCESS. Wish I could have heard y when you spoke over radio, know you were GREAT, only hope we can see you when you appear on T.V. Am so VERY PROUD of you.

Yours is the first NOVEL which I have taken time to read in ove twenty years, but read it I did, and think you have lots of talent as writer. Your description of the boats and river was magnificent, and believe you wrote just like those river men spoke, their language etc; and this is what the public (some of them) seem to desire in their read ing these days. But I don't think my pastor, nor our deacons would appreciate reading such language, now, do you? NO OFFENCE.

Would like to see the day when you will write another novel, with a different background, NO PROFANITY, a person, or people like Peter Marshall, or BILLY GRAHAM, and I know I would thoroughly enjoy reading it, and so would lots of other people. You CAN write, you have proven yourself with your first book. If you would write such a book, would be so VERY PROUD of you, and would I show it? I'll say! So why not try one of this type in the future?

Your writing in this book reminds me of something Ernest Hem ingsway wrote, NO, can't say that I ever read one of his through, as I did yours. Did see the movie version of "The SNOWS OF Killamnoir", know that isn't the correct way to spell the last word, but I know that you know the one I mean..Hemingway wrote the way he had lived, and in my opinion such a wasted life. If Hemmingway would have married my daughter, might have read one through. See if you can't write a novel which I know my pastor could, and would enjoy, also appreciate?????

Don't work too hard, take care of your health, for there isn't any money which can buy your health back for you, when you loose

AM WONDERING WHAT YOUR NEXT BOOK WILL BE LIKE???

Will say bye for now, as I wish to write your wife. Take real good care of Mary Jane, and Laurie for me. Kiss them both for me.

Know Laurie is getting as cute as an angel. Oh, she would b a very good subject to write about. Titles such as, "My Baby", Our LI e angel", "Our Little Darling", " something Wonderful in My Life", or just "Laura", Oh there are so many titles you could use when you wrote about her.

All my love,
Mother.

**EDUCATION DIRECTOR
POSITION DESCRIPTION**

NAME AND PHOTO OF WORKER

A. DESCRIPTION:

This position is located in the Education section of the Personnel Services Division. The Education Director is responsible for conducting and continually improving an effective education program, directed toward the improvement of the educational level of Air Force personnel and the maintenance of a high state of morale of all military personnel on the base.

B. DUTIES:

1. He counsels personnel on educational requirements related to their military or civilian careers, and provides helpful facilities.
2. He organizes off-duty study groups (secures teachers, class rooms, textbooks, and advertises for students).
3. He advertises and administers the University of Maryland program on the base, budgets for the required funds, arranges for the payment of costs, and maintains liaison with the Dean's Office, University of Maryland.
4. He enrolls personnel in various types of correspondence and self-study courses (USAFI, USAF SCI, USAF IT, go-operating colleges, etc.).
5. He administers various types of tests (GED, EOE, subject exams, college exams).
6. He makes cost estimates and arranges for payment of fees for USAF children attending the USAF Air Marshal Robert Lockie School, and maintains liaison with the USAF school officials.
7. He provides materials for education officers at the ACOM sites and handles their special problems upon request.
8. He compiles off-duty education and dependent education reports.
9. He functions as assistant to the Personnel Services Officer as may be required to promote and publicize the Special Services program (this involves advertising, organizing, and

SCOPE AND EFFECT OF WORK

Family recommendations and decisions on funds, and a waste of time, money and effort seeking educational advice and assistance.

I was quite astonished and hurt when I found out that people buy and sell houses. House was like a part of your body almost. This was you.

DATE (From-To)		EMPLOYER (Name, address, city, and state)	
1927 June	Aug. 1944	Red Deer, Alberta	Canada
Sept. 1944	July 1945	St. Joseph's College	Edmonton, Alberta
Sept. 1945	April 1948	c/o V.T.C.L.	Hay River, N.W.T. Canada
May 1948	Oct. 1950	532 Renden Place	Winnipeg, Canada
Jan. 1951	May 1951	Churchill	Manitoba
May 1951	June 1951	Winnipeg	Manitoba
July 1951	Sept. 1951	Winnipeg	Manitoba
Oct. 1951	present	Goose Bay	Labrador

II. EMPLOYMENT (including part time)

A. HAVE YOU EVER BEEN EMPLOYED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF A FOREIGN COUNTRY AS A CHIEF? ☐ YES ☒ NO

B. IF YES, GIVE NATION OF SERVICE.

DATE (From-To) EMPLOYED AS EMPLOYED BY (Name, address, city, and state)

I thought everybody was always writing. I had no idea that this was somehow a perverse activity I was engaged in.

DATE (From-To)		EMPLOYER (Name, address, city, and state)	
May - Oct. 1948		Yellowknife Northern Trans Co Ltd, Edmonton, Alberta	
EMPLOYED AS	checker	REASON FOR TERMINATION	end of navigation season
DATE (From-To)	April - Oct. 1949	Yellowknife Trans Co Ltd, Edmonton, Alberta	
EMPLOYED AS	purser	REASON FOR TERMINATION	end of navigation season
DATE (From-To)	Feb - April, 1950	Western Command, Canadian Army, Winnipeg, Alberta	
EMPLOYED AS	chief clerk (ordnance)	REASON FOR TERMINATION	end of Exercise Swastika
DATE (From-To)	April - Nov. 1950	TTCL, Edmonton, Alberta	
EMPLOYED AS	purser	REASON FOR TERMINATION	end of navigation season
DATE (From-To)	May - June, 1951	Crawley-McCracken, Fort Churchill, Manitoba	
EMPLOYED AS	warehouseman	REASON FOR TERMINATION	go back to university
DATE (From-To)	Sept. 1951 - present	USAF, Goose Air Base, Labrador	
EMPLOYED AS		REASON FOR TERMINATION	

III. NAME AND LOCATION OF EMPLOYER AGENCY OF GOVERNMENT OF THE ARMY (For voluntary only)

USAF, Goose Air Base, Labrador - hired in Montreal, Que

IV. TITLE

education director

V. CLASSIFICATION

yes - confidential

VI. HAVE YOU EVER BEEN ASKED TO FURNISH FIVE-DIGIT (other than military) (except for name) OR PUT ON AN INACTIVE STATUS FOR CAUSE WHILE SERVING IN THE ARMY, NAVY, MARINE CORPS, OR COAST GUARD OF THE UNITED STATES OR IN ANY POSITION OF PRIVATE OR GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT?

yes - confidential

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PERSONAL HISTORY STATEMENT

1. LAST NAME - FIRST NAME - MIDDLE NAME
ROSTON, Robert Paul

2. PRESENT GRADE (or grade prior to separation or transfer from active duty)
Civilian

3. PRESENT GRADE NO.
NO 208

4. PRESENT MILITARY ASSIGNMENT (or grade, rank, or status (honorary or present recruiting agency)
Information & Education Office, USAF

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Registon, Ontario

6. DATE OF BIRTH
11 Sept 52

7. PLACE OF BIRTH (city, county, State, and country)
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University of Alberta
 Edmonton Club 1945-48
 Alberta Science Club 1946-48

Yesterday, while staying with a friend in Winnipeg, talking with her about this occasion, I tried to recall when first I began to write. Instead of remembering a story or ~~poem~~ a poem, or even words, I could think only of a wooden box I built when I was a young boy on a farm in central Alberta. I built the box to contain my first books, ordered from the Eaton's ~~mail~~ catalogue. We had no bookshelves in the house. The box was ~~square~~ square and heavy and low and slid under my bed in the east room (and in true prairie fashion we identified rooms in the house by direction).

After a while I began to add letters and valentines and failed attempts at diary-keeping to the contents of the box. I have no idea now what was on these sheets of paper--and I ~~don't~~ regret I don't have them to sell to Dr1 Glazier. What I ~~am~~ able to recall is the box itself.

It was that box, in a curious way, that turned me into a writer. It was tangible evidence of thought. It contained space. It could be locked or opened. It caused me--if you'll forgive the extravagance--to ~~deal~~ deal with experience concretely. It taught me something about both selection and imagination. It ordered the world.

I didn't think I would ever be a poet because I was so daunted by the notion of poet. I grew up with, in high school I guess, this Romantic sense of the poet as a very privileged person in terms of insight or understanding, whereas I always thought of the prose writer as somebody who was just stupid enough to sit at the typewriter long enough to get enough pages... I had no trouble with that notion. It was a very slow process by which I admitted that I was secretly a poet.

... in my family men and women spent a lot of time sitting around talking. One of the chief forms of entertainment was to go visit relatives. The men would drink beer and wine and the women would serve up those incredible lunches. And they would talk about family history, or make jokes. Politics in Alberta was pretty heavy duty in those days.

1. He counsels personnel on educational or civilian careers, and provides...
2. He organizes off-duty study group textbooks, and advertises for students).
3. He advertises and administers the base, budgets for the required funds, and...
4. He...
5. He...
6. He...
7. He...
8. He...
9. He functions as assistant to the...

Read the certificate at the end of this questionnaire before filling in your answers. Print or type all answers. All questions must be completed. If proper answer is "No" or "None," so state. Detail is requested for your protection subsequent investigations which may be conducted, derogatory information on persons of same or similar names may be requested. If more space is required, use space "Remarks" or attach separate sheet.

DATE 11 Sept 52		PLACE Goose Air Base, Labrador	
1. LAST NAME—FIRST NAME—MIDDLE NAME KROETSCH, Robert Paul		2. NICKNAMES, ALIASES, OR CHANGES OF NAME Bob	
3. ARM OR SERVICE USAF		4. SERIAL NUMBER(S) civilian	
5. (a) OR PRESENT EMPLOYING AGENCY Goose Air Base, Labrador			
6. PRESENT RESIDENCE ADDRESS (Street and number, city, state, and country) Goose Air Base Labrador			
7. COLOR OF EYES brown	8. COLOR OF HAIR brown	9. COMPLEXION fair	
10. HOW OBTAINED: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BIRTH <input type="checkbox"/> NATURALIZATION <input type="checkbox"/> THROUGH PARENTS' NATURALIZATION			
11. COURT OF JURISDICTION		12. DATE NATURALIZED	
13. REMARKS			

... during harvest, when the bunkshack out in the yard was full, I liked to sneak out at night and listen to stories of travel, of adventure, of hard times, of home; they were story-makers, those dispossessed men of the thirties, myth-makers. I began to recognise the archaeological site of my own short life.... I became, profoundly, a listener.

9. He functions as assistant to the...

SCOPE AND EFFECT OF WORK

Faculty recommendations and decisions, funds, and a waste of time, money and effort seeking educational advice and assistance.

GRADUATE COLLEGE STATE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

PLAN OF STUDY FOR THE PH.D. DEGREE

Student: Robert Paul Kroetsch
 Department: English Minor (if any)
 Date degree is expected: February, 1952
 Thesis (if determined): The Unpossessed, a novel
 Master's degree, give name of school and date: Middlebury College
 Thesis topic (if none, so state): None

14. DATE OF BIRTH
 15. PLACE OF BIRTH (City, county, State, and country)
 Heister, Alberta, Canada
 16. Many things. But I suspect that finally I speak as one who follows the generation that knew the Thirties as a time of high idealism and bitter facts. I suspect I see that time in a different and I hope new light.

17. When I was six or seven, during the Depression, a man threatened my father for not accepting the Social Credit theories being advanced by the followers of Major Douglas in Alberta. Somehow, even then, the Messianic nature of prairie politics made an impression on me—the peculiar combination of fundamentalistic religion and radical political theory. I remember an aunt who came to our house, desperate because she had to send a letter but did not have the money to buy a stamp.

Combine with this an interest in the comic novel: from the great comic English novelists of the 18th century to Dickens to the contemporary satirists. I remembered people laughing during The Depression.

Combine with this the cozy university world in which I matured; the students wary of the prosperity that pressed in on us from all sides; the men of the Thirties become secure and offering us new bribes, new compromises.

Who might want to read this book?

GRADUATE COURSES ALREADY COMPLETED

Please check (V) title of courses transferred as advanced standing from other institutions. Everybody.

1. In Major Field			2. In Minor Field		
Title	Sem. Hrs.	Grade	Title	Sem. Hrs.	Grade
Aspects of the Short Story	2	A	8.106 Elizabethan Drama	3	A
Nearly and Corral	2	A	8.202 Secondary Stage	2	A
Modern Irish Prose and Drama	2	B	8.302 Elizabethan and Jacobean	2	A
Literary Criticism	4	II	8.300 Secondary Stage	2	A
English Prose	6	II			
Representative English Novels	2	A			
Chaucer	2	A			
The American Novel in the 19th Century	2	A			
Shakespeare	2	B			
The Modern Short Story	2	A			
Metaphor, Symbol and Myth	2	B			
The Art of Fiction	2	A			
Old English	3	A			
Study of Language	3	A			
Fiction Workshop	6	A			
Recess	3				
Middle English Fiction Workshop	2	A			
Shakespeare Early Plays	2	A			
Chaucer's Minor Poems	2	A			

just like those river men spoke, their language the public (some of them) seem to desire in their But I don't think my pastor, nor our deacons would use such language, now, do you? NO OFFENCE.

to see the day when you will write another novel background, NO PROFANITY, a person, or people like BILLY GRAHAM, and I know I would thoroughly enjoy so would lots of other people. You CAN write, yourself with your first book. If you would write...

I lived four-and-a-half miles from school and I went by horse to school all my life; I never had a bus. Every day of my school life I spent 45 minutes going to school in that landscape and 45 minutes coming back.

work too hard, take care of your health, for there is much can buy your health back for you, when you lose it.

DERING WHAT YOUR NEXT BOOK WILL BE LIKE???

Bye for now, as I wish to write your wife. Mary Jane, and Laurie for me. Kiss them both for me.

CANONICITY

Since I define a writer as one who writes,
I'm a little wary of becoming too involved
in the social image of myself.

* * *

The etymology of the word *canon* (as in the literary one of which I will speak here) and *cannon* (as in the military weapons of which everyone has been speaking since the invasion of Kuwait this past August 2) shows that the two words stem from the same root. Robert Scholes, in his article, "Aiming a Canon at the Curriculum," has quite succinctly made the connections between these two can(n)ons and has traced their provenance from the ancient Greek word "*Καννα*," used to refer to certain types of reeds, and, eventually, to the various metaphoric and metonymic extensions of the word for reed, such as rule, standard, model, severe critic, metrical scheme, astrological table, limit, boundary, and assessment for taxation (101). Scholes goes on to say that

both modern words--*cannon* with two n's and *canon* with one--can be traced back to the properties of the reed: its tubular inner structure, its flat outer edges, its regular jointed stem, and its consequent straightness and rigidity. (102)

The etymological connection leads me (laughingly) to conjure images of a "United Academics Coalition Security Force"; but then, perhaps as a student of (Post?)Modern Canadian Literature, I should not be laughing. As I have been forcibly reminded by Medievalists, Miltonists, Victorianists and the like, throughout my university career, in the larger frame of the Canon--here with one *n* and a bold, capital C--University English Departments still tend to regard English Literature and not Literature *written in* English (the fast emerging, more politically correct, but far from culturally entrenched term), as their domain. In this context, of course, it is nothing short of absurd for me to be contemplating a chapter on Robert Kroetsch's canonicity in Canadian Letters because Canadian Letters, by default, by exclusion, constitute non-canonical studies.

This exclusion, however, is not a state of affairs which has ever troubled me; my perceptions of the canon-builders handing down the judgements as to who I should read were hardly positive. I have no idea just who these all-powerful decision-makers may be--nor, it seems to me, does anyone else. Academics, when pressed, generally point to publishers, editors of "learned" journals, and book reviewers as at least the arbiters, if not the creators of the canon, but none of them is capable of naming a name or offering a concrete example. At any rate, "they," whoever these amorphous architects of canonicity may be, have always struck me as so conservative, authoritarian, dis(en)abling and downright presumptuous that I was glad to be studying non-canonical works.

I took great pride in abjuring the power structures and reality-constructions to which the canon is a contributor. I enjoyed positing my own critical position as outside of academic, elitist, confining systems--or, at least, I would tell myself, as existing on the margins of those systems, in constant tension with the centrifugal forces of prerequisites, course requirements and comprehensive exams trying to suck me in to their (absence of) heart. I am much less sanctimonious today, however, having to my great shock and wonder discovered that Canadianist scholars, perhaps rebelling against their aforementioned colleagues, have entrenched a (sub-? quasi-? alternate?) canon of their own. In it, the subversive, anti-authoritarian, canon-busting literature of Robert Kroetsch is as canonical as it gets. I face the paradoxical and acutely uncomfortable reality that with this thesis, I have become one of "them."

★

Kroetsch's canonicity is itself without question: his works appear on syllabi in universities across the country. Not merely required reading in *Introduction to Canadian Literature* courses, Kroetsch's works are also taught in courses on regionalism in writing, the development of the long poem, modern fiction studies, metafiction studies, and postmodernism. In addition, a Kroetsch novel or poem is often included in first-year survey courses of all description, the sheer numbers of which provide a significant boost in book sales, and, graduate seminars on his works alone have been offered at many Canadian institutions. He has won a Governor General's medal, a Fulbright and a Killam Fellowship among other prestigious grants; he appears not just in

dictionaries of literary biography, but in *Who's Who in Canada*; he is granted only slightly less space in The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature than are Northrop Frye and Frederick Philip Grove and equal space to writers nationally dubbed "world class" such as Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence and Hugh MacLennan. The terms of that canonicity, however, are perhaps subject to greater debate.

The types of courses in which Kroetsch's works are taught is an indication of this dilemma: regionalist as opposed to postmodernist, or what A. R. Kizuk has neatly dubbed Kroetsch's "bar talk" and "club talk" (MNS, 58). Kizuk refers to the split in Kroetsch readership and criticism between those who are attracted to Kroetsch's work for its authentic portrayal of the Canadian Prairie landscape and people (the "bar talk" contingent) and those whose motivation for studying Kroetsch centres on his allusions, aesthetics, and for lack of a better term, his "theoretical" tendencies (the [faculty] "club talk" contingent). Even a glance at a list of titles of dissertations and articles on Kroetsch's work reveals a split between categories which Kizuk refers to as "regionalist" and "literary" (64) criticism. As he acknowledges, these categories are, as imperfect abstractions, unfairly reductive (ibid.); to draw so sharp a line between "readers" (people "one normally comes across in a typical prairie bar" [58], who look to Kroetsch as representing them, who are drawn to his realism) and "critics" (academics who write about Kroetsch's subversion of genre, manipulation of narrative, recontextualising of myth) is to ignore the many academics who choose to write on Kroetsch's careful research into Prairie culture and history, his efforts to augment his personal experience; on the importance of landscape and climate to recurring images and themes; on the richness and complexity of his handling of characterisation,

voice and tall tale. More importantly, the rigidity of the argument from the winged-back chairs portrays the prairie reader as not only non-academic, but as culturally illiterate, able neither to recognise nor to apprehend the full measure of Kroetsch's texts--an elitist and stereotypical assessment which should be negated by the very fact that the literature in question is written by a one-time prairie farm boy. Kizuk's argument beautifully bridges the gap between "schools of thought" on Kroetsch in a way that the schools themselves have yet to master. It is only, ironically, with Kizuk's conclusion that I must differ. He writes that

club talk confirms [Kroetsch's] membership in a milieu, and ratifies his use of style. In the long run, however, his bar talk has the winning ticket. The opposition between these two modes of communication is not an equal contest, since in the club Kroetsch is merely one among many, and must accept the marginality of his authorship, while in the bar he is elected to a position of power. (68)

I must question the lottery in which Kizuk argues Kroetsch is playing. Certainly, his story-telling abilities and his "home town boy makes good" status back in Heisler are likely to get him a free beer in the local pub now and then; however, Kizuk is forgetting that it is the "club talk" critics, editors, and reviewers who, in ratifying Kroetsch, *made him* good. He is also forgetting that Kroetsch is also a member of the club; he is a Professor of English himself, and his success ensures that whatever "ratification" is going on is a mutual one; far from being "marginal" in the faculty club, Kroetsch's protean abilities lead him closer to election as "Grand Poohbah," or whatever

club presidents are called these days. Indeed, I'd be willing to bet that a few "scholars" would be lining up to pay for his draught and bend an ear in campus pubs too.

Thus if positing a division or a hierarchical distinction in Kroetsch criticism is debatable, in a discussion of Kroetsch's *canonicity* it is necessary. The "regionalist" aspects of his work, as important/well-received/authentic/beautiful as they are, are not the factors which placed Kroetsch's work firmly in the canon. Kroetsch's induction was virtually simultaneous with the proclamation of the "postmodern era" and the (silent but powerful) shift in academe by which ignorance of post-structuralist theory became tantamount to being (theoretically) illiterate. With that shift, and its accompanying shift in aesthetic tastes and acceptable literary/critical forms, "Robert Kroetsch: Canadian Writer" became "Robert Kroetsch: Lion of Canadian Letters."

★

M. E. Turner, in his essay, "Canadian Literature and Robert Kroetsch: A Case of Canonization," argues that the Kroetsch phenomenon, i.e. the multiplicity and variety of Kroetsch's textual products, and not the texts themselves, has been the subject canonised. While not nominating Kroetsch for sainthood, Turner argues that the status now granted Kroetsch is indisputably that of "a literary icon" (68). He points to the way in which Kroetsch's speaking out against one tradition has served to entrench another--based on poststructuralism, narratology, intertextuality, and the theories of deconstruction and reader-response criticism (57), thus again drawing

attention to the irony of the violently anti-system, pro-chaos writer positioned at the forefront of a replacement "-ism." The celebration of the margin has become the centre of literary trends in the 1990's.

Turner also postulates, in a way particularly pertinent to this discussion, that the reflexivity which Kroetsch cultivates in his own work and in his commentators makes it difficult to discuss one aspect of his work without being drawn into all the rest--that phenomenon of Kroetschian multiplicity--and that Kroetsch's critical influence is best understood not in terms of his own critical work, but in the theoretical approaches and vocabulary his works inspire, in the ways in which Kroetsch criticism shortens the distance between the study and its object (68, 61). This reflexivity, Turner argues,

is part of the work of many people writing about Kroetsch, partly because Kroetsch and his reflexive critics come to writing with common presuppositions and critical/theoretical positions. It is also. . . because the people interested enough to write on Kroetsch are interested precisely *because* they are influenced by him; a self-perpetuating cycle occurs as they find more to explore in Kroetsch's writing as they explore their own. As critics write about Kroetsch, the text they are interrogating in turn interrogates them--the assumptions, the method, the discipline itself. Kroetsch's reputation. . . exists in part because the criticism his work invites shapes his reputation as it is itself shaped by the work it seeks to criticise. (60)

Turner's remarks, of course, speak to the reflexivity of my own form/ulations.

DIALOGISM

I believe in a dialogic relationship with the world.... It's being willing to enter into the dialogue that counts.

* * *

Entering the dialogue with Robert Kroetsch is not an option; it is a *must*. Any text, "readerly" or not, allows for reader-interaction; Kroetsch's texts, however, foreground their inadequacy, their absences, their inability to mean without the input of an Other. They leave Iserian gaps, necessitating imaginative speculation, demanding response.

Mile Zero

[RK, poet/editor, afraid, perhaps to trust me...]

**:being some account of a journey through western Canada in the
dead of six nights**

[AF, novice reader, pondering said statement...]

did he really make the trip or did he (?) just make it up? writing poetry by the dashboard light? is there a song there? being some account. continuous tense. vagueness. tall tale?

[RK, persona, first-person story-teller in past tense...]

1.

I looked at the dust
on the police car hood.
I looked around the horizon.

[AF, suspicious reader/politicised critic...]

there's a (possibly better) story not being recounted here. how come he's standing by a police car? did he get pulled over? was there an accident? did he get a ticket? did he get out of one?

[RK, editor...]

(Insert here passage on
nature--

try: The sun was blight
enough for the wild rose.
A musky flavour on the milk
foretold the cracked earth...

try: One crow foresaw my fright,
leaned out of the scalding
air, and ate a grasshopper's
warning...

try: A whirlwind of gulls
burned the black field white
burned white the dark ploughman
and the coming night ...)

[AF, having-read-the-kroetsch-papers...]

these birds do crop up all over the place, fascination with crows,
always personified or mythologised

[RK, back to the story/persona...]

I AM A SIMPLE POET
I wrote in the dust
on the police car hood.

[AF, intertextualising...]

?did he curse
 ?did he try to
 go back
 ?what happened
 I have to/I want
 to know (not know)
 ?WHAT HAPPENED

[RK, minus first-person, in dialogue with his/story...]

Chateau (A Landing) Frontenac

crisp, and the wind
 the winter bleat

rain and the best
 are never mulled

champlain
 is green

madonna
the river is hungry

champlain, look in
 the window

absurd as undertow
 or word

the hurt of lovers
 hand in hand

repay the rot
 the risk, the rain

madonna
madrona

announce and
 enter adding (end)

champlain is green
 has empty eyes

westering is
 madrona, west

the wooden shore
 to look inland

[AF, questioning self...]

forgot to notice the editing [a silent RK, using pictures instead of words]--i was supposed to "insert this" before the "SIMPLE POET" sequence [AF, intertexting, "silent poet sequence"?], as indicated by the lines and arrows

[AF, questioning text...]

if this is a journey through western canada in the dead of six nights, how come we are suddenly in quebec? maybe i'm just picky because i'm from the (west) coast, but

[RK, questioning/remembering the "second night"...]

2.

**Where did the virgin come from
on my second night west?**

[RK, interrupting, telling a different story...]

**Let me, prosaically, parenthetically, remark
from what I observed: the lady in question took
from the left (or was it right?) pocket of her
coffee-stained apron a small square pad of lined
sheets of paper. She bit the wood back from
the led of a stub of pencil. And she wrote,**

[AF, materialist feminist, noter of details...]

just how does he know she's a virgin? another (tall) tale untold.
"coffee-stained apron"? apparently she's a server? maybe in some
greasy spoon truck stop where he grabbed a cup of java and

[RK, editor, interjects, again silently, with markers, signs...]

{AF, commenting on her own (comment)...}

signs... like detour markers, maybe even dead-ends, on the crazy
highway (labyrinth?) that is this poem/story/road

Driving, Accidental, West

1.

the shaped infinity
to hammer home

help, and the wild geese
heading south

and every way and
which, confuse

the fall of light
the fatal peen

how, and the commonest
crow or sparrow

speak the pale
or sensing moon

2.

accelerate, the swan
sing, or eloquent as

antelope, the crisp
rejoinder of the duck's

quack to the deer's
leap, and, even then

even, a static dream
twitter and acquit

the kill, wait, for
and the nasty snow

fall, fall, and for
tonight, only, dream

[AF, bibliographer...]

this poem has been published in whole or in part (mostly in parts) in 17 different revisions (4 of the whole; 13 of the parts," according to my (probably inaccurate but praise-worthy nonetheless) calculations. all of this took place over at least 15 years, possibly longer, if we are to believe rk when he says it takes him a while to muster the courage to show his work to anyone (much less, one would think, to publish it). so, the question this raises (for the voice-hunter more than the bibliographer but) is just how many kroetsches are

we getting here? there are potentially 5375 of them if we just allow for day to day changes in a single voice over 15 years, not even allowing for multiple roles. {AF, burnt-out thesis-writer, "i was told there'd be no math..."}

[AF, frustrated interviewer...]

march 18, 1991, evening, talked to rk on the phone and asked at what point in the writing of mile zero he decided to add the inserts and footnotes, etc. he doesn't remember...

[RK, re-remembering the coffee-stained-aproned lady...]

**without once stopping to think, the loveliest
goddamned**

{RK as regressed adolescent male}

**(I had gauged her breasts when she
wiped the table) poem that Christ ever read.**

She had a clean mind.

[AF, now militant materialist feminist...]

why does he have to include such hormonally-overcharged inanities?
and just what does that "clean mind" crack mean?
she turned him down?

[RK, claiming another temporal shift, now problematised by the discovery of the 15 year incubation period...]

3.

**On the third night west
a mountain stopped us.**

[AF, consistency freak, interjecting...]

hey he never mentioned a travelling companion before. who is this "us"?
did he pick up the virgin waitress from the truck stop?

[AF, voice-hunter, interrupting her interjection...]

maybe the "us" is the poet and reader, the dialogue, or the Other selves, the multiplicities

The mountains were lined up
to dance. I raised my baton:
rooted in earth, the lightning
rod on the roof of the barn,
on my soul's body. A crow
flew over the moon. I raised
my baton, a moon, a mountain.

[AF, intertexting...]

didn't the cow jump over the moon?

* {RK, editor; AF rebelling}

The crow flew over the mountain

[RK, editor cum self-justifier...]

*I have removed from this stanza two lines

Verily, I insist: I did
not raise the purple crow

(and I like the ambiguity created by the line break)

partly because the "Verily" intrudes what we might call another language code, and that an unfortunate one in this case, for all the play on *truth*;

partly because the sexual innuendo puts me, as actual poet behind the implied speaker ("I") in a bad light; that is, self-mockery is, so to speak, harder to come by, as one (the poet, the implied speaker, the I or the "I") grows older (RK).

[AF, with new understanding, a new (out)look...]

problematizing the problematic... we've got a whole lot of language levels here: "Verily" so, indeed.

[AF, not understanding, being a young, innocent lass...]

i don't see any sexual innuendo in that line. just what did he not raise
and where does the crow fit in and how come purple?

[AF, older, less innocent...]

oh

[RK, in italics and lower case again {a printed voice?} helpless to prevent my
refusal to follow his direction...]

Descent, as Usual, into Hell

i've told her now so long
so often and sojourn *salut*

diamond
star or

(*ouest*
or quest or)

worry bead
relinquish

redolent as always
as the heated rose

summer and
a scent

{RK, meta-poet}

(allot illusions as
is necessary to)

annealing praise
reticulate as tongue

mighty and a mouse
alike a maze

can he her up haul
or over if and may

asylum for her worship
in the night announce

the word of way
widen and weave

the was or is of
story is a story of

[AF, student of stylistics...]

interesting play on/with/of prepositions

[AF, bibliographer/voice-seeker/novice/critic/?]

the diction becomes more opaque, the possibilities more penetrating

[RK, your guess is as good as mine...]

4.

* Order, gentlemen, Order

[RK, editing, inserted dutifully by AF...]

Awake, Awakening

inhale, enact
the crappy sun

or face
finagle

far, and the body
wait

(the blackfoot had
no names for days)

the banjo, call
clairvoyant, still

gesticulate
triumphant

strum
and the morning

first, archaic
be, become

wrong or alone
we live, in delay's body

bone, altering
bone

after the word (after
which there can be no after)

cart
and the whipped horse

I lick your nipples
with my hand

[AF, fan...]

beautiful weaving and interweaving of now un-clichéd clichés

[RK, post-insert, {pre-insert?...} exponentially voicing...]

is the ultimate
mountain. I raised my baton.

[AF, starting to lose innocence again...]

i don't think he sees himself as a wizard (at least not as in "merlin")

[RK, editor/academic/theorist...]

*I have removed from this stanza the single line

(her breasts were paradigms)

(originally in parenthesis, as indicated) because I am somewhat offended by the offhand reference to paradigm. And yet, is not the mother figure the figure at once most present in and most absent from this poet's work? The concern with *nostos* is related to a long family history of losses: e.g., the paternal side of the family landing in New York in June, 1841, aboard the *Pauline*, and the mother of the large Kroetsch family, settled in Waterloo

County, Ontario, a few years thereafter widowed, and the early death of the poet's mother in Alberta, a century after that first un-homing. Both quest and goal become paradigmatic (RK).

[AF, unsure of posture...]

i was thinking when reading "Order, gentlemen, Order" that rk has a lot of nerve to exclude me (she) from his text this way. and i was thinking, when reading "(her breast were paradigms)" and rk's offense to the off-hand reference to paradigms that maybe i should be offended by the off-hand (off-person/off-subject) reference to breasts. but then he goes and puts it all into a maternal context, and a personal one at that and my biographer self (to say nothing of my sentient being self) knows how painful the loss of a mother at such a young age must have been and so i hesitate to chastise. i also don't even know if i get the whole quest/goal/paradigm point and so don't know if i should say much of anything from this shaky critical foundation.

[RK, male/poet/persona(?)...]

5.

The bindertwine of place--
 The mansource of the man--
 The natural odour of the stinkweed--
 The ache at the root of
 * the spinal thrust--

[RK, (harsh/self-) critic...]

 * Surely this is where the original version of the poem (1969) fails (Ron Smith of Oolichan Books on Vancouver Island, pointing to the reliance on dashes--the poet, come to a crucial moment in the journey, hesitating to write the longish poem the occasion dictates. The westward and return journey that fascinates Kroetsch is here turned entirely into implication without adequate substance (i.e., ground), into, at best, intertext... Only later do three couplets suggest themselves, relating to the poet's equal fascination with the visit to the land of the dead (in search of?)--

(interior, the
 dark shore)

the godfish
 hole

the bait bait, and
the hung hook hang

--but it is too late now, too late to weld such post-surreal niceties into a voice that in the sixties insisted on a source that was at once oral and local (RK).

[AF, struggling polyphonist...]

surely here is where rk most overtly problematises his own discourse... what here is *text* if the passage is "at best" *intertext*? who is speaking to us (me) if it is this third-person *other* kroetsch who is fascinated by the journey?

[The Anonymous Inserter...]

Weather Vane

muse
I figure

hold us, cock and after
after the hot sun

clydesdale or
and forecast if

under adam's gun
we live
or dithyramb
of sorts, allow

self,
portraying self

think you think
the globe round

the cupola
the deem or dream

trajectory
of ignorance

(the bent pine
resisting west)

wind, swing
the arrow's edge

[AF...]

the muse, the weather, the many changes of seasons of writing this, of
writing-- portraying whose self, what self, how-- the trajectory
of my ignorance is wide; the arrow, the vane (vain?) ordering me to
insert and delete-- order

[RK, on the road again...]

6.

What I took to be an eagle
turned out to be a gull.
We glimpsed the sea.
The road ended

[]

but it did not end:
the crying gulls turned
on the moon. The moon
was in the sea.
Despair that had sought the moon's
meaning now found the moon.
(Mile Zero is everywhere.)
The roar of the sea was the sea's roar.

1969/1981
Binghamton/Winnipeg

[Arrow Function... {as indicated []}]

Collected Poem

Every year is the same:
it's different.

visions of
exactitude
Death is a live
issue.

The world is always
ending.

When you get to the
beginning stop.

Green apples make you
shit like a bird, or

once in a while, just over
the next low hill

legs are longer than arms with
few exceptions

why doesn't bogus
rhyme with slump

I want to see one square
cloud.

(tempus
forgets)

The tree is there every morning.
Maybe you noticed that too.

[[

every voice is the same: it's different but my visions of exactitude
one (?) small (?) problem (?): there is poem left over outside
the arrow indicator and after the
sign-off--beyond, removed from, the time-space continuum
of *mile zero* --

the story of the poem
become
the poem of the story
become

EDUCATOR

. . . the mere onslaught of detail merely overwhelms. We grasp at something else. And that something else is the professor's domain: the world of reflection, of understanding. The insight born of leisurely and loving meditation. The word made human.

* * *

Defining the professor's domain in Gone Indian, Kroetsch certainly expresses the ideal of higher education, the dream that each student takes with her as she approaches the world of university. She hopes, as did I, that the blissful intellectual stimulation and growth of *Educating Rita* is in her future and that she will find a Michael Caine-like figure to fill her mind with the fine insights of a scholar. The portrait of academe and academics found in Gone Indian, however, could not be further from this (perhaps questionable) ideal: Kroetsch writes, instead, of professors who hate teaching and live on (and *for*) prestigious research grants and publications, dissertations that somehow never get completed, jealousy and resentment between office mates and fellow students, and a general sense of a purposeless, wasted, abysmally unhappy existence for all concerned.

In a 1973 letter to Patricia Knox, the New Press Promotion director handling Gone Indian, Kroetsch describes the novel as follows:

... it is on top of everything else an academic novel; an academic novel, let it be said, of a radically new kind, dealing not with power and politics but with the relationship between professor and student, the relationship between the two of them and knowledge: sometimes in parody, sometimes in earnest, the author pursuing the ideal to its moment of test....

(27.1.13.40c)

The relationship between Jeremy Sadness, Ph D candidate, and his would-be (if he could stick to a thesis topic) thesis supervisor Professor Madham is -- I was going to say unusual, but I do not know if that is true, though it is not to my knowledge typical either... I could say it is unproductive, but Jeremy does grow out of the experience, at least, of rebelling against Madham... And Madham, networking through Jeremy, gains an improved social life, so to speak (he has an affair with Jeremy's wife)... Only one thing is (perhaps) certain: in terms of education, neither is very progressive, or making very much progress.

My parents raised me on aphorisms; they had a million of them, and I have, much to my dismay, committed them all to memory and will no doubt subject my children to similar maltreatment. One of Dad's favourites comes to mind when considering Jeremy. Dad always told me that "the teacher will appear when the student is ready to learn" (he also said that "the world will step aside to let you pass if you only know where you're going" and that "even if you are on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there," but

I'll stick with specifically education-related metaphors for now). Jeremy needs to "find himself" and he is looking in all the wrong places--when he remembers to look at all. In short, Socrates himself could not do much for poor Jeremy. Madham, however, is no Socrates. His idea of encouraging his *protégé* may be encapsulated in this comment regarding Jeremy's introduction to a proposed thesis: "Jeremy my boy, you have used this same opening in two other failed, futile, rejected attempts at writing a dissertation" (21). Notice the deft pedagogical skill and eye toward encouragement with which Madham has chosen his adjectives.

Saturday, April 2, 1977
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Mrs. Aylesworth. The fierce-eyed,
red-headed teacher at Red Deer High
School who told me I should become
a writer. Again, today, I thought
of her. My debt to a teacher.

Perhaps then, we come to understand Jeremy's need for escape, for change, for transformation. And in the face of that experience, of searching for Grey Owl and finding a self (an extra-academic self, a life beyond the book), the life Jeremy led as a graduate student, and the *system* controlling all of it, is revealed with greater clarity. In comparison to the rural environment, to the physicality and routine of day-to-day existence in the "real world," the system of academe is found somewhat wanting. As A. R. Kizuk has argued, Jeremy's journey leads him to recognise the gap existing between rural and academic ways of living, and leads also to "an experience of dream-time in which language, writing, history and logic are perceived as inadequate and impotent" (MNS, 62).

As we think the book closed--academe censured by one who has been through it--we must remember that Kroetsch is not through it. He is still *in* it, a university professor of modern literatures. And, his SUNY Binghamton address and his prairie heritage match those of his fictional (?) Professor Madham--no less than a gilt-edged invitation to draw parallels and/or to question Kroetsch's opinions of academic life and his own role in it. I posed that very question to him in interview, and his response could easily serve as a synopsis or critical squib for his anti-academic novel: "I ache to see how many academics don't live in the world that surrounds them. They treat knowledge as an escape from the world [and . . .] hide in what passes for knowing. . ." (see my page 86). This low general opinion of academics is perhaps one reason for (what Kroetsch claims to be) the "non-intellectual"-ness of his novels (cf. Hancock, 35), a necessary Going-Indian, an escape.

The other escape takes place in the classroom, which can be steered toward the periphery of, or insulated from, the system. Kroetsch speaks and writes often of the positive influence of his students on his life and work, and obviously enjoys striving toward the antithesis of Madham's pedagogical style, clearly understanding the significance, the potential, of the teacher's role. The time he is willing to take for a student who, as my

Thursday, September 7, 1972

Little Meg went into grade one yesterday. Her first day of school. Her excitement is beautiful: she can hardly wait in the morning until it is time to depart. She comes home reporting how she likes her teacher, her classmates. My sense of the overwhelming importance of that first experience compels me to listen in silence.

father would want me to add, is ready and willing to learn, is a testament to that understanding. In a box in the Special Collections Division of the University of Calgary library, buried between invitations to conferences and all manner of correspondence related to editing and publishing, is a letter from a high school student in Saskatoon, named Melanie Davis, who had heard Kroetsch give a reading at a Prairie Writers Workshop and asked a stream of questions, essentially demanding an *explanation* of the usefulness of art; stapled to the back of it is a carbon copy of Kroetsch's three-page reply, dated only days after Melanie's (334.84.1.5.5). The original has, no doubt, been given pride of place in a scrapbook or memory box, as Kroetsch likely knew it would be.

Another memory box full of special treasures to be perused by nieces, nephews, and I hope, children and grandchildren, now holds copies of a series of letters, this time from a struggling graduate student in Vancouver attempting a thesis on Kroetsch's work, asking more questions (by multiples) than Melanie, and who received careful, detailed replies, a postcard, a photo, a wonderful poem, and, without question... an education.

[Simon and Shuster Author's Questionnaire]

EDUCATION:

BA U of Alta 1948

PhD U of Iowa 1961

Educated by the weather on the wheat plains;
educated by the isolation in the sub-arctic;
educated by the students at SUNY Binghamton.

FEMINISM

Dear Dr. Kroetsch:

As a woman and a feminist, I feel I must write to you to express my appreciation for the significant contribution your work makes to feminist studies. You use your power as power *to*--not power *over*--ensuring that your privileged position as an inductee into the canon, as a respected member of academe, is a positive force to enable Others to advance themselves as well. The magnitude of your generosity and the uniqueness of your talents quite simply astound me. Not only have you created wonderfully authentic female voices, women in indisputable subject positions, such

Attn.: Mr. Robert Kroetsch,

As a woman and a feminist, I feel I must write to you to express my disgust at the many and various ways you find to exploit and objectify women in your work--though perhaps I should say "Woman," as your writing bespeaks the politics of the Same. You spend a great deal of your interview time (and a great deal of time it is) extolling yourself as the voice of those absent in history, as an alternative to the mainstream line, as a proponent of the democratic sensibilities of the prairie pub. Yes, you work very hard at setting yourself up as Mr. Sensitive New Age Guy--

as Anna Dawe and Anna Yellowbird in Badlands, but you also go beyond this to skilfully use the male voice to reach your male readership.

Your recognition of the fact that the masculinist readership which must

creating the persona, the author-function, which so many of your readers unquestioningly transfer to their conception of your work. Readers have come to know and like the Kroetsch they meet in interview--such an open, nice, "average Joe" kind of guy--and they

This Miss Cohen. It started quite by accident. Let's make love up against the bookcase, I suggested. Are you *kidding*? she said. So I slipped it to her right there, Lit and Comp I, Section 13, tits on her like snowcapped volcanoes: we were in my office in the Library Tower. She wanted to know about passion. What is a destructive passion, Mr. Sadness? she inquired. My office looked like a barbershop after, there were pubic hairs scattered from my Norton Anthology through Anatomy of Criticism And in walks my office mate, this decadent virgin bull dyke from Long Island they've quartered on me.

be led to self-consciousness in order to eradicate the sexism and misogyny so pervasive in our society will not respond to overtly feminist discourse has gone too long ignored by the feminist community. Were all your novels like Badlands, narrated by a woman, nakedly speaking the feminine, you would alienate the very audience we need to penetrate. But, of course, you know this. Thus your masterful (mistress-ful?) handling of the tech-

ignore the blatant misogyny which greets them as they enter the world of a Kroetsch text, renaming it self-parody or, better yet, irony. In the event that you may be left with any doubt by this point, Mr. Kroetsch, let me assure you: I am not among this group of readers. I see your work for what it is: the perpetuation of the masculinist tradition at the expense of feminine subjectivity. Let's look at a few case studies, shall we?

niques of irony come into play. Your systematic construction and deconstruction of masculinist codes and values in Gone Indian is nothing short of a *tour de force*!

As Jeremy Sadness (a beautiful naming--he is the personification of that which brings sadness into the lives of all

Hello? Carol? I see it now. I apologize. I was wrong. I'm guilty. Right. Your favourite professor drove me to it. By putting that goddamned Reggie in an office with me; she studies twenty-four hours a day. No wonder, who would screw her? And yet she has time to organize the EGO. English Graduate Organization. Magnificent. She's at my ear day and night . . . and hour after hour I hear her swallowing chocolates one at a gulp. Something like ninety-nine beautiful sex-starved females in that department and I've got to share an office with the chocolate monster.

enlightened women and men) persists in objectifying the women in his world, we are called upon to judge not the women he disparages, but rather the source of the disparagement. Every misogynist remark Sadness makes has at its root his hatred of his own pathetic condition. Here is a man who cannot face his own inadequacies, who must instead project them onto an Other. You ensure the failure of that

The Studhorse Man: Yes, here we meet your friend Hazard (nice, macho name) who spends half of his time trying to get his horse and himself laid and the other half bragging about it. And this is a bragging of a special sort: he has become a regular *connoisseur* of mammary glands. Every shade, every texture, every possible degree of nipple erectness and

arousal... he has a category for them all. And I do mean all. No species of mammal escapes Hazard's careful eye. Kroetsch's world: where men are men and sheep (horses? pigs? sows? bulls?) are nervous.

Gone Indian: yet another version of the male quest for (parts of) the female. Jeremy Sadness is every woman's nightmare (and he does see

. . . Her tits were like nothing so much as two great speckled eggs of a rare wild bird. . . . A crow's egg, he guessed first--but no, the colour behind the freckles was lighter. And the freckles themselves, around the nipples they were the shape (very small) and the color (very light) of the freckles on a chickadee's egg. . . . Next, farther back from the nipple-- . . . the freckles were as small and faint as the spots on the egg of a red-winged black bird.

projection, however, by insisting on the failure of its source. Sadness is the epitome of impotence--sexually, to be sure, but professionally and spiritually as well. Thus if your male readers see their masculinist values mirrored in Sadness, they must see, also, a reflection of their ultimate folly. That which is projected onto the Other is quickly refracted back to the Self.

This same technique serves you (and us) well in The Studhorse Man, where Hazard's breast-fetish renders absurd once and for all the Western males' synechdochal representation of Woman as Tits & Ass. Hazard's endless

women as Everywoman--witness the beauty pageant at which all of the contestants are identical in appearance). So threatened is he by any glimpse of female power (and there are only glimpses in your works) that he must attempt to conquer it. He thus either copulates with a woman or pronounces her unfit for even that. And, really Mr. Kroetsch, these scenes are unworthy of you. Surely you could have come up with a more original approach than to merely paraphrase the line which any remotely talented woman has already committed to memory: "Okay, so you're a brilliant writer/neurosurgeon/attorney, but I wouldn't want to fuck you."

meditations on nipple shades and relative roundness and firmness devolve into similar discussions of the mammary glands of horses, cows and male pigs, so that your male reader can no longer laugh conspiratorially with Hazard and his locker/bar-room banter, but must begin to laugh at Hazard, and consequently at himself. This wonderful evocation of male self-reflection is solidified when the reader makes the discovery that the biographer narrating this journey into the Male is a patient in a psychiatric hospital, lying naked

You see, part of the problem that I have with your work is that it is your work; here the author-function you have set up is working against you. You are an educated and knowledgeable man; you espouse liberal, egalitarian values; yet you persist in portraying women as flat (no pun intended), stereotypical, non-subjects, nonentities. And what is worse, all the while you *appropriate* the stylistics and forms devised by women who were trying to break out of the very oppression to which your work

Martha's own breasts were of chalk white, their nipples of red jasper. I am sure they were what is called well-preserved, for a woman of thirty-seven. . . .

in his bathtub, making penis-hats out of the 3x5 cards on which he has jotted his research notes. Again and again, you deftly employ irony to cut the male ego off (... at its knees).

contributes. "Your" notes and journals are genres which were once the only preserve available to women. Your fragments and erasures are the feminine attempt to break out of the linearity

Equally of interest to me, as a student of feminist theory and linguistics, is your ease in invoking the stylistics of *écriture féminine*. So many writers, male and female, cling to the structures of their patriar-

of phallogocentrism. Women were relegated to the margins in which you now play--we did not freely choose to be an absent presence, and your overtaking of our genre(s) only absents us once more.

The only woman in creation I COULD NOT SCREW UNDER ANY CONDITIONS WHATSOEVER: and I'm locked up in a cage with her for sixteen hours a day.

chal forefathers, the linearity and teleology, the insistence on control and Author-ity. You defy this tradition, though, and defy your own centrality as a white male, by finding your voice, instead, in the margins that are home to the feminine. Your work displays not merely a comfort with, but a sheer revelling in the uncertainty, the questioning, the erasure and fragmentation that characterises the womanwriter. You, too, are at home on the edges, in the silences, the absences, the openness of what we might call *vulvalogodecentrism*.

And please do not make the mistake of imagining (as too many critics have) that just because you offer *one* female character who actually lapses into thought or speech beyond the praising of the male hero that you can get yourself off the hook. Anna Dawe is at most an aberration in the Kroetsch canon, and even she tells not her own story, but one of male questing and bravado. And here, too, you rely on the same masculinist tropes: Anna Dawe is more intelligent than any of the men in her life; therefore she is a 45 year-old virgin. Body and mind

Last, but arguably most profound,
is your essay style in "My Book is
Bigger than Yours," where you self-
consciously reveal your own
inadequacies as a man reading/ writing
women.

If pen is envy, I must confess,
I envy you the potency of yours.

Yours in sisterhood,
Alanna Fero

cannot merge in your world, can they?
--At least not if one of them is
female.

If pen is envy, I can only say
that, treating women the way you do,
you should rightfully be experiencing
a genuine fear of castration.

Truly *not* yours,
MS. Alanna C. Fero

*Total and absurd male that he was, he assumed, like a male
author, an omniscience that was not ever his, a scheme that was
not ever there. Holding the past in contempt, he dared foretell
for himself not so much a future as an orgasm.
But we women take our time.*

GENRE

We have to face some goddamned interesting formal problems right now.

* * *

Kroetsch's generous inclusion of genre^{*}-labels on first editions of many of his works is perhaps the only means by which his reader^{**} can distinguish between his novels,^{***} poems,^{****} and criticism.^{*****}

* Genre: broadly defined as Kind; Sort; Style; A category of artistic, musical, or literary composition[#] characterized by a particular style, form, or content^{##} (OED). More specific to literature^{###}, genre may be understood as a type or category into which literary works can be grouped according to form, technique or purpose (Coles Dictionary of Literary Terms [CDLT]).[§]

** Reader: a) one that reads b) one chosen to read aloud to others: as Lector c) one who evaluates manuscripts d) one who reads periodical literature to discover items of special interest or value e) one who reads lectures and expounds subjects to students f) one who reads and marks students' papers g) a device for protecting a readable image of a transparency (OED). For these

purposes, we can eliminate *b*, *d*, *e*, and *f*; however, this still leaves a rather gaping discrepancy between merely taking in printed material and evaluating it (cf. *criticism*, fn. ^{*****}).@@

*** *Novel*: A fictitious#### prose#### narrative##### or tale of considerable length (now usually one long enough to fill one or more volumes), in which characters and actions representative of the real life of past or present times are portrayed in a plot or more or less complexity; The particular type of literature which is constituted or exemplified by this class of fiction.##### (Formerly without article; now with *the*) (OED). The

novel may be regarded as the third stage in the evolution of fiction narrative, of which the epic was the first and the romance was the second (CDLT).^{@@@}

Poem: 1. "The work of a poet, a metrical composition" (Johnson); "a work in verse" (Littre); a composition of words expressing facts, thoughts, or feelings in poetical form; a piece of poetry. In addition to metrical or verse form, critics have generally held that in order to deserve the name of *poem*, the theme and its treatment must possess qualities which raise it above the level of ordinary prose. b. (in a more general sense): Applied to a

composition which, without the form, has some quality or qualities in common with poetry. 2. *fig.* Something (other than a composition of words) of a nature akin or likened to that of poetry (with various implications, as artistic or orderly structure, noble expression, ideal beauty, etc.) (OED). A composition in metrical form, characterised by qualities of imagination, emotion, significant meaning and appropriate language. A poem may be written in rhyme, blank verse, or a combination of the two, but the expression is usually rhymical and designed to give aesthetic or emotional pleasure (CDLT).^{@@@}

***** *Criticism*: 1. The action of criticising, or passing judgement upon the qualities or merits of anything; *esp.* the passing of unfavourable judgement; fault-finding; censure. 2. The art of estimating the qualities and character of literary or artistic work; the function or work of a critic. b. *spec.* The critical science which deals with the text, character, composition, and origin of literary documents, *esp.* those of the Old and New Testaments. 3. An act of criticising; a critical remark, comment; a critical essay, ##### critique (OED). The art of judging and defining the qualities and merits of a literary or artistic work. Each age has its critics, who, by setting standards and affecting tastes, influence the work produced by artists and writers.

Literary critics range from the journalistic reviewers who discuss three or four books a day, to the learned critics who study and make informed pronouncements on the merits and faults of literary works (CDLT).^{#####}

[#] *Style*, *Form* and *Content* are differentiated according to the following conventions: *style* refers to a characteristic manner of expression, as according to the writer's style or the style of the period in which the work was written; *form* and *content* indicate the shape and structure of a work as opposed to its subject or substance (OED; CDLT).

Composition: 1. The act or process of composing; *specif.* arrangement into proper relation or proportion and esp. into artistic form. b. The arrangement of type for printing. 2. The manner in which something is composed. b. General makeup. 3. Mutual settlement or agreement. 4. A product of mixing or combining various elements or ingredients. 5. An intellectual creation. 6. The operation forming a composite function (OED).^{#####}

Literature: 1. Writing, grammar, learning. 2. The production of literary work esp. as an occupation. 3. Writing in prose or verse, esp. writings having excellence of form or expression and expressing ideas of

permanent or universal interest b. the body of written works produced in a particular language, country, or age c. the body of writings on a particular subject d. printed matter (OED). Strangely enough, this is the one term that the dictionary of literary terms does not define.

Fictitious: Of, relating to, or characteristic of fiction (OED). (cf. *fiction*, fn. ###).

Prose 1. The ordinary language people use in speaking or writing. 2. The literary medium distinguished from poetry esp. by its greater irregularity and variety of rhythm and its closer correspondence to the patterns of

everyday speech (OED). Spoken or written language that is not metrically diversified. While prose may be rhythmical, it is without the sustained metrical regularity of verse. Variety of expression is achieved through diction and sentence structure. Novels, essays and most modern drama are written in prose (CDLT).

Narrative: 1. *The act or process or an instance of narrating.* 2. *Story.* 3. *The representation in art of an event or story (OED). In prose or poetry, the type of composition used to recount an event or series of events. In simple narrative, such as newspaper accounts, events are told in chronological order. A narrative with plot is often less chronological.*

Events are arranged according to a preconceived principle determined by the nature of the plot and the type of story (CDLT). @@@@@@

Fiction: 1. Something invented by the imagination or feigned. a. *specif.* an invented story. b. fictitious literature (as novels or short stories) (OED). Narrative writing drawn from the imagination or fancy of the author (CDLT). @@@@@@

Essay: 1. To put to a test. b. An initial or tentative effort. 2. The result or product of an attempt. 3. An analytic or interpretive literary composition usually dealing with its subject from a limited or personal point

of view (OED). A discussion in prose of a certain topic. An essay may be classified as formal or informal, depending on its subject and style. The formal essay is characterised by qualities of dignity, serious purpose and logical organisation. Examples range from the serious magazine article to scientific or philosophical treatises of book length. The informal essay, sometimes called the *true* essay, is moderately brief and instructive. Among the qualities that mark the informal essay are: humour, graceful style, a personal element, unconventionality or novelty of theme, and freedom from stiffness and affectation (CDLT). ~~~~~~~~~

[®] A note on my choice of research tools for these definitions: I am motivated to use such diverse materials as the Oxford English Dictionary and the compendium of the Coles publishing company because I feel the two represent the hierarchical poles of the scholarly spectrum. The OED is generally regarded as the reference of choice for academics, while the lovely bold stripes and \$3.95 price tag of The Coles Dictionary of Literary Terms are a major attraction for high school and undergraduate students. Thus the information provided by these two somewhat incongruous sources will, I hope, combine to provide what at least approaches a consensual opinion on meanings, insofar as such a thing may be understood to exist.

⁸⁸ For my own purposes, as both a reader and a critic of Kroetsch, I will treat the two terms as though they are synonymous. Though I recognise that such may not be the case for all readers, I will dare to offer the bold generalisation that most readers, whether or not they actually come to the point of recording their thoughts about a text in writing, do, in fact, evaluate and or make judgements regarding same, based on personal preferences, expectations, inherited cultural beliefs, or other socio-political and/or ideological considerations or criteria.

⁸⁹ This definition raises an interesting question as to whether or not the texts which Kroetsch has subtitled *novel* and/or which agents and

publishers and booksellers have marketed as such should in fact be construed in this way. What, indeed, is the length required of a "volume"? And, to what degree may we say that Kroetsch's "novels" are representative of real life? Certainly, the authenticity with which he portrays prairie peoples, their land and culture (here understood as signifying "day-to-day way of life, " and not the "high" culture of opera, ballet, and art galleries) is oft-noted and perhaps even verifiable. The definition, however, does not specify whose real life is under consideration. If Kroetsch's works do not represent my real life, am I thus to consider them something other than *novels*? And what of this "third stage" issue? The mythic journey through time and space which is

(doubly) recounted in Badlands may be argued to have epic proportions. And either conception of the generic designation "romance" (restoration of order or "happy ending" vs. a version of a "love story") could apply to several of Kroetsch's works: Words of My Roaring, Gone Indian, and the aforementioned Badlands, to cite only three. Is the "third stage" in the development of prose thus to be understood to include the previous two, or am I thus to consider Kroetsch's works as regressions to or representations of these earlier forms? Even more importantly, the addition of the definite article to the usage of the term in contemporary English would indicate that the genre is antithetical to Kroetsch's professed stylistic preferences, i.e. for multiplicity and variation.

Provided that we accept, for the sake of argument, that the designation of poetical form as that which is metrical or in verse may include metres or verses other than the iambic or trochaic and the rhymed couplet or quatrain, it is possible to apply at least this segment of the definition of *poem* to Kroetsch's work. However, the question becomes more problematic if we expect that any two readers will be able to agree as to what constitutes a treatment of theme which is "beyond the level of ordinary prose," has "significant meaning" (is not all meaning significant?) and "ideal beauty." One woman's "ordinary" may be another's "ideal." Which is to say nothing of the fact that whether a work is designed to give aesthetic or emotional pleasure begs the question of whether or not it succeeds.\$

@@@@ A critic may estimate qualities, participate in a critical science, or possess a talent for the art of judging. Surely this is the very sort of paradoxical and nonsensical definition for which a writer such as Kroetsch was born to fulfil. A critic may be virtually anything. The criticism produced, of course, will also be criticised, as indicated by the glaring value judgement stratifying the journalist (apparently intended to be understood as newspaper or magazine columnist, and not the editor of a scholarly periodical or quarterly) and the learned critic. Kroetsch, I take it, would fall into the latter category, given that his work has influenced the setting of standards in Canadian Letters; however, these standards have been set more as a result

of his interview persona than his "critical" or even "fictional" one, so this conclusion, too, is open to debate.

Perhaps, given the protean nature of Kroetsch's talents, and the eclecticism of many of his texts, they would all be best understood as *compositions*, abjuring other possible, but apparently at best, reductive, at worst, inaccurate categorisations.

What of the autobiography, tall tale, and ethnography of a "poem" such as "Seed Catalogue"? What of the myth and archaeological (re-) construction(s) of "Stone Hammer Poem"?

This definition would indicate that with all Kroetsch's research and insistence on the hard core of authentic detail and voice, that his works are *not fictional* (I hesitate to say *non-fictional*, setting up an other, equally rigid category as it does). Does this mean that the hot springs scene in Alibi really happened?

"Effing the Ineffable," focusing as it does, on the poetic qualities of farting, could probably quite accurately be construed as free from "stiffness" and "affectation." I also like very much the concept of the essay as tentative and testing. Of course, by this definition the term applies better to Kroetsch's "poems" and "novels" than the category of criticism of which essays are ostensibly a part.

\$ Given the apparent dichotomies between "poem" and "novel," "verse" and "prose," how are we to differentiate between, for example, "novels" such as Gone Indian or Badlands, and "long poems" such as "Letters to Salonika" or "Excerpts from the Real World"? The structures of all of these works find

their basis in transcriptions of tapes, letters, field notes and journal entries, and there is little demonstrable difference between their sentence constructions, use of the vernacular or story-telling capabilities which could indicate their genre (cf. fn *).

HANGOVER

Begin: the body writes the poem.

★

Interviewer: Would you ever wake up in the morning and say, "My being is not feeling well today. If I sit down and write today, I will not write well."?

Kroetsch: Yes, I would. (laughing) We call that a hangover.

★ ★ ★

The poet: stone hammered.

INTERVIEW

. . . Deferral
 Contingency
 Mr. Potato Head ((??wearing a condom
 Post-[Canada]
 Absence
 Wickedness
 Dodging
 Accuracy
 Silence . . .

* * *

The following interview took place via Canada Post, somewhere in the spaces between Vancouver and Winnipeg, December and March, questions and answers, the hard drive and the floppy disk, the written and the oral. The section titles and asterisks indicating "important" questions appeared on the original list and all are reproduced here in their original order. Kroetsch's (the Post-man's?) replies, their all-at-once-ness, are recorded here as I received them, unedited--by me, at least.

ACF,
 April 1, 1991

* * *

INTERVIEWS AND INTERVIEWING

Are you comfortable with interviewing? Do you get nervous anymore? Do you read your interviews when they are published? Are you generally happy with your answers or do you find yourself mentally editing?

I'm comfortable being interviewed. I find it difficult to read about myself in any form. At best I read about myself as someone I seem to recall having once known fairly well.

When you are writing, do you ever think about the ways in which your work will be critiqued or interpreted or the kinds of questions it will raise in interview? Do you ever write hoping to elicit certain questions or responses?

When writing I do not think of the possibilities of interpretation. I work toward the delights and complexities of writing a story (when writing fiction). At the moment I'm concerned about my first day as a user of a computer. And I notice that I am already in trouble with the first person singular pronoun.

**Hey he just skipped
3 *** questions!**

What do you see as the "function" of the interview, i.e., why do we do them? why do we read them? turn to them as source, etc?

The function of an interview? Extension of the text--whether as elaboration, interpretation--whatever the shift in discourse kind might be. Even autobiographical material--however one is to understand that to manifest itself--relates to the text as a version of plenitude.

LANGUAGE

*** You are often referred to or quoted assaying that you write "against" traditions or conventions or forms or systems... the tyranny of narrative. What would you say you write for?

The problem is what critics (you critics) nowadays lump under the label, power. Tradition and convention--either can give or take away power. What do I write for? In a certain way, at least, I write to give the reader power. Over his or her own narrative of a place in the world. Being here. How do we go about being here, without being told how to be here, without being prevented from being here?

I dunno either

*** This is more a question about poststructuralism in general than about your work in particular and I'm not really sure that I expect you to be able to "answer" it, BUT given that we now see language as being about signifiers and not signifieds and meaning as endlessly deferred... what motivates you to continue writing?

I have said enough about signifier and signified. I, it would seem, resist the transcendence attributed to either. Again--being in the world. Contingency is the clue (not key) word: contingency, speaking its condition against the violent dream of absolutes.

I didn't think so;
that's how come I
asked

*Do you want your work to be understood
more or less than you want it to be
appreciated?*

Understood? As Morag Gunn might say, What means understood? I invite the sweet complicity of the readerly act.

What does that mean?

Back to this topic of signifiers and the multiplicity of meaning and textual openness, etc., how do you feel about the criticism of your work? Have you read anything that you would consider a misreading? (No need to name names, just give me a hint or two as to what sparked your response...)

I feel I've been extremely fortunate in the appearance of critics willing to talk seriously and even passionately about my work. We talk seriously, together. What is the nature of the dialogue that print enables us to engage in?

**Just who
is interviewing
who?**

Orality... the importance of voice and tall tale and vernacular in your work all comes back to the oral. Talk, if you will, about the problems of issues (theoretical and practical) in trying to write the oral.

Writing the oral--perhaps in the past I had or held to a rather simple notion of voice. We are each many voices. Among our dialogues are the important dialogues we conduct within the fiction (?) of the self. Some of the voices within us are slower thinkers than others.

*** *At times I think I see a suspicion of the purely written medium in your work. Not only do you seem to strive for authentic "voices" in your characters, but you add photographic images or transcriptions of tapes... Can you talk about that?*

Perhaps I have a suspicion of the purely written because it silenced the voices that inhere in my own.

*** What about language and criticism? My own pet peeve of late (and the motivation for my approach to this thesis) is the way in which so many critics talk about the innovative language of postmodern texts, for example, and yet still rely on Aristotelian forms and the notion that the critic has access to some meta-language, outside the language of the text. One of the things that first attracted me to your work is the way you seem, to me, to resist that. Any comments?

The valorization of Aristotelian form played a part in that silencing. Critics like you, by opening the form, let the abundance of voice, of voices, be heard. You are right--I distrust the metalanguage and the dialectics of the metalanguage that pretend to speak (for) that metalanguage. And community--that should be the voicing of community--not up speaking to down. I prefer the horizontal axis.

u r right
it means
so much
&
so little

GENRE(S)

*** How do you decide that a given idea has to become part of a poem or part of a novel? For example, why, when you found the ledger, did it become a poem and not the genesis for a novel set in Bruce County?

How does your work in one genre affect your work in others? I tend to see your work as part of one big genre, pushing the boundaries of all the categories. Would you say that's a fair estimation?

*** About the "note" form you so often use... no matter how I ask this question it's going to be loaded, so I may as well tell you that I am planning to argue that the "note" is a Kroetschian genre of sorts and just ask you to respond to that...

Language as foreground makes for poem;
 narrative makes for story. The ledger for
 me was both--I hear in the consequent
 text both poem and story, both language
 and ... the place where genre hesitates
 to assure the reader and begins to bargain
 instead. I think of those wonderful market-
 places where we, in rituals of approach
 and withdrawal, try to agree upon value.
 In this situation (site; citing?) the
 *** note becomes a telling genre. I like
 your speculations.

*Scraps and shreds of paper with notes
 jotted down on them turn up
 all through your papers--"Hell is
 prelogical"; "Canada: That which has not
 happened"; "If we don't have the courage
 to do this, we deserve our monotonies"--Is
 this one of the ways in which you generate
 ideas or at least keep track of them for
 future works or is this just a trail left
 for pathetic graduate students like
 myself, looking for meaning on the back of
 every cornflakes box?*

Scraps and shreds of paper. Contingency
 again. In the world, in the bar, in the
 kitchen--words seeking transformation--
 and only traces of the bookness of which
 paper is the bearer. Of course, graduate
 students should be led into the labyrinth.
 But I mark the way by getting lost myself.

*While I'm on the subject of your papers...
 Did you go through them and/or edit them
 in any way before depositing them in
 Calgary?*

I did almost no editing of the Calgary
 papers. The librarians invited me to
 keep hands off. And I liked their offer
 of creative participation. They gave
 rein to their own impulses to make
 story.

At what point in your career did you begin to realise that someday someone would be sitting in a Special Collections Division somewhere, trying desperately to decipher your handwriting? Did you start saving more of your notes and drafts? Ever think of leaving any trails (the wild-goose-chase variety or otherwise) for potential researchers?

Knowing that someone would look at my papers (I destroyed a whole novel in the late fifties because I didn't know about papers) has possibly led to a bit of destruction. Given my nature, I am more inclined to cover trails than to leave them. I am in some way extremely private, even (offensively) secretive. People who have worked with me for years complain that they know nothing of me.... Perhaps, on the other hand, the writer is an empty box.

MOTIVATIONS/RESEARCH

*** *I was amazed, consulting your papers, to see the degrees to which you go in research, i.e., consulting Weston's field notes at the Ottawa archives or writing to farmers and weather bureaus about the number of weeks of drought a wheat crop can withstand. Why is that accuracy so important to you?*

Accuracy is part of my way of being in the world. Being in heaven or hell is easy. But dailiness.... The dailiness of our lives. How measure that? How guess story with your eyes pressed to a head of hair, with your ear pressed to a crow's calling? Is the crow calling? Do I guess wrong?

*If the fiction makes us real, what does
the "real" make our fiction?*

Your fiction/real comment. Right on.
I've been puzzling about that lately.
I want to read what you decide.

**It wasn't a comment
It was a question**

... nice dodge

*** *How would you describe the relationship
between realism and, say, theoretical
content in your work? Do you see it as
more of a harmonious balance or a tension?*

Perhaps realism is only one form of
linguistic play. And, yes, perhaps the
word tension has been worked too hard
in this century. Part of the pleasure
resides in the precarious, the
impossible balance of... Where are
you words? The balance of... I try to
put it literally, into my poems. Where
is it in the novel? ... Harmonies. Do
something with that, please.

*How "real" do your characters become to
you? I noticed, again, in your notes to
yourself, the number of times you were
struggling to find just the right voice
for each character.*

Wow. Have you read my papers!
Yes--why should not a character in
a novel be just as "real" as a person
in life. Both are based on discourse
strategies that are mostly narrational.

*And that prairie landscape? Would you ever
consider abandoning that setting? Do you
think it would affect your work whether a
given novel were set there or not?*

The prairie landscape. It centers my own narrative sense. I talk of that, outward from that. Even when absent it is, I would hope, present. It helps me locate a narrative that resists the powerful eurocentric narratives that we so unwittingly accept.

Consider the fate of the potato--moving heroically from South America into a resisting Europe, a converted Europe, a back to our version of America. Other narrative possibilities are everywhere around us. Consider the wheat that we think so basic to prairie landscapes. Consider the straw hat.

Jeopardy!
The game of
supplying
the right
question
to the
answer

I'm losing
but I'm enjoying
the game
but

WRITING/RITUALS

Here
we enter
the labyrinth

Most of your novels open with epigraphs. At what point in the writing do you choose them?

*** *I noticed that several of your novels are plotted out, chapter by chapter, on the backs of old maps. Is this just because maps provide a single sheet of paper large enough on which to compose or does this have something to do with the importance of place in your work?*

What about the many poems that are scrawled on the backs of SUNY Bing health questionnaires or course outlines? There's kind of a neat sense of intertextuality in reading a poem written over top of the canon of modern literature, but I can't make a connection between "A Physician's Evaluation of Patient's Mental Attitude" and the draft of "Wong Toy" written on the back of it. Are they related?

How important is a place like YADDO in your career as a writer?

Didn't you help establish a similar artists' retreat in Saskatchewan?

How do you know when you're finished?

In a way I was aware of the contextuality --the poem scrawled on the back of a "written" piece of paper. You are a reader who likes risks.

YADDO.

I'm exhausted. A long day. I'm trying, at the moment, to listen to a program on Martha Ostenso's WILD GEESE. It's a novel I include in my undergraduate course in the Canadian novel. I don't know how to get to the top of page four using this machine. Page 3, it says at the bottom of the screen. But I've printed out the first three pages to see if I can use the printer. News: about Iraquis [sic] trying to surrender to the occupying forces, with the war over. News: the disasters that are Yugoslavia. What awaits Canada? What is the place of fiction in this story? We try to locate fiction and poetry in politics. The weather: minus 8 tonight, plus 5 tomorrow. We measure....

I begin to see

jeopardy/risk

question the
questions

the
answers
will appear

YADD0. I could take it for short periods of time only. Maybe two weeks, in order to finish a work. I should write about the experience but can't. The concentration--being alone and writing from say 9:30 in the morning until around 5 in the evening --we were provided with lunch, lovely studios--

I was interested in seeing something similar evolve in Saskatchewan. That program blossomed, then a couple of years ago came under crippling economic fire. It may be staging a comeback. The boom and bust that is so much a part of prairie life is a part of artistic activity as well.

Epigraphs. They tend to strike me late in the process of writing a novel. And as for maps--I read them as a boy in school, I read them now--as muse, as story, as dream.

I know a book is finished when it tells me to leave the story.

FEMINISM

*** *Basically, I have this problem discerning what's going on in your work with respect to women. I find that I am torn when trying to decide when and if you are being*

ironic. It seems to me that, as a body of work, your novels are either incredibly powerful parodies of masculinist attitudes or they are among the most striking examples of sexist work. They can be read either way, depending on reader attitudes with respect to irony, etc., but not, I think, both ways.

Anna Dawe and Anna Yellowbird are two of the most beautifully written female characters of which I am aware. However, I can point to few other female characters in your work which I can argue are given full subject positions. And characters such as Reggie the Bull Dyke or Martha or Julie are at best portrayed as flat and stereotypical--at worst, one could argue, with more than a little misogyny. How do you respond to this issue?

I am curious also, on this issue of women in your work, as to why you have never been questioned about this before. I've read 27 "Interviews with RK" at last count, and no one, to my knowledge, has even raised the issue. Can you hazard a guess as to why not?

About the male world--

I am a parodist. Reggie and Martha and Julie are studies in the fantasy lives of some pretty shaky males. I am fascinated by point of view as shaper of what we see--an unforgiving (for the individual whose it is) element in what I'm here calling contingency and a side of contingency that makes some readers long for the "universal." Susan Rudy Dorscht, of Calgary, has a book coming out on my writing/reading of women--it should be out in May.

??Is there any other

You mention 27 interviews. Good grief. I'm going to keep quiet, this is my last interview. Interesting that I don't catch so much as a glimpse of the interviewer. Another version of silence? (The sister of mine who died

in California was in some ways my--I resist Jung--anima; we were two voices within a voice.)

AUDIENCE

Do you have an ideal reader?

What do you know about your "demographics," as a publicist might say?

*** *Do you think about issues of elitism when you write? Are you conscious of who may or may not "get" your allusions or fully comprehend what you do with language? (I guess I'm getting back to the realism and "story" vs. language and theory again...)*

I'm surprised when people find me hard to read. Perhaps that's because I'm my own ideal reader. My sense of privacy makes it difficult for me to show unfinished work to anyone. Smaro has helped at times, with her sense of the physicality of ideas. But mostly I'm secretive. By the way, I'm at the moment trying to work through an unfinished draft of a novel with an editor (Ed Carson) and I have found it useful. I make a book as easy as I can make it without lying about what I'm writing. I'd blush to be called elitist--I'm at heart a prairie democrat with a literal sense of what equality means.

EDUCATOR

How do you see your role as teacher?

What considerations do you have in mind when you design a syllabus?

Have you ever taught one of your own works?

Do you think being a teacher and, essentially, helping the novice learn to interpret, affects your writing in any way?

What about didactic elements in your work? Do you ever feel as though you are trying to teach a lesson or convey a message?

*** *You often seem to parody academics or academic criticism in your novels. I'm thinking of GONE INDIAN in particular, but the same could be said of much of your fiction. What does this say about your opinion of, or your membership in, academe?*

I like to think of myself as an enabler. Students tell me I somehow "give them permission" to write what other forces prevent them from writing. I have never taught one of my own works. I like to think I am generative as a teacher, as a writer. The two roles are not in conflict for me. In fact I experience some anxiety at the thought of being a writer and no longer a teacher. My "construction of self" works better when I teach than when I write.

**I see now
why RK & LR
became such fast
friends**

Yet I parody academics. I ache to see how many academics don't live in the world that surrounds them. They treat knowledge as an escape from the world. They hide in what passes for knowing and pretend to some kind of absolute knowing. Our "knowing" (and the puns are important) depends on context of emotion, of ignorance, of silence, of --for lack of another word--love. The erotics of knowledge. The erotics of teaching. The erotics of writing and reading.

MYTH

*** *What do you see as the role of myth in our culture, or do you think it has a role any longer?*

What attracts you to mythic tropes or modes of writing?

The necessary fictions. The trouble arises when people begin to forget the fiction part and kill and maim in the name of their myths. The fiction part keeps us open and lets us evolve. Consider the history of the condom in our own brief time, from marginalised "secret" to TV star. That's delightful and important. The condom become icon. And the implied, again, erotics--we flirt with the transcendence because it too is an appealing fiction--but we should make love in a dialogic not a submissive way.

There's a lot of "questing" in your work, whether the "serious" or the "parodied" variety. Again, what draws you to that theme?

Questing. Tell me how to get around that one, Alanna. Is not parody the only way? Is it mortal time, the time of clocks and calendar--for all our versions of transcendent time--that tells our story at the same time that we are telling it? On this one we should be talking, not writing. And yet--consider those remarkable fictions--the week, the 60 minute hour in a 24 hour day.

You seem to see keys to the present as being found in the past. Why is that?

I suppose I tell story against the
inherited story and in subtle abrasion
with the inherited story and in wicked
complicity with the inherited story.

*I came across references to Joseph
Campbell's THE HERO WITH A THOUSAND FACES
quite a few times in your notes. Recall,
if you can, what that book is about for
you.*

*** *The appropriation of myth has become
rather a hot topic of late. How do you
respond to the argument that writing using
Native myth, for example, is best left to
native writers?*

*** *I have heard, through friends who attended
your reading at Sechelt this past summer,
that you said you would "hesitate" to
publish "Old Man Stories" today. Why (or,
I suppose, why not)? And if you would not
publish them today, why do you continue to
read from them?*

When I read Joseph Campbell I read
him as a barebones writer. I now see
that he too had an agenda. As for
appropriation--I would be willing, am
willing, now, to risk all. My
hesitation at Sechelt was a hesitation
in the face of the question how? How,
these days, use other stories. To write
is to appropriate. Even to write so-
called autobiography is to appropriate.
Like the rumored Indian, we must ask
forgiveness of the deer we are about
to kill.

**Somehow I don't
think this here
cowboy movie
pun was intended**

BIOGRAPHY

*If I were an actor hired to play you in
"The Robert Kroetsch Story," what would I
need to know in order to get a sense of my
character's motivations?*

If you were the guest of the week in "THIS IS YOUR LIFE," whose voices would be coming out from behind the magic curtain and what would they say about you?

Your questions are fabulous questions.
I see how skilled and wicked you are
as an interviewer.

Gee, another great
dodge

this box isn't
empty

there's a trickster
inside

SANS-CATEGORY

What do you think you would have done had you not become a writer?

If you had to choose between one of the roles you now play, i.e., you could only teach or only write poems or only criticism, etc., do you think you could choose? Which would it be?

Surely this is your major category, oh wise undoer of the world's small designs. Until I went to Portugal, a couple of weeks ago, I would have chosen teaching over writing, given that impossible choice to make. Since my two weeks in Portugal I would choose writing. Perhaps I have chosen writing. As for other careers--I can imagine being a print maker or a potter--but haven't the slightest talent for either role. I notice that either would, as writing does, allow me to be alone while worrying endlessly about society and culture.

Your questions are beautiful. You make an art of the exactness and the impossibility of questions. It's your move.

Robert Kroetsch

March 17-18 (a long night), 1991

JUVENESCENCE

A whole unlearning of the acquired self,
back to the boy who would have written the
novel. To letting him write it.

★ ★ ★

Neat the way that serendipity takes over at times, especially when you are absolutely desperate. I mean, I was doing fine for the first nine chapters... A through *I* were easy to figure out. But then I got to *J*. What was I going to talk about? You know, when I started this project and first began telling people about it, every smart-aleck in the department emerged to say, "Oh yeah, so what are ya gonna do about *Z*, huh?" Or maybe if they were of the slightly more original sort they'd pull out the big guns and cite *X* as the letter that would confound me. I had those covered, I'd chuckle. Who'da thought that a comparatively innocent letter like *J* would turn out to be my nemesis?

I was not about to let one little letter spoil the whole thing, so I set about finding myself a word. I began my quest with a couple of volumes of Kroetsch's poetry. I thought there had to be a *J* word in there somewhere that

I could spin in to an argument about something--its significance as a symbol in the poem, maybe as a *mise en abyme* for something; if I was really lucky, maybe I could even find something really profound, like a synecdoche. (You see, my experience has been that the more obtuse the literary term you choose to exploit, the more impressive your work appears). No luck, though. I found a "just" here and there and a "jiggle" and even a "John" and a "James," but nothing that even I, a self-proclaimed wizard at bullshitting, could spin into an argument.

Next I turned to the four sets of encyclopedias my father had bought me as a kid--well, they're not exactly sets per se. You see, *my Dad would start buying them when they were on sale at safeway one volume a week if you bought \$20.00 worth of groceries but after a week or two he'd forget* see daddy's a chef and lots of times he brings home leftovers from work only I'm not suppose to call 'em leftovers an' I'm not suppose to tell anyone cause daddy could get in trouble with his boss that asshole uh-oh I'm not suppose to use that kind of language either even though nobody tells me why except mommy says daddy likes me to do as I say not as I do anyway we don't really need to go to Safeway every week like other kids families do an' even though I wouldn't say this to daddy cause I love him alot he's getting kind of old an' he doesn't remember stuff so good anymore so even when we do have to go to safeway if I don't go with him that's one of my favourite things to do cause daddy carries me around the store over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes an' pretends he doesn't know where I am but so if I don't tell him to he'll start talking to the vegetable cronies that's what mommy calls the neighbour ladies who ask all the questions an' so they have a new recipe they want to try an' he's a chef so he

knows how to do it an' he comes home an' gets that funny I'm sorry duck look on his face an' mommy rolls her eyes and so I don't get the next encycrapeedia an' the stores are kinda mean if you ask me cause if you miss one of the books they won't let you get it the next week cause once they start selling the EUR-GOT they won't let you buy any CLO-EUR's an' daddy says it something called a shaft an' when I don't get it he just laughs an' says I will when I grow up so anyhow I have four part sets of encycrapeedias an' I use them to do all my school reports just cause I don't have all the way up to z doesn't mean I can't do good reports I just pick topics that start with letters I have like when we did canada I wrote about bc an' when we did western europe I wrote about italy an' when we did south america I wrote about brazil an' did an oral report on ecwador for bonus marks but then when we did eastern europe an' I had to do checkoslovackia when i wanted to do rusha or the ussr like we're suppose to call it now but no matter what you call it I still don't have the right letters...

--Hey, wait a minute.
That's a story!

Wow, amazing how just one image can take you right back to the immediacy of a whole lifetime, or at least childhood, of experiences. And profound how the alphabet is still structuring my academic life--something about those formative years... The point was, of course, that I had two sets that made it up to the J's, but neither of them had any light to shed on my dilemma.

The final attempt: I latched on to the complimentary dictionaries and thesauruses (thesauri?) that always came with the encyclopediae (another tricky one), and started plowing through the J section. When I'm really in

trouble, I always fall back on old habits. Gives you a sense of security, you know? My dictionaries had never let me down as a kid, and sure enough, I found the word: "juvenescence." It means "to grow young."

How do you grow a poet? You go back to his beginnings. And that's just what (little Bobby) Kroetsch does in his writing.

Kroetsch's works return the reader again and again to the "seeds" of his childhood, of his self. His settings revert to the prairie of his boyhood; his characters recreate the townspeople of rural Alberta; his plotlines trace the themes and images that were significant to the place in time where he began. More importantly, however, Kroetsch captures the worldview, the spirit of a child, clearly regarding it as a central component to writing and creation. The writer here, is conveyed not as the Author or possessor of Truth, but as a fellow quester, a bundle of questions.

Anyone who has ever spent any length of time with a small child is familiar with the endless stream of questions which spring forth from them as their minds wrap themselves around new ideas. Children, when first learning grammar, for example, want to know why all sentences must have subjects? verbs? objects? Why does this or that word need a capital? How come so many words aren't spelled the way they sound? Why do parentheses need to close? One can almost feel the degree to which their new ideas are being moulded and limited as a result of the conventions and rules to which they are made to conform. Kroetsch, instead, prefers to explode those limits, exploiting and at times ignoring the rules, and his readers find themselves faced with texts that look like these:

?did he curse
 ?did he try to
 go back
 ?what happened
 I have to/I want
 to know (not know)
 ?WHAT HAPPENED

("Stone Hammer Poem," FN, 4)

I AM/naught. That's all I is. Mmmmmmmmmmmmm.

Zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz.

(After Paradise," FN, 267)

((I have aspired to all forms of folly; now
 I am being wise

("Letters to Salonika," FN, 160).

Indeed, children are aware of the "arbitrariness of the linguistic sign" in a much more profound way than are we adult students of Saussure. They want to know *why* a dog is called a dog and a cat a cat, and all we can tell them is "because they are," and feel inadequate as they look at us in disappointment, knowing that this is not a satisfactory answer. It is not, I would argue, so much Kroetsch's knowledge of contemporary linguistic theory that leads him to probe the limitations of the significance of words, as it is his childlike fascination and sense of wonder at the possibilities which, for example, six definitions of the word *ledger* may offer him.

How do you suppose butter was discovered?

Kroetsch's approach to language and form parallels "the emergence of meta-linguistic awareness in the child: a distinct maturing is achieved when he is aware of himself as word user, and able to laugh at word play" (FOW,

118). A child's favourite thing to do (well, probably a runner-up to consuming vast amounts of sugar and destroying property) is to create language. My best friend Jenny and I thought we were the coolest kids on the block when, at about the age of eight or nine, we "invented" Pig Latin: we had our own little world and a special way to combine communication and rebellion. We could talk about secrets in front of our mothers and teachers and they couldn't understand a word we said--or so we liked to think. And my big brother and sister used to comb Mom's giant 1956 Modern Medical Cousellor (pawnd off on her by a sly door-to-door salesman and referred to by us kids as "Mom's Recipe Book") for names of diseases with which they could torment me. I lived in fear of horrifying maladies such as "impentaygo," "elephantitis," "pamifingus" and the dreaded "herpes zosters," fully convinced they could strike at any moment. While the glossy photos of angry rashes and oozing sores no doubt contributed to my trepidation, those polysyllabic, unpronounceable words had power for me--perhaps even power over me, for a time. This is not to say, however, that I was incapable of (linguistically) getting even with my siblings. I, too, had a growing vocabulary: "weasel-breath," "fart-face," and "poo-nose," were, as I recall among my favourites. Word-play, for children, while silly and fun and laughter-provoking, is very serious business: it provides the opportunity to express the secret, the taboo, to break rules and invent new ones, to challenge authority and themselves.

In the same way that children resist the traditional rules of Adults, Kroetsch resists the rules of Authorship. Children beg for the freedom to make their own decisions, to say and do and be what they want in their own way, and Kroetsch's self-conscious resistance to literary conventions, genre boundaries

and grammatical constraints invokes this child-like response to the world in many ways. Take, for example, the pleasure and defiance of the adolescent Kroetsch's "playing dirty" in "Seed Catalogue" and chanting

I don't give a damn if I do die do die do die do die do die do die
do die do die do die do die do die do die do die do die do die do
die do die do die do die do die do die do die do die do die do die
do die do die do

or the play with nursery rhymes enjoyed by his younger self:

Beans, beans
the musical fruit;
the more you eat,
the more you virtue.

(FN, 45, 33)

Indeed, "Seed Catalogue" is perhaps best understood as a child's poem--and this child is a rebel.

Does your mama know that you're going to hell?/
Does your mama know you're doing it well?/ Does
your mama know how you love to screw?/ She was
pretty good in her day too,/ they tell me.

Kroetsch repeatedly talks, in interviews and essays, about the *naïveté* that is required to write--the wonder, the magic, the willingness to engage, to play. Indeed, game theory plays a large part in his speculations on fictional discourse: "I think a kind of erasure of self goes into fiction-making. It's interesting that we PLAY a Game, isn't it? These two words resist each other in a signifying way. PLAY resists the necessary rules of the

GAME" (LV, 50). One gets a sense, in reading almost any of Kroetsch's texts, of a concept of play which mirrors the way in which children play games. When they are unsatisfied with the rules as they exist--when they cannot "win" by playing the game as it was designed--children simply make up new rules: "anybody with blue eyes gets two bonus points"; "All little kids get an extra five minutes to hide...."

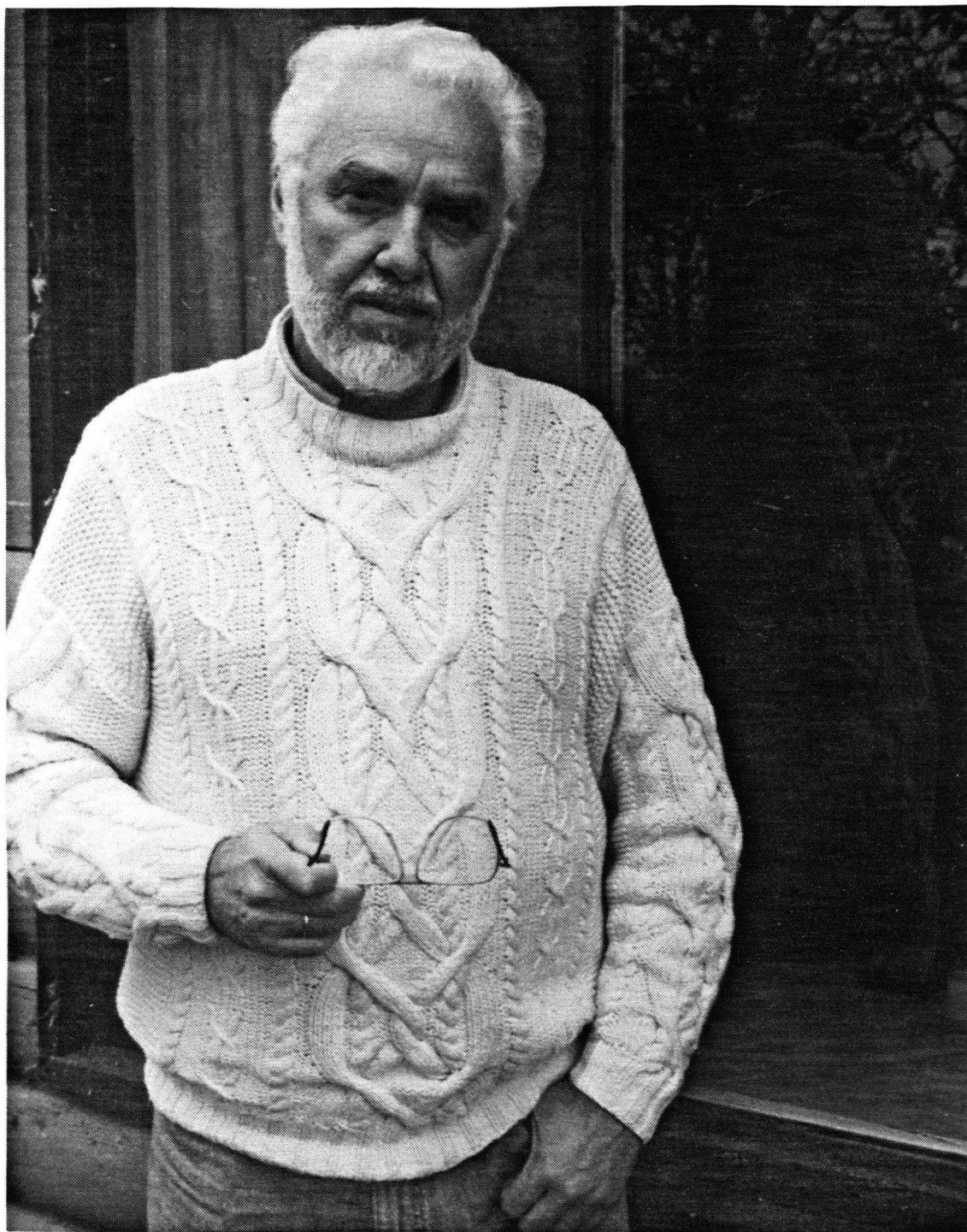
oops is the right name for accident

Language itself may be construed as a game, writing as a form of play. This idea is certainly not a new one: Saussure draws parallels between language and chess in several instances in his Course in General Linguistics. Language's rules of selection and combination are arbitrary, products of a chance roll of the dice, and potentially infinite, given language's diachronic possibilities. Kroetsch plays both with and against language--depending on whether or not the rules as they exist will allow him to "win"--and in the process, passes the ball to the reader, inviting her to get out onto the playing field and into the game.

"Stone Hammer Poem" are three nouns, like "RockPaperScissors," a game of continuous breaking, covering and cutting. . . . Only paper, covering rock, wins that game. And this paperweight is on top.

KROETSCH

... no camera so far has done justice
to my fascinating face...



LANGUAGE

. . . it seems to me that language is totally removed from the notion of speech and voice I don't think I understood at first how language is separate from what it signifies. I was interested in language as signifying things that were not allowed, were taboo... it's only recently that I came to see that what language signified was language.

* * *

In What the Crow Said, language is not only explored and pressured in characteristic Kroetschian style, but it is also thematised/characterised/personified. (The nature of and degree to which Kroetsch probes and stretches the limits of language in this novel can perhaps be evidenced by my own difficulties in finding a word to describe it adequately). The first character to whom we are introduced in Crow is Vera Lang[ue], a woman who, after copulating with a swarm of bees (bee/be/b--a single letter, a single phoneme, which mesmerizingly conveys the entire essence of our existence), "starts[s] everything" (7): language and being have intercourse and the world of the novel is born. The child of that union, JG, significantly referred to only by

Language itself is a version of plot.

his initials (letters? signs? syllables?), is mute. He is not portrayed as trapped in his silence, however--far from it. JG is "the most beautiful baby ever born in Big Indian Hospital" (61), eternally young and fundamentally free to express himself from the very roots of his be(e)ing: "JG was not guilty of thought. It was a simple knowing that took him where he went" (147).

A face that is only beautiful, a boy who never grows old--because he is free of language.

JG is Kroetsch's enactment of his belief that the authenticity of voice, the lyricism and profundity of poetry, are firmly rooted in the body. We discover, for example, late in the novel, that JG sang in the womb for almost the full term of the pregnancy: "Only at the moment of birth did JG fall into his terrible silence" (156). The implication here is that JG could not make the transition from the warm, liquid safety of the Mother's body to a world of rigid signs and systems unscathed. The raw splendour and grace of JG's spirit could not translate itself into mere words. In a world in which intellect, soul, and body are conceived as separate and distinct entities, JG is a vision of wholeness. His silence is not a "terrible" life sentence; it is a wondrous living sentience, a celebration of the voice of the body:

JG, locked up in the parlour, hearing the men return, was excited beyond all reason; but he couldn't speak a sound. He farted loudly out of pure joy. . . . the phone . . . ringing a confusing series of rings,

scar[ed] poor JG half out of his wits: soft, ripe
 excrement trickled down his pantleg onto the parlour
 floor. (129; 133)

We are taught, as children, to fart silently.
 What a pity. Perhaps, right there, we learn
 to abandon Voice. We try to "sound" like our
 "superiors." Imagine a society in which
 people praise the eloquence of each other's
 farting. A society of poets.

If the magical properties accorded to JG are not clear in the dexterity with which he expresses his emotions, we must consider that what the crow said is said for/to/on behalf of JG. It is this portrait of innocence, unsullied by language, and not the characters whose words make up the 218-odd pages of text, who provides the genesis of the novel's central issues.

That language is fundamentally the antagonist in this text is made eminently clear through the character of Liebhaver, a typesetter for The Big Indian Signal. (The triple punning here contributes to the foregrounding [sign-posting?] of language: signal as smoke signal, as signifier, and as "meta-signal" to the reader, hastening her to pay attention to word-usage). Liebhaver blames Gutenberg for all of the problems in his life, from his linguistic/job-oriented difficulties, to his habit of passing out in the "cans" of the beer parlours and other dwellings in which he is wont to imbibe, only to be found with his hands frozen in somewhat indelicate postures (cf. 54, 115, 165). Liebhaver's many interior monologues express nothing short of hatred at the inability of signs *not* to mean:

He liked to drink while he sat alone at his kitchen table and hated his collection of type. He tried, with the twist of a wrist, to turn an M into a W. Failing at that, he turned a T upside down; but he could read it as easily upside down as upright. . . . He set the word OUT, building from the T he had tried to mock out of meaning. He left the T on the table. He placed the U on a windowsill. He carried the O into his living room. But he knew the word OUT was still OUT. It was the failure to reduce a mere three-letter word to nothing that made him attempt a sequence of illogical sentences; he printed across the linoleum of his living room floor: I'M NOT ALONE. REALLY. (54-55)

The man who lives by words alone is truly that. Liebhaver recognises the Derridean dilemma which we all now face: the language speaks *us*.

I despise words, he wrote; he stared at the sentence, enjoying it. Writing it down had freed him, in some way he did not fully comprehend.

Liebhaver comes to cherish and care for his wooden type pieces as one would a collection of rare birds or a flower garden composed of unique blooms. Indeed, the letters *individually* have life-like qualities in his estimation. Perhaps language fails again and I am being disparaging or reductive without intention. Let me correct myself: for Liebhaver, the letters *are alive*; it is

only when the alphabet, the system, takes over that the letters lose their capacity to simply *be* and he rages at their subjugation:

All the capital letters in his collection of wood type were set in neat rows, arranged alphabetically. He couldn't bear that. . . In terror at the domestication of those free beautiful letters--no, it was the absurdity of their recited order that afflicted him: ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ--he opened a twenty-six [!] of rye and, with immense effort, tried to disentangle himself from the tyranny of rote. The U, he argued aloud to himself, in the Middle Ages, was the final letter, held by the wisest of men to be only a rounded version of V. He tried to resay the alphabet and failed. I and J, he remembered, were once deemed the same: he tried to disregard one in his recitation and lost both. He tried again, the simplest changing of the alphabet--and heard himself making sounds for which he had no signs at all. (69)

Like Liebhaver, Kroetsch also often finds himself making "sounds" for which there are no signs. Kroetsch, too, rages at the seeming imprisonment of linguistic system--Lang/*langue*--perhaps why he revels so in *parole*, the freedom, with certain stipulations and conditions attached to it, that may be attained in, for example, the neologisms with which he has come to be associated ("becomingness," "unhiding," "uninventing"...). Only words which resist their wordness, constructions with their own deconstructions built-in,

labyrinths of meaning which defy the narrowness of hieroglyphics, etymology, definition, can hope to reconcile the Liebhaber/Kroetsch contra-diction: these despisers of words must live through them.

The balance of Liebhaber's love/hate relationship with his set of wooden type pieces would seem, at the end of the novel, to have been tipped in favour of love... our linguistic sign-post, our Big Signal, tells us that he is, after all, a love-haver. When he thinks that his life and his world may be coming to an end, Liebhaber turns to thoughts

of his own small collection of wood type,
hoarded away from the destroying world. Those hidden
words, failed in their hiding. . . . Yes: his hands
wanted those few scraps of wood, those fragments of
old trees, carved and cut into the shapes of the
alphabet. They were all he had brought with him from
whatever the place was that he had fled or abandoned.

(197)

We can only speculate as to what Kroetsch's thoughts would be at a similar moment, what his collection of wood type might be: possibly the alphabet blocks he played with as a child, the building blocks of his own language-acquisition; the box of notes and diaries and stories he kept under his bed while growing up; or, perhaps more appropriate would be a word-hoard comprised of his signature phrases.*

* The idea for the following (dare I call it?) poem is borrowed from David Wagoner's "The Words" in Collected Poems: 1956-1976. Bloomington/London: Indiana UP, 1976, p. 53.

THE WORDS

Crow, memory, how?, breast, fear,
Failing to unhide the discoveries of the site.
These are the words guaranteed to appear
In any text Robert Kroetsch did write.

He possesses a wide and varied lexicon,
Other birds, other questions, other glands,
But these words, it seems, have a pull that is strong,
Attracting, inspiring the poet of prairie lands.

There are blackbirds and who's? and anxieties and legs,
Potential success covering stones, fences, and pegs,
But, more often than not, in the end
Kroetsch returns to these old friends.

* * *

Language itself, the trickster, perhaps.

METAPHOR

The notion of transference that's involved
 in metaphor moving from one place to
 another And I think it's that moving
 we distrust

* * *

Kroetsch has said in interview, numerous times, that he resists metaphor, that it is a "too easy" way to write a poem, and that he has abandoned it in favour of metonymy (cf. LV, 92-94, 116-117; RDT, 45-46). These kinds of statements, I argue, are best understood by critics as another of Kroetsch's interesting, but hardly factual tales. "The Ledger," the text Kroetsch has repeatedly introduced as evidence of his newfound metonymic re-naming, is (Sorry Bob), undeniably metaphoric. You see, metonyms, as expressions of part/whole relations, do not draw on additional semantic fields. But wait! There's hope for Kroetsch's (desired, if not entirely actual) aesthetic yet. But I begin in the middle. Let me explain using the model for metaphor developed by Eva Kittay and Adrienne Lehrer in "Semantic Fields and the Structure of Metaphor."

Kittay and Lehrer offer a theory for the analysis and explication of metaphor essentially based on the following tenets:

1. In metaphor two otherwise unrelated conceptual domains are brought into contact in a manner specifiable through the use of the linguistic notion of a semantic field (31);
2. Semantic field theory is based on the assumption that the meaning of a word is determined in part by other related words available in the lexicon (32);
3. Within this view of semantic field theory, "lexemes in a field can be related paradigmatically or syntagmatically. The commonest kinds of paradigmatic relationships are synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, converseness, part-whole relations, and incompatibility. The syntagmatic relations of a field indicate the basic underlying structure of sentences in a given semantic field or indicate rules and relations specifying what collocations are possible given certain semantic considerations, i.e. considerations which govern the constituents of a given field (33);
4. In metaphor the lexical items [the paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships] from one semantic field are transferred to another semantic field and the structure of semantic relations of the first field (the donor field) provides the structure or reorganises some previous structure of the second field (the recipient field)" (32);
5. The transference of meaning can be seen as a process in which the structure of one semantic field reorders and imposes a new

structure on another conceptual domain. To regard metaphor in this way will help to explain the conceptual interest of metaphor (34).

Now, it is this very transference of meaning and imposition of structure in metaphor to which Kroetsch objects. In simply damning metaphor as a generic

Kroetsch: . . . I guess I have this absurd hope that if I provide twenty names, then somewhere I will reach a point where they all connect and become more realized or identifiable. Metonymy isn't analogy either, is it?

Neuman: Metaphor is analogy.

Wilson: Metonymy only asserts that two things, or two signs, are sequential. . . .

Kroetsch: And so one just moves on and around, and there are further namings and renamings. I trust that process. I trust the discreteness of those naming acts. And it is very important, I think, that it is this very discreteness that becomes part of how writers are getting at stories, not the connections made by analogy, or by metaphor, which keep on insisting upon stable, definite structures. . . .

system, a homogeneous entity, which results in the evils of stasis and definition, Kroetsch ignores the possibility of difference, ignores his own propensity to deconstruct systems, his own inability to write in stable and definite forms. Ah, I get ahead of my own argument again. Let me demonstrate.

"The Ledger": the poem intersperses excerpts from the "real" ledger with passages from letters and articles, along with a variety of alternative/

historical/obsolete definitions of the word "ledger" and their literal and figurative extensions to create an intricately tangled web of metaphor. To be fair, I should acknowledge that Kittay and Lehrer's theory stems from a structuralist school which specifies, labels, and diagrams the transference of meaning which takes place in metaphor. Application of this sort of rigid theory to a poststructuralist poet/poem which attempts to defy such categorisation is probably cause for question. However, this very paradox compels me to attempt it. The metaphors in "The Ledger" lack many of the components Kittay and Lehrer propose. They are implicit and cannot be reduced to an easily delineated sentence; they have no explicit "points of incongruity" and resist even classification into sets of paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations. But *they are metaphors* nonetheless. Only in the tension between the systematic and scientific theory and the maze-like and deconstructed text can I hope to find an answer to the question of Kroetsch and metaphor.

I have learned a little bit more clearly that to go from metaphor to metonymy is to go from the temptation of the single to the allure of multiplicity.

While at least one metaphor is provided by each of the six definitions of the word "ledger," the primary donor field in the poem (because it is first in the sequence and because of the columnar form of the poem) is accounting, which restructures three recipient fields: the human life cycle, the

eco-system, and writing/poetry. For the moment, I will limit my discussion to these three metaphors.

THE LEDGER

- a. "in bookkeeping, the book of final entry, in which a record of / debits, credits, and all money transactions is kept."

the
book
of
columns (FN, 11)

Kroetsch generously outlines the characteristics conventionally associated with accounting. The "ledger" is the book in which the accountant records and tabulates figures, in columns of debits and credits. The paradigmatic relations of accounting can include synonyms such as bookkeeping, recording or tabulating. Accounting involves mathematical calculations--right and wrong answers--empirical truths. We tend to think of it as being a very dry, unimaginative enterprise, and our cultural stereotypes of accountants depict them as dull "number-crunchers," devoid of ingenuity or personality. Accounting also, importantly, involves the imposition of arbitrary structure; entries into the ledger must fall into one of only two categories: debit or credit.

Transferred to the recipient field of the human life cycle, as occurs through Kroetsch's exploitation of the elements of the donor field in his recounting of anecdotes from the lives of his ancestors in Bruce County,

Ontario (the columnar structure; the antiphonal repetition of "What do I owe you?"; "It doesn't balance"; "Paid in Full"), these relations transform significant human life experiences (the setting up of a home, the birth of a child, the growth of friendships) into a mere table of checks and balances. (See Figure A).

Married three Bavarians.
Buried three Bavarians. it balances (24)

Figure A

RESTRUCTURED FIELD OF HUMAN LIFE CYCLE
--

OPENING OF ACCOUNT	LOAN OF \$	REPAYMENT OF \$	MERGING OF TWO ACCOUNTS	INTEREST
BIRTH	FAVOUR DONE	FAVOUR RETURNED	MARRIAGE	BECOMING A PARENT
	DORMANT ACCOUNT	CLOSING OF ACCOUNT		
	OLD AGE	DEATH		

The "naturalness" we would generally associate with birth and death or the "romance" of falling in love and getting married, once imposed upon by the rigid, stark conventions of accounting, seem little more than debits and credits. And, if we consider the restructured syntagmatic relations (Figure

B), this cynical, cut-and-dried portrait of human existence becomes even more pronounced.

Figure B

RESTRUCTURED SYNTAGMATIC RELATIONS

AGENT	VERB	OBJECT	LOCATIVE
Accountant	records	money transactions	in ledger
Justice of the Peace/Clergy/ Government Official	records	birth/baptism/ marriage/death	on certificate/ license
Clergy/ Undertaker	records	name, birth and death dates	on tombstone

Viewed this way, human life is further restructured--reduced to what can be "filled into the blanks" (or columns) of standard records. Human life is depicted in the way it will appear generations after our deaths--with only sterile, emotionless accounts remaining to establish that we ever lived.

* * *

The ways in which the donor field of accounting serves to restructure the recipient field of the eco-system can perhaps be described as an undermining (or balancing) of this rather cynical view of human life. Though referred to as the human life cycle, the above restructuring delineated human life as just that--linear--with a beginning and an end. Foregrounded in this new context, however, is the "balance" aspect of accounting--give and take. Nothing comes from nothing: for every credit there is a debit somewhere, and, as this restructuring implies, for every debit there is also a corresponding credit. Once opened, an account never really closes; it merely transfers its funds. (See Figure C).

Shaping the trees
into logs (burn
the slash) into
timbers and planks.

Shaping the trees
into ledgers.
Raising the barn.

Shaping the trees.
Into shingles.
Into scantling.
Into tables and chairs.

Have a seat, John.
Sit down, Henry.

That they might sit down
a forest had fallen.
(14)

Cause of death:
went to sit down
and missed the chair (26)

Shaping the trees.
Pushing up daisies. (16)

Figure C

RESTRUCTURED FIELD OF ECO-SYSTEM	
CREDIT	DEBIT
growing tree	tree cut down
chair made out of wood from tree	human dies falling off of chair
human body (buried) fertilises growth of new trees	

I'll be damned. It balances. (16)	

This metaphor implies that no death is an "end," but merely a change of state, a transference of funds. It restructures the previous metaphor in the sense that our human lives are depicted as a component of the larger field that is the planet's eco-system and thus a debit to the inanimate world can be a credit to humans and vice versa.

* * *

The restructuring of writing/poetry by accounting is even more of a "jump" than the previous two metaphors--more implicit, and having more to do with ambiguous associations and conventions than easily "diagrammable" semantic relationships. A poet is conventionally thought of as an imaginative

"creator" of meaning, a spiritual person, moved by the Muses to transmitting profound thoughts and deep emotions via literary devices such as metaphors. Kroetsch tells us, however,

EVERYTHING I WRITE
I SAID, IS A SEARCH
(is debit, is credit)

is a search

for some pages

remaining

(by accident)

the poet: finding
in the torn ledger

the column straight
the column broken
(12-13).

The poet is revealed to be not a creative source of original insights, but at best a manipulator of "found," prior texts--the accountant, totalling the numbers of someone else's books. More importantly, however, in terms of the conceptual restructuring taking place, when faced with "the book of columns" that is "The Ledger," we are made to re-think our assumptions about the writing of poetry. Once the donor field of accounting has been superimposed upon the (writing of the) poem, we can no longer view it as the product of some great rush of creative energy and inspiration; rather, we must see it as the result of a process of cutting, shaping, and balancing of its component parts until each fits into a certain arbitrary structure--made overt through Kroetsch's exploitation of the columnar form. This restructuring is further reinforced when we begin to consider the relationship between the

accountant's numbers and the poet's words. In the same way that the accountant's ledger reduced people's entire lives to what they owed to whom and if they paid, the poet's "Ledger" reduces people's experiences to what can be put into words, delineated with the alphabet, a system easily as arbitrary as are numbers (if not more so). The poet once envisioned as the exemplar of free-flowing imagination is now no more or less an accountant than is a banker.

* * *

THE AUDIT

The "balancing act," in which I have engaged in trying to apply this categorical theory to metaphors for which there are not yet categories raises a number of issues. Kroetsch's assessment of metaphor as it is conventionally understood and employed is quite apt: certainly, Kittay and Lehrer's theory (here treated as representative of at least *most* conceptualisations of metaphor) does regard metaphor as a transference/imposition of meaning, a making of "A into B"--the very facet of metaphor which Kroetsch condemns (cf. RDT, 46; my page 113), and importantly, as occurring at the level of content or semantics, and uni-directional. In "The Ledger," however, the transference of meaning is multiple: donor and recipient fields are not simply linear and static, but are constantly shifting to evolve into a complex layering of metaphors--even *meta-metaphors*! The "meaning" is transferred principally at

the level of the columnar form and as often as "A" is made into "B," "B" is made into "A," and both are made into "C" or "D" or "E"...

Kroetsch's labyrinthine handling of meaning transference in "The Ledger" certainly deconstructs conventional metaphors; but, it does not *destroy* them. "The Ledger" is still a metaphoric text. Back to you Bob.

NOTE

Of the many problematically problematised genres into which Kroetsch's work may (refuse to) be slotted, only one gives even a sense of the varieties and multiplicities of Kroetsch's work because it is, by definition, without concrete definition: the note. "Note" implies sketchiness, incompleteness, perhaps randomness or arbitrariness, immediateness, streams of consciousness, and indefiniteness. The note--as amorphous, as process-oriented, as a *moving toward* an as yet unrealised something else, as transforming and transformational--may be anything we wish it to be.*

Note: as Advice to Himself

It seems to me I have
to sit down and write the
whole novel in one great
uninterrupted outburst - This is the
only way I can put into it a
sustained energy, a sustained tension.
This worked with both previous
novels.

* Please see Appendix A for transcriptions of holograph reproductions.

Don't hear the voice yet
 the situations are fine —
 so many good things going
 but humor does not quite
 come across —
 tone seems indefinite
 obvious,
 sex too strong? (a little
 more humor
 needed perhaps —
 perhaps not the one to one
 relationship between
 him & his profession?
 The war is brought in well
 How does he get out of scene with fall?
 Not clear?
 Why are the men angry w/ him?
 What are the bones used for, fuel?
 He is a "poet" — so is Johnny —
 is this good?

more of the labyrinthine scheming of Leeb, in his devising
 an escape from death. His endless returning to new possibilities.
 His ever-lasting blindness to the life that goes on around him.

But is it then a first-person story? Or limited third-person?
 No, I have to keep it in third person. But the presence of the
 "author" has to be more demanding/ against the story itself.

The pressure of Leeb's need against the flow of Tiddy's world.
 The intertwining.

More looseness into the style, the flow into Leeb's mood and
 poetry and stark meditation.

The total freedom of Leeb's creation in tension with his total
 obsession.

Escape from, abandon, everything that smacks of the merely.

Note: as Advice to his Friends

Let the chips fall.

Think of yourself there as your own shadow.

Consider submission. Forget desire.

★

Let the surprise surprise you.

★

Listen to the voice of the blackbird, my dear friends. When you hear not one phoneme, not one morpheme--not one smidgen of a sound--that is familiar: then you will cease to be afraid of your own Voices.

Note: as Caption

Sinnott took great pains to compose the picture in his mind, then adjusted the camera, then snapped. He muttered to himself: "Men Repairing a Sweep." And added to no one: "Vanishing."

He set up his camera to take a picture of the shore, as if that too must vanish. He waited, watched the shifting pattern of water, mud, grass, hills, sky: he snapped the picture, he said to himself: "Retreating Shoreline." Again he moved the camera, again he announced his title: "Chinese Cook and Cookstove on Open Deck."

Note: as Correspondence

No mail at all from you. I talk to myself. I begin to suspect I am writing these letters to myself, writing myself the poem of you.

Note: as Dispatch

I liked the telegram, the one you sent me reporting my birth. And the bouquet of thistles, that too bespoke a generosity and a thoughtfulness I hadn't anticipated. But why did you have the florist send me the bill in a black envelope?

Note, as Draft

6.

This stone maul
stopped a plough
long enough for one
Gott in Himmel.

The Blackfoot (the
Cree) not finding
this maul cursed.

7.

The poem
is the stone
chipped and hammered
until it is shaped
like the stone
hammer, the maul.

8.

Now the field is
mine because

I ~~said~~ it,

(I said it)

to a young man

who did not

notice that the land
did not belong

to the Indian who

~~said~~ it to the ~~Indian~~ who

said it to the C.R. who

said it to my gran father

who said it to my father

2/

who said it to his son

who said it to his son

The stone maul

however

Did L curse?
Did L (say)
Did L try to
go back?
What happened?
(~~that~~)
What happened?
What happened?
What happened?
What happened?

(for - please)
(for - please)
(for - please)

Note, Field

Grey, two-headed,
the pemmican maul

fell from a travois or
a boy playing lost it in
the prairie wool or
a squaw left it in
the brain of a buffalo or

it is a million
years older than
the hand that
chipped stone or
raised slough
water (or blood) or

Note, Foot

* I have removed from this stanza the single line
(her breast were paradigms)

Note: as Grocery List

I am tired of strawberries. One last basket to finish and
then I must stop eating strawberries. I had some cherries
yesterday. They were outrageously expensive. Perhaps I can

measure my waiting in kinds of fruit. There, I am almost through the strawberries, I have already begun the cherries.

*

To town to buy groceries: potatoes, bacon, eggs, milk, cheddar, brie, Swedish Stilton, lettuce, tomatoes, frozen orange juice, chicken, hamburger, margarine, radishes, canned soup, bread.

Note: as Letter

What is a letter? Sometimes it is a star that fell.
Sometimes it is a stone.

Note: as Memo

From you I could learn to hate geography. Its emptiness.
Its spaces.

Note: as Memoir

Even the two ends of an egg have difficulty understanding one another. As a child I believed rabbits lay eggs, and in that knowledge I was complete.

Note: as Postcard

I am in China without a language. What I saw from the sky was roads that weren't roads; I saw the irrigation system

for watering the land and from up in the sky I thought I saw roads, too many of them, brown, on the green of the green earth, and then I saw all those roads were water, and so in a sense they were roads, and I thought of the fingering of water, holding the land green; it was like that, I was happy to see that, and I understood; but then we were landing.

Note: as Record

page 33: James Darling

1880

Mar 22: to sawing square timber	1.44
June 21: to 1 round cedar bed	3.50
June 21: to 1 jack shingles	.50
Dec 4: to sawing mable [sic]	1.50

(it doesn't balance)

Note: as Reflection

I only buy used mirrors now. I like to see other faces when I look at myself.

Note: as Vignette

Winter was ending.

This is what happened:

we were harrowing in the garden.

You've got to understand this:

I was sitting on the horse.

The horse was standing still.

I fell off.

Note: the form of formlessness, the place of/for free play, the ways in which suddenly anything is fair game for writing: Kroetsch has said that when "we have nothing to write about, but NOTHING to write about, that is what we HAVE to write about" (LV, 145), and he does it beautifully. The rigid structures dictating the composition of fiction versus poetry versus criticism do not (at least, apparently, for Kroetsch) permit the expression of such unusual/quizzical/surprising/banal/self-directed/shared/ personal ideas; the forms and functions of the index card, the little yellow stickie, the datebook, the scrap or shred of paper *do*.

Please note...

ORAL

I'm still tempted by oral models where the story in the act of retelling is always responsive to individuals, to the place, to invention.

★

. . . I was tuning in on . . . the kind of self-creation that goes on orally. . . I'm fascinated by the content where we are literally in a new world telling ourselves about it, making each other up, inventing each other in this new world.

★

**Please request cassette of oral exam from thesis librarian.*

POSTMODERNISM

Kroetsch has been dubbed "MR. CANADIAN POSTMODERN" by Linda Hutcheon (cf. CP, 188 ff.); M.E. Turner refers not to Kroetsch's canonicity as a postmodern writer, but rather to his *canonization* (cf. ACC); Kroetsch has edited boundary 2: a journal of postmodern literature; he claims he writes Canada as a "postmodern country" (cf. LTW, 21-33, for example). Thus to argue for Kroetsch's postmodernism is nothing short of redundancy; it seems the Name of the writer and the Name ascribed to the writing have become synonymous. They should hereafter be read as such.

and Postmodernism is... the term designate for
fundamental self-reflexivity, the self-consciously
art(ifice), situating itself squarely in the
context of itself, its social and ideological
actualities (CP, 1, 10).

but Kroetschism is... wilfully fragmentary,
discontinuous, asystematic, incomplete (CP, 160).

- and* Postmodernism is... the consumerism of easily disseminated reality structures such that cultural entrepreneurs dabble gaily in the creation of new history, new science, new religion, new politics (R, 9).
- but* Kroetschism is... a transformation of reader into rat, labyrinth into hall of mirrors, cheese into nothingness.
- and* Postmodernism is... creative use of shelf space: keeping your Mozart, Twisted Sister, Beatles, Frank Sinatra, Fine Young Cannibals, Leonard Cohen, MC Hammer, Kenny Rogers and Placido Domingo collections in a funky holder equipped for 45's, 78's, 33's, eight-tracks, cassettes and CD's.
- but* Kroetschism is... a harmonious tension or a tense harmony refusing to balance the contra-diction between the implied universals of mythic story and the definite here-and-now-only-less of narrative.
- and* Postmodernism is... the fountainhead of noble lies (R, 11).

- but* Kroetschism is... eclectic, drawing as much from Victorian Dickensianism (or Dickensian Victorianism) and down-home Prairie farmhand bullshitting as from Faulknerian streams of consciousness or Marquezian magic realism.
- and* Postmodernism is... catching; preventative vaccinations are available at the Free Clinic for a nominal fee.
- but* Kroetschism is... ludic activity, a concept of play in which its inescapable rule-boundedness is matched by a laying bare of the game plans within the game itself so that others may play or refuse to play, but always with a knowledge of just what they are playing at.
- and* Postmodernism is... drinking Mexican beer bottled in Taiwan and (perhaps not) eating a pepperoni and fugu sushi pizza at an Ethiopian restaurant.
- but* Kroetschism is... at its best, a restoration to first place of the temporality of language over the spatiality of image (27.1.9.77).

- and* Postmodernism is... a kitsch ecotheology complete with its doctrines and its priest and priestesses (R, 12).
- but* Kroetschism is... the paradoxical setting up of and refusal of categorisation, a construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of sense making non-sense (sensually speaking).
- and* Postmodernism is... a bunch of WASP teenagers from Kerrisdale spending all their hard-earned McDonald's paychecks at a hole-in-the-wall shop in the East end called THIRD WORLD where they can buy 7ive hermit crab necklaces, 60's love beads and tie-dyes, woven *Tehuana* ponchos, and hand-carved Kenyan slave rings.
- but* Kroetschism is... a confrontation of the hopelessness and necessary hope of originality, a contriving of authentic origins, an orchestration of the absent (FWPF, 55, 56).
- and* Postmodernism is... agony: the pain of birth into its self, its world (R, 16).
- but* Kroetschism is... *not*.

- and* Postmodernism is... an elusive idea, with a now-you-see-it, now-you-don't- way of behaving (R, 26).
- but* Kroetschism is... actually choosing to give up free tickets to The Indigo Girls *Nomads*... *Indians*... *Saints* concert at the Orpheum to be followed by cheap lobster at the English Bay Cafe in order to stay home all but handcuffed to a computer named Biff writing an anti-thesis about nothing in particular and eating leftover alphaghetti.
- and* Postmodernism is... entirely unsatisfactory, quintessentially problematic, annoyingly awkward and calling to mind a band of vainglorious contemporary artists following the circus elephants of Modernism with snow shovels (PF, 3).
- but* Kroetschism is... an exploding porcupine, an erotics of space, un hiding the hidden, disunity as unity, a recitation of emptiness, a grammar of silence, a veil of knowing, the lovely treachery of words.
- and* Postmodernism is... wearing a Victorian, ruffled-collar lace blouse with faded and ripped Levi's, a smoking jacket, and K-mart \$12.99 rubber riding boots

(if one is a woman of course; worn by a man the outfit would be merely ridiculous).

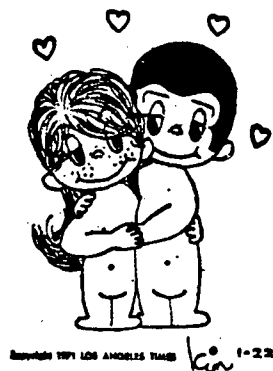
but Kroetschism is... a textual drunkenness; the incoherence and inanity, profundity and power of linguistic intoxication.

and Postmodernism is... modernism NEW AND IMPROVED, like Mr. Clean and its powerful new additive-- biodegradable surfactins (and a larger, shinier earring dangling from his glistening germ-free bald head).

but Kroetschism is...

[insert here entire thesis; then ignore it]

and Postmodernism is...



never having to say you're sorry.

QUESTIONS

((... remaining... lost... found

why are there not more *q* words in the english lexi-con

how come

maybe just may BE/E

it all begins with *q* with ?

there is so much

left

that I want to

cannot

know

not k/now

archaeologybioGrpahyca
 NnicitydialOgismeducat
 oRfeminismgenrehAngove
 riNterviewjuvenesCenck
 roetschlanguagEmetapho
 rnoteoralitypostmodern
 ismriskssystemtalltaleu
 nwestxyz.....

KnowledgewisdomdegRees
 educatiOnhonourslEarni
 ngTuitionedificationte
 achingcritciSmanalysis
 Closereadingexperience
 intelligenceinsightadv
 ancementonehelluvaloto
 ofhardwork.....

it doesn't balance

the weight of ignorance
 tips the scale

the books i should have read

the order of things
of grammatology
the alphabet book

the books i should not have read

the order of things
of grammatology
the alphabet book

the questions i asked of family and friends

can you think of any words associated with
 archaeology?

did mother goose write the alphabet book
 or was it someone else?

could "anon" have written it?

what's the name of that beat-up old
 medical book, mom?

what kinds of diseases can cattle get?

do you hyphenate grass-hopper?

is percheron a breed of horse?

what kinds of names did you call your
sisters and brothers when you were kids?

do you know anything about *italics*?

just where is this heisler place on a map,
anyway?

did grandpa have to abandon his farm in
the depression?

how far can i push the deadlines and still
have this done by april?

do you get it? i mean really, is it clear?
can you understand it? is it too easy?
seriously, do you get it?

what sorts of questions did i ask you
while i was writing my thesis?

the questions i was asked

what does the alphabet have to do with it?

how on earth did you come up with that
idea?

what are you going to do about "z"? "x"?
"q"?

are you sure you can say that? won't you
get into trouble?

does your voice want to split that
infinitive?

does your voice want to split this
infinitive?

you've got a lot of pages there, duck. why
can't you just cut a few chapters, write a
conclusion, and come home for dinner?

what in the sam hell do you think you're
doing here and do you really imagine
you're going to get away with it?

robert who?

the questions kroetsch refused to answer

what's the most commonly asked question?

what's the stupidest question (or sort of question), assuming, of course, that your answer will not be the same as to the previous question?

what have you never been asked, and possibly, would like to be asked?

why do you think no one has asked before?

what would your answer be?

what question(s) would you refuse to answer and why?

if the fiction makes us real, what does the "real" make our fiction?

any superstitions? do you have a favourite fountain pen or an antique typewriter? any way in which you always begin or always end a work?

do you have an ideal reader?

i do not want to write a dry, extended version of a publisher's squib for the biography chapter, so i am trying, instead, to pull together a series of vignettes to make a collage of sorts. do you think you could tell me a (tall) tale or two?

if i were an actor hired to play you in "the robert kroetsch story," what would i need to know in order to get a sense of my character's motivations?

if you were the guest of the week on "this is your life," whose voices would be coming out from behind the magic curtain for you to identify? what would they say about you?

anything you can tell me about upcoming work?

the questions i was told to ask

did he really travel through the badlands?

did the hotsprings scene in alibi really happen?

does he get women's permissions before he publishes their sex life along with his own?

is he aware of the very process of being interviewed by a graduate student?

did the hotsprings scene in alibi really happen?

what do his daughters think of his work?

has he ever asked a group of first nation's peoples what they think of his handling of myth?

did the hotsprings scene in alibi really happen? to him?

the questions i could not ask

how do you begin
 where do you find the strength/
 where do you find the weakness
 for language
 game
 story
 meaning
 for -less
 for -ness

?? how DO you woo a bear
 ?? how DO you make love in a new country
 ?? how DO you grow a Prairie town
 ?? how DO you grow a gardener
 ?? how DO you grow a lover
 ?? how DO you grow a past
 ?? how DO you grow a poet

?? how do you grow a *THESIS*

?? how do you DO

RISK

A serious writer who can always win is bored and boring. . . . We push to a point where we begin to risk losing. That's where fiction acquires a game element. In fiction, in writing itself, I think there is a temptation to failure.

* * *

Risk: the word is scattered throughout Kroetsch's writings, and its connotations inform his aesthetic perhaps more than any other concept. The primary consideration for any writer, of course, is the reader. Daring to write at all, daring to publish, involves risking possibly negative audience and critical reception.

Because Kroetsch pushes language and convention and expectation to the point where he "risks losing," his works do not present an "easy read." The text is so steeped in con-text, whether theoretical (Bakhtin, Barthes, Derrida, Eco, Foucault, Iser, Jakobson, Kristeva, Ong, Saussure....), intertextual (Barth, Borges, Lowry, Marquez, Ross, Stevens, Twain, Williams,

to name very few), or rural (the tall tale; the novelist, the language, as trickster), that, one could argue, years of pre-reading are necessary even to begin to grasp the possibilities. As Kroetsch has pointed out on numerous occasions, one cannot deconstruct what has not yet been constructed: "the whole notion of experimentation and *avant-garde* is based on the audience's having a strong sense of convention. . . . In our own time, the conventions [have] become so shaky that it's rather hard to be defiant about them" (LV, 190).

Kroetsch's work is never going to hit the bestseller list. But then, daring to speak of authorial intention for a moment, that is not his wish. Kroetsch is appealing to a "probing and intellectual readership," and wants to "move literary boundaries, not masses of people" (UST, 36). "Anybody can read one of my books," says Kroetsch, "but they have to be willing to do a little work--and play too of course" (ibid). The reader may refuse, however, may not enter into the game, may not be willing to put in the required energy and commitment, and Kroetsch recognises that in asking so much of his readers, he is "going for the big stakes" (ibid).

Kroetsch is quick to make clear, however, that his choice of writing style is not so much a calculated risk as it is a *necessary* one--writing without some element of risk is tantamount to the death of creativity:

You stay alive by moving around on those edges where you risk meaninglessness all the time. That's one of the risks you have to take on the edge, that it might be just totally meaningless. When you disallow the centre, you take that risk. (LV, 130)

Being on the "cutting edge" of his field, the explorer, the "first" to attempt some innovative textual strategy, can mean that Kroetsch liberates himself and discovers new forms; or, conversely, it can mean that he discovers this "new" form has never been attempted before because it is simply unworkable. In The Crow Journals, Kroetsch speaks of his writing process:

The meaning that doesn't quite mean. . . . I begin to understand that when I begin a novel I am the creator. I control, select, invent. At some point the created world assumes control of the creator. It uses the writer to get itself created, completed. Thus, currently, my loss of identity. I am the merest vehicle, the tool, of my novel's ambition... I am lost, but that is all. I am only lost. From that, there is a possibility of finding. (69)

Kroetsch seems to feel that the writer must dare to let the work write itself, to let the process take over--not merely the appearance of process remaining in the so-called "finished" product--but rather the opening of the textual site to the degree that what is sought is subjugated to what might be found. After the first reading of "Seed Catalogue," Kroetsch records his response: "It works as a poem. All that bloody gambling. It WORKS!!!" (CJ, 62). He is not sure what he was looking for, but he knows he has found something.

The poet not a maker, but as book-maker.

Again, we come to the notion of the labyrinth. Lifting the pen, facing the blankness of the page, the writer enters a maze. Somewhere between the

imagination and the paper lie all manner of traps and pitfalls and the writer must navigate over and around them, taking the risk of losing idea, focus, self, or worse yet, for Kroetsch, losing *out*--to order, to system, to time... to language.

I play on the edge of convention. I suppose that's one place where I bend the rules. I also take the risk of falling right into language: the danger of language taking over.

Kroetsch's short piece entitled, "Taking the Risk," takes the reader in still another direction with respect to this obsession. In it, Kroetsch talks about his childhood, his education, his early writing, his current work, until, at long last, in the closing line, he gets to the *point* and says: ". . . you must take the risk, finally of loving words. Of loving/words" (67). Ah, but to draw this hasty conclusion is to *miss* the point. That Kroetsch equates loving and words, as indicated by the either/or of his ever-present virgule, is no surprise, and is certainly not a "risky" disclosure. No, the real risks were taken in the parts of the narrative that I skimmed over trying to find the next reference to risk, to the revelation of the much-anticipated *point*.

I used to, I think, distance myself greatly--keep myself and my work far apart. But in writing poems like "Stone Hammer" I have taken the risk, so to speak, of looking at my own immediate experience rather than shaping it into fiction.

Perhaps the biggest gamble Kroetsch has taken in any of his work is his placing of his *self* squarely in the text... the awkward little boy in "Seed Catalogue" who gardens on the farm and gropes in the granary; the accountant/poet, son and nephew who (un-)narrates "The Ledger"; the friend presuming to counsel so many in Advice to My Friends; the father, husband, and lover revealing such private privates in "Postcards from China" and "Letters to Salonika"; the self-conscious and introspective writer of The Crow Journals.

Risking Humour:

poem for a child who has just bit into
a halved lemon that has just been squeezed:

see, what did I tell you, see,
what did I tell you, see, what
did I tell you, see, what did I
tell you, see, what did I tell
you, see, what did I tell you,
see, what did I tell you, see,
what did I tell you, see, what
did I tell you, see, what did I
tell you, see, what did I tell
you, see, what did I tell you,

see, what did I tell you, see,
 what did I tell you, see, what
 did I tell you

One could, of course, go on

("Sketches of a Lemon," FN, 87)

The reader might not laugh.

Risking the intensely personal:

I am past all fantasy, past even touching my own body. Except only
 that I rehearse you with my remembering tongue.

("Letters to Salonika," FN, 143)

The reader might not want to know.

Risking bodily harm:

I've been to bed with some dandy and also skilled
 ladies, sure, but would I a ballyhoo start
 for the keen (and gossipy) public?
 I'd be sued or whatever, maybe killed
 but (now and then) you've got to tell *somebody*
 and a reader has I guess, in spite of all, ears

("For a Poet Who Has Stopped Writing," FN, 105)

The reader might be offended.

Risking the banal:

Ken Probert and I went for a late lunch, this afternoon, to the new Burger King that has just opened on Pembina. Grand Opening. Little children wearing crowns. The children, in their make-believe, laughing. I asked for a crown. The young gentleman in charge of the crowns was offended.

("Letters to Salonika," FN, 150)

The reader might not care.

SYSTEM

I suppose I write against systems, even if I, ironically, end up incorporating a system. That's one thing. I do write against them.

* * *

I. The difficulty in subverting or deconstructing, the reliance on conventionalised meanings and forms and tropes in order to hide them...

"The Ledger": the *found* accountant's record, the already-created, the form we must know as it was in order to see what it *is*, the source we must recognise in order to appreciate Kroetsch's re-creation/un-invention of it, the necessity of reader expectations in order to fail to meet them.

What the Crow Said: the out-of-time-novel, the all-at-once-ness of which can only be transmitted by its not adhering to the prescribed beginning-middle-end, passing of seasons, coming of age and growing old time frames.

The thing that strikes me more and more in writing. . . is the power of conventions; if the reader does not know the conventions, we can't make it come alive.

"Stone Hammer Poem," "Seed Catalogue," "Sketches of a Lemon": the beautiful telling of story without narrative, without linearity, the eloquence of which becomes clear because of the paradoxical construction of and resistance to numerical ordering.

"Effing the Ineffable"; "For Play and Entrance: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem"; "The Moment of the Discovery of America Continues": the anti-essay-ness of Kroetsch's critical forms, the subversion (explosion) of Aristotelian five-part structures, of for examples, of giving time to the oppositions, of syllogisms, of transitions, and the essential horribleness of hinging the reception, the apprehension, the connection to/of the work on reader knowledge of what it is *not*.

. . . The whole notion of experimentation and *avant-garde* is based on an audience's having a strong sense of convention. . . . In our own time, the conventions became so shaky that it's rather hard to be defiant about them. I think that one of the paradoxes of serious art is its reliance on an audience that is grounded in conventions.

II. The deadline, the degree, the calendar, the daytimer...

Iraq invades Kuwait; the U.S. (the U.N. Coalition) invades Iraq (liberates Kuwait).

Desert Shield (which sounds like a brand-name for Arab condoms--Trojans, Sheiks, Desert Shields--they are all in the same semantic field) becomes Desert Storm overnight--the Naming and UnNaming, the construction of (my) reality.

Television programming becomes endless streams of CNN footage, including non-stop commentary on the dimples and muscular arms, shoulders, buttocks of their number one reporter, now dubbed "The Desert Fox."

Every PhD on the continent becomes a Middle East expert: "Ah, yeah, well, I travelled through Egypt in 1962 when I was trying to find myself after failing my Comps for the second time, and my impression of the area then is that it was very volatile....."

Every economist becomes an oil-speculator: "Canadians pay more at the pumps... film footage at 11:00."

The American toy industry, victim of the recession, begins to boom again, designing a Saddam doll, new fatigues for G.I. Joe, and miniature PATRIOTS

which can actually intercept SCUDS. (In Canada, I guess we'll be manufacturing brooms, dustpans, and little lysol cans, since we're only over there to do "sweep and escort" missions, "sterilising" the area for American CF-18's.

UBC campus sees not one demonstration, not one rally, not one break in stride, one moment of silence, one acknowledgement that something even minutely more serious is going on than ECT's, GMAT's and GPA's.

I continue writing, watching documentaries of the Sixties between casualty reports, making progress toward graduation day... ashamed.

III. The delight in arbitrariness...

Kroetsch's *need* to number, alphabetise, map, structure, plan, chart, outline, footnote, edit... and then "resist" these schemes "with words" (Hancock, 44). Yet, does the reader ever really get to see the arbitrariness, or the resistance to it? Is such a thing even possible? Kroetsch *plans* to be *arbitrary*. Is the reader to understand this strategy as providing some *mimesis* of arbitrariness? Or is she just supposed to say "oh, well, it's the thought that counts." Or is she just being duped, perhaps as much by her own expectations as by the Author controlling these (semblances of) structures? How is she to know whether his beautiful anti-teleological un-narratives weren't written first in chronological order and only later de-sequenced? I begin to feel like Annie Wilkes in *Misery*: "I'm your number one fan..."

... I have less and less interest in the notion of literature. I keep thinking of Artaud: "Literature is bullshit." He didn't say *writing* is bullshit, he said *literature* is bullshit, because to make it into literature is to systematise.

IV. Lunch: Student Union Building, talking *ad nauseam* about reading processes with Erin as a busperson wipes off our table. Erin, looking at this black woman, slump-shouldered as she carries our dirty trays away, says: I think I get it now. This white, upper-class male theoretician has an author-function; I, as a white, middle-class woman have a reader-function; and across the room is a black, lower-class woman who has the cleaning-up-our-shit-function. Welcome to university, I say.

V. The inscription of the author-function...

The fledgling writer sends an unknown first manuscript to a publishing house (he doesn't have an agent yet); a junior editor reads it, eyes full of stars at its potential--a bigger office, a reserved parking space, a key to the executive washroom--and oh yeah, maybe some book sales; so, the little editor takes the draft upstairs to a big editor who also sees its potential, calls starving writer on the phone and sets up a meeting. Cutting to the chase, fledgling writer's book gets published and he becomes a legitimate writer, getting royalties and everything; big editor (having taken all the credit for little editor's discovery) begins marketing his new gold mine, dreaming of a

condo in the Cayman Islands: the squib and the "About the Author" are carefully drafted; the publicity tour commences, and the author-function is born.

A few autographs, interviews and GG Awards later and he is all grown up: Robert Kroetsch, Mr. Canadian Postmodern, down-home prairie farmboy hick-from-the-sticks turned academic and theoretician, and, ultimately, a Lion of Canadian Letters. No new Kroetsch work can ever be read as was that early manuscript; the author-function does its job well and is now invisibly, but indelibly superimposed on even future texts. Before even cracking the binding, the reader encounters the laurels of the critics (Governor General's Award winning author Robert Kroetsch "has an extraordinary command of literary form"; "is an experimental writer of the first order"; "possesses a profound sense of the legendary"; "recounts the hilariously parodic story..."; "confirms his reputation as one of Canada's finest..."). Even if she has never heard of Robert Kroetsch, literary icon, she cannot help but be influenced by such words. And if she has "heard of" him, has read other works, has dipped into some Kroetsch criticism, has taken a course on Canadian literature or postmodernism, whether she knows it or not, she brings an author-construct to her reading of the text and will balance that reading against her expectations.

Author-function: Prairie writer.

Text: Seems to be inaccurate in its description of the harvesting season.

Reader-response: Oh well, maybe they do it differently in the northern part of Alberta where Kroetsch was raised.

Author-function: Liberal Democrat, accepting of differences.

Text: Seems racist/sexist/homophobic/classist/elitist

Reader-response: Ah... Parody!

Author-function: Subversive, Deconstructionist, *Avant-garde*

Text: Seems traditional and formulaic

Reader-response: Beautiful foregrounding of the inadequacy of conventional forms and structures.

VI. *Innocent, Motivated, Imaginative Student:*

. . . a contemporary Canadian novelist, poet, and critic, can often be found investigating systems of ordering: he examines their contrasting characteristics of symmetry and arbitrariness; necessity and inanity, their potential to be both banal and surprising. My thesis on his aesthetic will comprise twenty-six chapters, each corresponding to a letter of the alphabet. My form is not in any way an attempt to trivialize scholarly criticism; rather, this form is an integral part of my study. The writer's absorption with system invariably leads him back to the nature of the linguistic sign, and the possibilities and limitations of significance. The form of my thesis responds to my subject; it is a form which becomes, finally, a thesis in itself.

Anal Retentive, Jaded, Tenured Professor: Uh-huh.

Well, it certainly seems, ah, ambitious, and ah, I suppose, interesting, but what, ah, precisely, I mean, is, ah, the *point*?

Student: Well, Sir, it seems to me that if you are asking me to posit a single point, then you missed the point.

Professor: No, my dear young lady, quite to the contrary: I did not miss the point; you do not have one.

Student: Exactly.

Professor: Request for thesis approval denied.

VII. Imagine if you will...

That disjunctive, fragmentary, self-consciously parodic, playful, intertextual and irreverent writing formed the canon of literature written in English since the eighteenth century...

That Bakhtin, Derrida, Foucault, Kristeva, and their poststructuralist colleagues had not become the driving force behind a (not *the*) new critical movement...

That postmodernism had not been periodised (and thus valorised) virtually contemporaneously with its inception...

Who/What/Where/Why/How would a Robert Kroetsch be?

VIII. Instructions for the Preparation of Graduate Theses:

A. PRELIMINARY PAGES: Parts 1-4 listed below **must** be included; parts 5-6 only if appropriate; part 7 is optional. Those parts which are included **must** be in the order given, 1-7.

1. Title Page: The form and the content of the title page **must** follow the sample shown. All the information shown on the sample --from the title to the copyright statement is **REQUIRED**.

2. Authorisation: This form is required in the Library's copies only.

3. Abstract: This should be a summary or condensation of the thesis and state the problem, the methods of investigation, and the general conclusions. Those abstracts intended for the library copies should not exceed 600 words; those intended for U.M.I. **must** be limited to 350 words.

4. Table of contents: This **must** list all the main divisions of the thesis, the subdivisions, the bibliography, and, when present, the appropriate sections included here (i.e. 3, 5-7), the appendix, and index. Page numbers **must** be given.

5. List of Tables: For each table, its number, full title, and page number **must** be listed on a page separate from that on which the table of contents is entered. The tables **must** be numbered consecutively in order of appearance and, preferably, in large Roman numerals.

6. List of Figures: Figures--graphs, photographs, and other illustrative material--are to be listed on a page separate from that containing the tables. Number, title, and page are to be given. Figures **must** be numbered in Arabic numerals consecutively in order of appearance and captioned Figure (or Fig.) 1, 2, 3, etc.

1. Acknowledgement: This should not be more than one-half page.

B. TEXT: While not all the parts of the text listed here are required (i.e., introduction, appendix, and index), those present **must** be in the following order: introduction, main body, bibliography, appendix, and biographical form.

NOTES: The footnotes or notes may be numbered consecutively throughout the thesis, or throughout each chapter. They may be at the bottom of pages, at the end of chapters, or at the end of the main body of the text immediately preceding the bibliography. Candidates are reminded that a consistent and established style **must** be followed in footnotes, notes, and bibliography.

PROHIBITED: Binding, Cardboard, Construction paper, Erasable paper under any of its various trade names, Holes (such as those made by binder rings), Letraset or like adhesive, Pencil, Rubber Cement, Scotch tape or like adhesive tapes.

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One could, of course, go on....

TALL TALE

. . . the tall tale tradition. You see it in beer parlours in the West; the delight in insulting and verbal quarrelling. . . . But behind that there is a very serious movement toward, a need for, myth-making.

* * *

The tall tale genre is clearly a major influence on Kroetsch's work. Kroetsch is constantly to be found elaborating upon the ways in which storytelling is not only important in a literary sense, but integral to the human condition. Indeed, it seems to me that Kroetsch argues for the necessity of story with the same vehemence as contemporary psychologists and psychiatrists argue for dream or *REM* ("rapid eye movement") sleep: deprivation of mental exercise, of psychological re-creation, results in intellectual and emotional dysfunction. Kroetsch clearly believes that we *need* to fictionalise--make each other larger than life--"weave and unweave ourselves" (CJ, 19).

The tall tale is particularly amenable to Kroetsch's style and aesthetic because the story gets richer and fuller with each (re-)telling; it is the

ultimate in melding continuity and openness, in the participatory, re-creative experience. Take, for example, this excerpt from "Seed Catalogue":

My father was mad at the badger: the badger was digging holes in the potato patch, threatening man and beast with broken limbs (I quote). My father took the double-barrelled shotgun out into the potato patch and waited.

.....

My father couldn't shoot the badger. He uncocked the shotgun, came back to the house in time for breakfast. The badger dug another hole. My father got mad again. They carried on like that all summer.

.....

One morning my father actually shot at the badger. He killed a magpie that was pecking away at the horse turd about fifty feet beyond and to the right of the spot where the badger had been standing.

A week later my father told the story again. In that version he intended to hit the magpie. Magpies, he explained, are a nuisance. They eat robins' eggs. They're harder to kill than snakes, jumping around the way they do, nothing but feathers.

Just call me sure-shot,

my father added.

(FN, 35)

Kroetsch acknowledges the strength and beauty of his own tall tale heritage and beautifully captures the paradoxical process of self-erasure and self-creation which is the cornerstone of this story-making tradition. In the tall tale, we are responsible for our own identities. We make our own plots and subplots, chapters and verses, additions and deletions; we can be our own heroes.

One time in my callous youthfulness I dared to ask if he wasn't stretching a point. "You tell it," he said, if you know better.

Kroetsch's resistance to codification and insistence upon the open-ness and dialectical freedom of the tall tale is based in large part on the tale's history (archaeology?) as a pre-literate discourse, firmly rooted in the oral tradition. The tall tale forges a link between performance and process because every telling involves an improvisation of sorts. Each narration is a carefully crafted and continually adapted exhibition: the teller reacts not only to audience response, but to audience questioning and interjecting (Brown, 28). The tall tale is always improbable if not downright illogical or impossible, and is usually spontaneous, based in the personal, and intended to be comic (Brown, 26): a description which could as easily have been intended for "Seed Catalogue" (in spite of that poem's basis in a found, written text) specifically, as any story or yarn in general. The tall tale can also be described as "paratactic"--in part due to its reliance on audience response and participation, it takes shape as if by building blocks. Each piece comprises a plot portent or an "and then" and the order of telling is

dependent on the order in which the blocks are laid out and picked up. Lines/verses/stanzas, etc., are detachable: the story grows clause by clause, one idea at a time, and can be expanded upon, altered, or ended at any given point.

As folklorists are quick to point out, there are literally hundreds of thousands of tall tales, handed down from generation to generation, which are still frequently told today (to say nothing of the whoppers contemporary tale-spinners continue to invent). The seemingly endless possibilities for story, with all of these tellers and all of these listeners jumping in and out of age-old narratives, are reminiscent of the labyrinth, a pervasive motif in Kroetsch's work. The oral poet/tale-spinner throws himself into the midst of a whole maze of stories, old and new, each twisting, turning, and intertwining with another, and must find a way, embellishing as he goes along, to get himself out. As Kroetsch has said, however, getting oneself out of the labyrinth involves a participation in its creation:

You tell your way out of story, in a sense. I think
that what it comes down to is that we are trapped in
those mythic stories; we can surrender to them or we
can tell our way out. (LV, 96)

Telling his way out, for Kroetsch, often means daring to appropriate the stories which have come before him, stories from other eras, other cultures, other peoples, and recontextualising them in a contemporary national, regional, or most often, personal context. One of Kroetsch's most interesting mythic works is a long poem entitled, "How I Joined the Seal Herd" (FN, 52-

56). Conjuring up images of the west coast Indian "Salmon Boy" legend,* this poem involves Kroetsch's introspective game-playing with the possibilities of fantasy and illusion for the creation of new textual (and physical) forms:

I knew, the seals lying together
in the hot sun maybe 300 seals
I counted slipping off my shoes

the effect was immediate I learned
to let my body give it was not I
who controlled the rocks I learned

curling my stockinged toes to the
granite rocks and edges: maybe
I have this wrong but I knew

in the first instant of my courage
I must undo my very standing/crawl
on the wet rocks, the sand...

.....

I'm a new man (mammal, I corrected
myself) here and yet I was going

*In virtually every Indian community (or First Nation--the politically correct language changes often enough to become a labyrinthine tale of its own) west of Alberta (Haida, Tlingit, Tsimshain, Kwakiutl, Kutenai, Chinook, Nez Perce, Kathlamet, Coos...) one comes across variations of a legend in which a young boy is abandoned by his family and adopted by the salmon, gradually adapting physically until he is one of them. See, for example, Tsimshian Mythology. Ed. Franz Boas. Recorded by Henry W. Tate. U.S. Bureau of American Ethnology, Thirty-first Annual Report, 1916.

too far too far past everything
dispersed past everything here/gone

dear, I whispered (words again,
words) I wanted to say/I am
writing this poem with my life [.] (52, 56)

Kroetsch takes the ancient and timeless story of human copulation with and transformation into animal, adds to it his absorption with language, and places it ("it"--a nice vague, open referent, potentially meaning almost anything from the poem, to language, to the self, to truth) under erasure, constantly questioning, revising, and rethinking: ". . . I believe this is the word. . ."; ". . . I corrected myself. . . "; "maybe I have this wrong. . . ." This refusal to accept either the solidification of experience and vision into a factual account, or the forcing of abstract thoughts and emotions into concrete words, is wholly consistent with Kroetsch's paradoxical comments on the long poem of which "Seal Herd" is an example: the task facing the (contemporary long) poet, he says, "is to honour the belief in disbelief" (P&E, 92).

This notion of honouring the belief in disbelief seems to me to inform much of Kroetsch's literary and critical contexts. Myth is generally recognised as being somehow other than *true*, without actually being *false*, and by its very pervasiveness and significance, it calls the value and nature of

truth into question. Myths, certainly, evolve and change, and the story we hear or read may not be the same story that was first told; but, at least we think/we know what we are dealing with. Truth is an indefinable concept. We *believe* something to be true--we cannot really know it. Thus the sanctity of the tall tale: the truth of it is that it *is*, not that it is factual or accurate, but that it is reliable, an old friend, an other self.

. . . during harvest, when the bunkshack out in the yard was full, I liked to sneak out there at night and listen to stories of travel, of adventure, of hard times, of home; they were story-makers, those dispossessed men of the thirties, myth-makers. I began to recognize the archaeological sites of my own short life. . . . I became, profoundly, a listener.

Myths survive (and perhaps propagate) in their retellings and Kroetsch believes in the open, ongoing text. He is also intensely aware, as a regionalist, that the myths of other cultures, however universal in theme or scope, cannot speak to the experiences of western Canada and Canadians. We must, therefore, recreate (and the multiple meanings are important) these mythic stories--of origin, of transformation, of initiation--so that they can be authentically spoken with our own voices (as does the *first person* speaker of "Seal Herd"). Says Kroetsch:

We have sought out the decentering rather than the centering function of myth.... Now existing on the circumference rather than in the center excites me. It is a way to resist endings and

completion. On the circumference we can defer meaning and other finalities. I want to avoid both meaning and conclusiveness. And one way to achieve this is to keep retelling, keep transforming the story.... So myth can become a very useful notion again. Instead of fear and entrapment, myth can become generative again. But it must be decentered. (LV, 130)

Kroetsch believes in the necessity of audience/reader participation and textual openness or fluidity, thus I think his resistance to Myth (and the capital *M* is important) as great code or archetype or allusion stems from a distrust of its implied universality and consequent rigidity. The tall tale, with its mythologising of the personal and everyday, becomes myth decentered. The tall tale provides a form (forum?) which is inviting and accessible to all, drawing us into its small-ness and immediacy, and slowly building toward the larger-than-life with the imagination of each re-telling.

Thus the strange tale I have tried to weave here begins to, or at least, hints at coming together. The beer parlour--the last bastion of communal dialogue and interaction in our society, as Kroetsch would have it--is the place where, the group-bullshitting which takes place as a story is told by a teller and the interjecting listeners who qualify and question, takes on the seriousness of myth-making and culture-building.

"... Why didn't *you* go when *you* had a chance?"

".... I was going."

"Going where?"

"*Going*. Making tracks. Skinning out... Then I got hit on the goddamned head. That's why I stopped."

"Hope it wasn't an idea that hit you."

"Good God Almighty himself, as far as I can see. Hailstones coming down as big as goddamned apples. MacIntoshes."

".... Knocked me sillier than"--he signalled back over his shoulder--"you know who. I was travelling full gallop when I got hit, streaking across those bald-headed prairies, spraining both ankles in gopher holes. Ground was half covered with lumps of ice the size of softballs, more coming down, the wind blowing, the sky roaring. Then clonk. Nothing can knock me over, Tune. But somehow I got it into my head that all those big round things were dinosaur eggs...."

"I suppose you think I'm bullshitting?" Web said.

"I didn't say anything."

"Never told a lie in my life."

"I didn't say a word," Tune said.

Maybe we should be concerned about that...

UN

1. There are no rules.
2. There are rules.

* * *

Kroetsch's favourite prefix: "UN." He *unsays*, *undoes*, *unnames*, *uninvents*, *unweaves*, *unhides*, and generally, *unmeans* any and all forms of discourse.

(When you write about a poem by Robert Kroetsch, you find yourself saying *BUT* a lot, or trying to find a way not to say it).

Kroetsch writes to convey speech and dialogue, *uncoding* the code; he edits lines out of a poem only to re-incorporate them in a different form, *unremoving* the removed; he draws maps and charts and plot outlines on which to base a novel or poem and then resists them in the writing, *uncreating* the created; he builds a system in order to take it apart, and thus *unforms* the formed.

At one time I considered it the task of the Canadian writer to give names to his experience, to be the namer. I now suspect that on the contrary, it is his task to un-name.

Asked to describe Kroetsch's work to someone unfamiliar with it, one would find it difficult to avoid *un* words: unacademic, unanalysable, unapologising, unarrogant, unassembled, unattainable, unauthor-ised, unbanned, uncanonical, uncensored, uncheckable, unclassified, unclassifiable, unclichéd, uncoercive, uncommercialised, unconcealed, unconnected, unconstrained, uncontrived, uncustomary, undeluded, undefinable, undignified, unduplicated, unexpurgated, unfaked, unfazed, unforgettable, unhackneyed, unhistorical, unhomogenised, unignorable, unjointed, unmanageable, unmatchable, unmediated, unnameable, unpredictable, unpunctual, unrealistic, unregulated, unromanticised, unstandardised, unsynchronised, unsystematised, untraditional, untypical....*

* My choice of words is obviously mediated by my respect for Kroetsch's work. Another critic might have constructed a list which looks more like the following: unaccented, unacceptable, unaccredited, unadmired, unadventurous, unaffected, unaggressive, unambitious, unamiable, unartistic, unassimilated, unauthentic, unbeloved, unbrilliant, uncandid, unclarified, uncoded, uncompelling, uncomprehended, uncontemplated, uncourageous, uncreative, uncredited, uncultured, undedicated, undemanding, unexciting, unexotic, unexplored, unexpressed, unforgivable, unfulfilling, unfunny, ungifted, ungraspable, unhelpful, unheroic, unideological, unimaginative, unimpassioned, unimportant, unimpressive, uninspired, unintellectual, unintelligible, uninventive, unliberated, unliterary, unmelodious, unmemorable, unneeded, unpardonable, unpersuasive, unpleasing, unpoetic, unpolished, unprofessional, unquestioned, unreflective, unreliable, unremarkable, unsatisfying, unscholarly, unspectacular, unstartling, unstylish, unsubtle, unsuitable, unsurprising, untalented, untrained, unversed...

■ This is not exactly reaching the glorious heights of profundity. There are not any wondrous literary terms which start with "U." My un-thesis system has apparently been my un-doing. ■

Peter Thomas has argued that Kroetsch's *un-ness* is part of a need to *un-Kroetsch*, saying that "for all the energy and joy of Kroetsch's fictional world, it is realised by a mind which distrusts its own compulsions" (PDM, 64). Indeed, this argument has much to support it; however, I would take it still further: Kroetsch, it would appear, distrusts any *compulsions*. Any system, be it of thought, literary convention, cultural code, the language itself, is "contrary to the demands of authenticity" (MCNE, 17). They must, therefore, be probed, explored, exploded, forced to make non-(*un?*)sense... they must be undone.

. . . the form must violate itself. The renewal does not come from outside, cannot be brought about by the introduction of new materials into the form. This creature is a porcupine that can only be violated from within.

One builds into a system something that breaks that system.

VERACITY

Verily, I insist: Mr. Canadian Postmodern is a hard-core realist.

★

Kroetsch's work has always been recognised as "descriptive" and "authentic," in the sense that farmers reading The Words of My Roaring or archaeologists reading Badlands or graduate students reading Gone Indian are able to recognise themselves and their experiences in the texts. What has not yet been recognised--at least not in any published materials of which I am aware--is the painstaking research lying behind Kroetsch's achievements of such authenticity. Every character's voice, every allusion, every historical event, every minute detail is checked and re-checked to ensure that he gets it right. While writing The Studhorse Man, Kroetsch researched calendar dates for

1945 to determine that Lent fell between March 8 and April 1 that year (27.10.1); similarly, he consulted the same 1910 edition of Encyclopedia Britannica, which he would have Hazard and then Demeter consult, discovering that it had a dark blue binding and that its coverage of the horse was found in "VOL. XIII, HAR to HUR," beginning on page 712 (27.10.2). His preparation for the writing of Badlands included travel to the Public Archives of Canada (Ottawa) to read the journals of famous archaeologists such as Phillip Weston, and recording bits of "insider information": an archaeologist, he notes, would "break a skeleton--*never* cut through" (27.16.8). In addition to his consulting published and archival sources in his quest for accuracy, Kroetsch has, for example, written to farmers to check his "book/theoretical" information

. . . itinerant prairie printer, as center, as ultimate story center/teller: my own (rural?) experience, basically, expanded towards the tall tale, the mythological; but always the hard core of detail.

against their life experience. He has also conducted his research as experience, travelling on a river boat down the Red Deer River to feel for himself what he would record William Dawe as feeling, or visiting horse breeders who practice artificial insemination in order to capture its practical and emotional aspects, to capture that which cannot be encapsulated in a veterinarian's manual (cf. CANAM, 4).

Consulting Kroetsch's papers in Calgary left me, quite simply, stunned. The archaeologist, says Kroetsch, "leave[s] things where they're found," merely unearthing the discovery and leaving interpretation to the reader (RDT,

21). In that spirit, I offer here, without mediation, a small taste of the discoveries which I was fortunate enough to retrace.*

Stallion

stallions are changed by the jump, by the cold, or by the season. Usually by the standing cold - 45-50°.

Heavy bones: Pouches - grey, or some are black. Breasts and Claps. Belgian is also a draft horse.

Keep a stallion tied in a barn 2 ways: better + a chain around the neck.

Join put a bridle on when they young. Keep him in a strap + chain from the rear ring of the bridle through the ring on the far side + back to his hand. By pulling on 12' ~~the attached strap~~ attached to the chain chain he can tighten up on the horse's jaw + make it hard with

his other hand he guides the penis - to save time.

Jim, standing a stallion for 2 years, led it with a chain run through one ring of the bit + fastened to the other. Used this "for extra pressure." Used chain binds the jaw.

Stallion bit - rough on one side (like a wood screw), smooth on the other. Use smooth side for a gentle stallion, rough side pulls down on the jaw.

Kept his stallion shod.

Penis - 16" (?) - dark with white alveoli the top.

*Please consult Appendix B for transcriptions of holograph materials.

A stallion will make
for a gelding. Knows
by smell it isn't
a mare. Chew a
gelding to pieces.

Used a loaded buggy
whip to control the
stallion - once cut
open the flank in
two places where the
stallion made for a
pony. Was then that
was being treated.

As soon as a stud
sees a mare it starts
to get excited. The
master has to handle
it. In restraining it,
he angers it; the
stud may turn on
a man.
Jim knew a stallion
that chewed up 2 men.

Stallion gets hold
with its teeth &
shakes its head. Teeth
usually slip & tear
hair off. Jim got bit in

stomach with both
feet.

Once a studhorse
man came in, had
lost his mare, the
woman of the house
went out & unhooked
the stallion (used to
pull the buggy).
Four farmers refused
to let a studhorse
man come, but because
he couldn't control
the stallion. Two
men were crippled on
the job.

A mare "going
out of season" might
put up quite a
fight. Have to
bring in another
mare to arouse the
stallion, then
when he's aroused,
switch him to
the 1st mare.
Stallion often
won't go near a
mare that has
a sucking colt.

Sometimes a mare
won't take a stallion
without being
worked up. Use a
pole or a stall to
protect the stallion
from kicks while
he breeds the mare
up.

Have to keep other
horses away while
breeding a mare.

One man holds the
mare; other holds the
stallion. One man
could tie up the
mare & do it alone.

Studhorse man goes
on the road for a
week at a time.

Pay 3 men in one
day, but not 2 days
running. Best to
"stay by two a day."
Too many - the
stud isn't sure enough -
you may destroy
him

①

The artificial vagina

- , the outer tube of heavy rubber
- > an inner tube of lining of thin rubber
- > The space between is filled with warm water
- > at one end an opening ⁱⁿ for the penis to enter.
- > at the other end a hook ^{or rubber strap} to hold the ejaculated semen.

The operator must be skilled: The animal trained.

Must insist on the correct temperature, pressure & lubrication.

Temp. between 105° & 115° F.

- > a special lubricant is commercially available.

Let the male mount on various female - & then guide the penis quickly into the open end of the artificial vagina.

②

Many other males can be trained to mount dummy female.

- some should be vaccinated ^{the day of} ~~the day of~~ collection from a stallion.

- with the development of freezing techniques, it should be possible to store semen perhaps for several years.

Artificial insemination, you must understand, is possible only with genuine semen. And of course it must be collected. The artificial vagina--and I have examined one since, holding it with trembling hands before me--is made up of an outer tube of heavy rubber with, inside it, another tube or lining, this one very thin rubber. The space between must be filled with water that has been heated to a temperature of not less than 105 and not more than 115 degrees F. The male can be quite insistent about the proper--not only temperature, but pressure and lubrication, as well. A special lubricant is, of course, available commercially. At the far end from the opening of this device, a beaker is so placed as to catch without waste or contamination the ejaculated semen. (SHM, 148)

* * *

*
men test up their underclothes
& find them to
wrap specimens in
mildness - another to
enable them to bring out
and select specimen -

have this happen - they
 find the bone they've been
 seeking, at a time - no
 plaster or burials left - they
 take all their clothes & build
 up their remaining flour -
 then comes disaster.

1500 lbs of plaster for
 a big one -

to the collected in 76

can Drunkells

as many as 120 people come
 in one day to see a skeleton
 he was collecting - a
 40-ft double bill skeleton -
 arranged to have one day
 to show.

burley dipped in fluid
plaster -

made the plaster
rip there -

cut underneath in
middle, supported in 2
places, then complete
wrapping & turn

over - no rock

showing -

haul into camp &

built a ~~case~~ on a

rainy day -

0.5 ft in the skeleton -

smaller one in 1 piece -

16 ft or so - back at a
natural crack on a weak point

one black box - 3500 lbs - 82c
b. 8. 8. 8. 8.

- horned dinosaur - close
to 3,000 lbs

- if any box is reversed,
cover it with rice paper,
~~then wrap the~~
then put on sticks cut
by hand - then
wrap in strips of

*

I studied the documents. I read of the bitter feuds of Marsh and Cope, those first great collectors of dinosaur bones; and from that lesson I learned that my father had been born one generation too late. But he was not to be deterred by a mere error in chronology.

(BL, 138)

*

Dawe quiet for awhile, working with his raw, bare hands, moving the clay off the clay-encased bones that were the skeleton on his precious and unique *Daweosaurus*. Then, without looking up, working while he spoke: "Sternburg... one time, working in Kansas... Found some new specimens just when they were leaving the field... Had no plaster or burlap left... They used their last sack of flour to make paste...."

"Not much use making paste," Web said. "If you don't have burlap."

Dawe working carefully, uncovering traces of the ischium, ilium, pubis in a chunk of rock. Carefully, lovingly, he laid bare the unbroken specimen. "Used their underwear," Dawe said. "Sternberg's men. . . . "

Grizzly laughed now. He unbuttoned his sweat-stained grey flannel shirt, removed it, threw it on top of Web's. Both he and Web waited.

Dawe: "I'm not thinking. Should have told you to bring your bedsheets." And abruptly he stripped off his shirt, stood awkward and embarrassed in his long-sleeved underwear.

Web motioned Grizzly to follow; he and Grizzly went out of the coulee to carry in more water, went to bring whatever food they could find, whatever rags they could make of bedding and clothes.

* * *

QUESTIONS:

1. Do the scrutineers count the ballots at a provincial election?

They are there to check the count, also to watch the poll during the day.

2. Are the ballots counted at the polling booth?

They are counted at the polling station, the box is the box corner, set aside, for marking the ballot.

3. In a provincial election, is electioneering allowed on the day before the actual voting?

Yes.

4. To vote in a provincial election—do you make an "X"?

Yes.

5. Is there a name for the men on horseback at a stampede who ride out to take a rider off a bucking horse?

They are called pick-up riders.

6. If you had no rain for 35 days, would a heavy rain still save a wheat crop? At what time of year could a crop be saved—in August sometime, for instance?

Of course not.

It all depends on the amount of reserve moisture at the beginning of the drought. But with a good reserve, a crop can stand a 35 day drought, for instance last year 1964 we had hardly anything but a little sprinkle of rain from the middle of May until the first part of August. But we had a terrific amount of sub-moisture. With the methods of farming these days, fertilizer, deep tillage, cultivation instead of plowing and the combine putting the straw back on the land, not quite a lot of difference. So the amount of moisture we need.

I sincerely hope this answers the questions for you. I didn't get it off sooner, but I just found the letter, it was put away in my desk, any time I can answer any questions please feel free to ask. Hope to see you soon.

as ever

Harley.

F. S. McElroy & Sons.

*

"It's pretty easy to say it's going to rain in the next thirteen days."

"It hasn't rained in the last twenty-four," I said. "Or hadn't you noticed, Doc?"

(WOMR, 8)

. . . the bull wasn't finished. He kept bucking and turning. And the boy who had been riding so grandly suddenly looked scared. His hat was too new, that was a bad sign. He had got onto something and didn't know how to get off. He'd planned on being bucked off, I suppose, and here he was riding the worst animal of the lot, and he wasn't losing. That was his trouble.

Two pick-up riders started out to try and crowd in on the bull from both sides and pick the boy off. He was using both hands now, pulling leather, and his hat was somewhere on the ground getting its first stains. But before those cowboys got to him he just let go and the bellyband and fell. That's when the bull turned. (WOMR, 105)

★

That's when I first realized: I had forgotten what a rain cloud looks like. In a flash I remembered. That hint of purple behind all the blackness. You understand--earlier I had *believed* it would rain. While all the time I suspected that every cloud is made of dust. Now I *knew* it would rain. There's a terrible difference.

(WOMR, 188)

★

I listened to it rain; it was nearly pitch-dark, with the rain falling not in sheets now but steady. The three-day kind of rain. It might go on for a full week, you can always guess. . . .

"She's a soaker," the Doc said.

"A real souser," I said.

"Just what we needed," the Doc said. . . .

"There won't be much of a crop," he said. "But at least they'll get their seed back. And feed for the winter, and a little to sell, enough to pay the bills until spring."

He was right. I'd been promising a bumper crop. But this was all we could hope for. I didn't think an Easterner could know that much about farming. (WOMR, 198-199)

*

RAIN

The homesteaders' greatest -
a great hard spring that
swayed the grass and gave
them a new beginning
in common.

With it, the Doc - many poor
killed the horses the homesteaders
brought with them. Only the
little caryons could survive.

- stopping horses. Farmers who
would put up people who
lived further from town.

Then one and his girl Indian
wife that gave a father
to the homesteaders, London,
at breakfast. For the old
man, the only truly
significant experience in his
long life was that of homesteading,
because he was 17 years old.

*

*

*

Robert Kroetsch, the arbiter of Canadian postmodernism, the writer who sees (or claims to see) language as an infinitely regressing, auto-referential system, a mere series of deferrals of difference, who argues that the connection between signifier and signified as at most arbitrary, at least non-existent, is a closet-realist. Behind closed doors, Kroetsch is, in fact, obsessed with detail, precision, documentary accuracy, verifiable truth.

If "the fiction makes us real," the real certainly enriches Kroetsch's fiction.

WEST

I live in Vancouver, about 10 blocks from the Pacific Ocean; I used to live on Vancouver Island, only two blocks from it... I always thought I lived in the west; now I discover that I live on the coast. The west is elsewhere, maybe nowhere... except in fiction... except in the works of Robert Kroetsch, where the fiction makes it real (C, 63). Kroetsch comes closest to risking a definition of what west means to him in a short essay entitled "Turning Alberta into Fiction," where he writes:

About westerners: we are all homesteaders, finally. And will be, for generations. This realization shapes all of us as individuals or citizens, shapes me as a writer.

We are homesteaders in that our imaginations respond first to possibility rather than to past. We look at this place, at these prairies, at this Alberta, and, to be poetic about it, we replace memory with desire. The popular name, next-year country, is not frightening to us. It is our shorthand name for a state of mind, a need, an obsession, a blind confidence, a desperate act of faith, a way of living.

The historians remind us that we, or our immediate ancestors, came here from other places. But they forget that the migrating generations had to travel light to get here at all. A man's bare hands were of more value than his piano. Books were a luxury, and without books memory is reduced to the living generations, the speaker, his parents, his grandparents. The 1930's finished the job: those who had memories went back to them. In the bright, terrible flame of that long sun, the dross of culture was burned away. History itself became a luxury. All that remained was next year.

It was the politicians, not the writers, who first understood the nature of this possibility. Louis Riel, that frustrated and frustrating dreamer, was reduced by an earlier circumstance to an identical predicament. In his translation of predicament into potential--in his prophesying a new world, imagining a new kingdom--he is little different from Bill Aberhart or Tommy Douglas or Dief the Chief. . . .

It is inevitable that some of us would stop being visionary politicians and try to become mere novelists instead. Because we want to imagine the real Alberta.

(27.23.6)

Kroetsch's calibre of perception, his beautifully poetic reading of settlement as narrative, as autobiography--even in such a short, perhaps even "throw-away" piece--speaks to the importance of the western people and landscape in shaping his sense of self as a writer. West, in Kroetsch's work, is an

amalgamation of the place, its people, and their spirit, interacting with each other. The Canadian prairies and the dreamers who came west to inhabit them become for Kroetsch a "geography of museness" (CJ, 15), a "frontier of our selves" (27.1.13.17), an inspiration and an event: "Genius loci. . . . The place of mythology, of story, become action" (CJ, 56). West is not so much a real place as it is a mythic one, a possibility, a never-quite-reached potential, a necessary failure in order to keep the dream alive. Kroetsch

From Tristan to Columbus to Trudeau, men have gone west in search of new loves, new worlds, new identities. Gone Indian explores that "trip" in its variations from the Blackfoot shaman's visions to the American dream of the Canadian frontier as the last Eden.

Kroetsch phrased it poetically; I will phrase it aphoristically: west is where one's reach forever exceeds one's grasp. "Next-year country" remains next year country, forever in the process of creating itself.

Jeremy Sadness, upon at last reaching "the far interior he [could] in the flesh inhabit" (GI, 5) for which he has been looking his whole life, pronounces he is in fact looking for nothing:

Nothing. Yes, I am looking for nothing. The primal darkness. The purest light. For the first word. For the voice that spoke the first word. The inventor of zero. (22)

The beauty of the number "zero," however, is that it may signify infinity as well as nothingness. The absent presence of potentially illimitable possibility. Such is the mythic west for Kroetsch. "It's only by our lack of

West we're haunted, we might say. Kroetsch addresses the lack by making absence essence" (FOW, 119).

In "Seed Catalogue," for example, Kroetsch builds poem out of prairie fence:

Son, this is a crowbar.
 This is a willow fencepost.
 This is a sledge.
 This is a roll of barbed wire.
 This is a bag of staples.
 This is a claw hammer.

We give form to the land by running
 a series of posts and strands
 of barbed wire around a quarter section.

First off I want you to take that
 crowbar and driver 1,156 holes
 in that gumbo.

And the next time you want to
 write a poem
 we'll start the haying.

How do you grow a poet?

This is a prairie road.
 This road is the shortest distance
 between nowhere and nowhere.

This road is a poem.
Just two miles up the road
you'll find a porcupine
dead in the ditch. It was
trying to cross the road.

(FN, 42-43)

The heritage handed down to him from his homesteading family, the simple beauty of self-creation, (creation *by* self and creation *of* self), the building of something out of nothing, provides strength and stimulus for Kroetsch's work. The road which leads from "nowhere to nowhere," the sense of isolation, nothingness, the sheer absence of the west is fodder for Kroetsch's imagination. The notion of the blank page, the *tabula rasa*, parallels the apparently open plains on which the dreams of those early homesteaders were founded. The farmer and the writer each plant their seeds and hope for a profitable yield.

I think the prairie novelist is somebody who sees something for those 900 miles between Winnipeg and the foothills.

Kroetsch's wonderment at the imaginative possibilities afforded him by his western settings--and, importantly, his western heritage--translate into what can only be described as a reverence for the prairie peoples and their ways of life. He seeks to capture every subtle nuance of the characteristics

which separate prairie farmers from all other Canadians. In The Words of My Roaring, for example, the crowd at a political rally is portrayed with a respectful attention to detail: "Three hundred people knocking their calluses together. . . . the men in overalls with patches on the patches on their patches, the women in bloomers made of flour sacks" (4, 7). Calluses and patches and bloomers, to another writer, perhaps to any outsider, might be construed negatively, as judgement, their indications of poverty and hard labour equated with lower class status; in Kroetsch's text, however, these markers of poverty are symbols of pride, of survival, of a strong work ethic and an indomitable spirit. Those calluses become a muse for Kroetsch, a reminder of where he came from, a marker indicating the direction in which he wants to go.

I look at my hands.
 They are no longer my own.

They have become my father's
 hands.

Kroetsch's realism--indeed, his literalism--in depicting western ways of life functions as a continuing tribute to the culture which shaped his writerly identity. The prairie road of "Seed Catalogue" does not have "poetic qualities"; it is a poem. Kroetsch's imagination and veracity merge in the setting/trope/ absence/presence of the prairies. His paradoxical obsession with the accurate portrayal of real people, living real lives is (un?)balanced by his equally strong need to mythologise, to make things larger-than-life. I

am tempted to say that Kroetsch's mythologising of everyday activities from voting or livestock reproduction to crop planting or fence-building is magic-realistic, the raising of the ordinary and banal to levels of profound importance and myth. I think, though, that Kroetsch would say that these ordinary events are already important, already profound, already mythic. By basing story in the here and now, the personal, the local, Kroetsch reveals, rather than creates, his western identity. West, the mythic land of "Go west, young man" infamy, is, Kroetsch wants us to know, the home of the prairie farmer.

The hostility between east and west in Kroetsch's novels also achieves realistically mythic proportions. Nowhere is this made clearer than in the Sunday morning radio addresses of Reverend Applecart, whose sermons call for the retribution of "that red beast of a Who-er. . . . Toronto, and all her high muckie-muck millionaires" (WOMR, 34, 35). As Johnnie Backstrom recounts:

Applecart was onto the dirty Easterners who were gouging the West. He had built up to that and now he was onto them. He was talking about the Second Coming and the Last Judgement, the final reckoning of the Fifty Big Shots. Just wait, he said. And he gave them a blanket condemnation. . . . Applecart was connecting Satan and all of hell with the dirty Eastern millionaires, the financial racketeers. He was the voice of the prairies speaking. He was ripping into all the betrayers of Christ and His holy principles which, it turned out, had a lot to do with the price of a wheat crop.

(35, 37)

This excerpt is about more than just the rivalry which dates back farther than Confederation; it returns us to the mythology of west of which Kroetsch speaks in "Turning Alberta into Fiction," to the unshakeable belief that anything--that a77--is possible, to the faith in the land that keeps the farmer from abandoning his homestead in the face of drought, grasshoppers, hail, and the crop failure they bring. It returns us to "next-year country." Applecart's sermon also raises another important feature of the Canadian west: those who live and work the prairie farms of which Applecart speaks, see themselves as living not just in "next-year country," but God's country. West here connotes the promised land, inhabited by a chosen few, living a purer life than those city-dwellers who sleep too late and are incapable of appreciating the satisfaction produced by a hard day's work, dirt under their fingernails, the smell of manure in their nostrils. Western life is a simple one, characterised by the unencumbered-ness of those early homesteaders, migrating across the country with only their most valuable possession in tow: their bare hands. Kroetsch writes, in Alberta, that

A certain giddiness characterizes an Albertan, a certain confident heady willingness to top whatever was said before, whether he is mixing politics and religion in one sentence, talking football and oil stocks in one breath, telling of the trout that turned out to be a horse--or simply remarking on the prospects for next-year's crop.

I might add that the word *giddy* derives from *god*; it suggests a frenzy that is divine in origin. Some say this condition is encouraged by the salubrious effect of Pacific

air strained through the teeth of the Rockies and mixed with an Arctic cold front; others, less inclined to praise temperature extremes, attribute it to a slight deficiency in oxygen supply combined with the decreased gravitational pull.

At any rate, Albertans are in an excellent position to look down on the rest of Canada. . . . their elevation is such that they live with their heads quite literally in the clouds.

(3)

X... Y... Z...

L
z
z
z

The beautiful truth is as good a name as any for the meaning Kroetsch does not wish to represent, but does point out like an "x"--a transcendent truth. . . .

★

The story is concealed from us. Only by careful acknowledgement of that concealment do we allow for a revelation of story.

★

I like mathematics as language.

★

$$y^2 + z^3 = x (i)$$

Find the value of x (as reader-response, as interpretation, as criticism, as opinion, as judgement...) where

$$y = \text{reader} \quad z = \text{text}$$

and

$$y = \text{text} \quad z = \text{reader}$$

"Text" may refer to any Kroetsch text, the canon of Kroetsch texts, my thesis, a Kroetsch text in my thesis, the two (many?) as merged or recontextualised or uninvented...

"Reader" may refer to any Kroetsch reader, the ideal Kroetsch reader, me as Kroetsch reader, my reader(s), readers of Kroetsch through my thesis...

★

Language, whether "natural," or "artificial," has limitations and boundaries which are obscured by formless, indefinable variables.

ARCHAEOLOGY

(or... The Alphabet Journals)

MY Field Notes

NO.

Library		
Archive		
Inter-Library Loan	}	
Den	}	Notes
Bedroom	}	
Kitchen Table	}	
Classroom		
Bathtub		
Long Walks in the Woods		

Well, that's closer to it.

27 July 1990

OK. Getting my thoughts re-collected. The stopping and starting on this project is getting a little ridiculous. Still, glad to be getting on to Calgary and the real work. It's the before that always kills me. Once I get into it, the sheer enormity of it all lessens.

University of Calgary

31 July 1990

OK. Found my way to the library and then went over to the bookstore for supplies: red, blue, green and black pens; pink, blue, yellow, and purple highlighters (I'd never be able to organise my thoughts if I couldn't colour-code); two file boxes and a slough of 3x5 cards. I'm ready to go.

1 August 1990

Wow. The librarians here are great, bringing out box after box, always ready with another one before I have to ask for it. This all feels so voyeuristic. I'm peeking in at a lot of things that are very private, especially to a writer.

Strange feeling of intertextuality in going over many of the holograph notes. So many poems begun on the back of SUNY Bing course lists... written over Joyce, Sartre, Camus, Conrad, Kafka, Fitzgerald, etc. Their names, their works, BEHIND K's poems. Hmmm. Gotta get this in somehow.

It gets more and more bizarre. 20 or so holograph notes written on health evaluation sheets. "Elegy of Wong Toy" begun on back of "Physician's Evaluation of Patient's Mental Attitude."

Evening. Back in this residence cubby hole. Re-reading the novels. It's almost like K doesn't trust the written word on its own. Gone Indian has lots of tapes; Badlands has Sinnott the photographer. Other mediums are constantly foregrounded. But what to do with this?

2 August 1990

Mom and Dad's 28th wedding anniversary.

I'm struck by the thoroughness of research here--bees, rainfall, archaeological digs, horse breeding (in more detail than I care to ponder before dinner), myths--Mr. Canadian Postmodern is a bloody realist. Hmmm. Lots of references to Dickens too. I need a letter for this, though. My system turning on me already. Every idea leads to an Uh-oh, where do I put it?

Get a legible holograph page from each text and get them in the thesis somewhere. Collage-like. The pages don't have to be "evidence" of anything, just for interest's--and arbitrariness'!--sake.

3 August 1990

HA! Found a very early volume of poetry: "Mental Meanderings" 1945-46. Long rhymed sequence entitled: "On Having Failed a Final." The absorption with failure, even then.

So beautiful here, on the 12th floor, overlooking the whole city. I can see beyond the oil-baron's headquarters though, to the plains and wheat fields. Makes me feel more connected to the work.

Starting to feel like I know this Mr. Robert Kroetsch. Like he's an old friend with whom I'm getting reacquainted. All the stories, letters, notes seem so familiar, like catching up on the past or something. I've traced poems and novels from their inception on the back of a Denny's placemat through the drafts and logistics of publishing to the completed work. The whole practice seems rather odd, really. Trying to explain just why I'm doing this to my relatives has been a learning experience in itself.

6 August 1991

Spent the long weekend playing with my niece and nephews. Couldn't get more removed from "scholarly research" than playing commando on a jungle gym. The boys running around with toy machine guns; Krysta and I told to "stand guard," reminded that sentry duty means being still and quiet--out of their male way. Some things never change.

7 August 1990

Notes-to-Himself... gotta work these in too. The sisters in Crow based on his own sisters. I wonder if *they* know that.

Maps, maps, and more maps, each with a chapter by chapter structuring of the novels. He actually makes little squares for each chapter *before* filling it all in and the ideas rarely fit in the boxes intended to contain them. Pushing the boundaries, even at an outlining stage.

My imagination fired, I wish I had a month off. Uninterrupted time, one great burst of energy, and I could write it all.

8 August 1990

Found a wild letter from his mother-in-law today. Chastising him for his foul language. Sounds like my parents. You sound like a dock worker. A lady wouldn't talk that way! Yeah, well... Wait until they see my plans for the Feminism chapter.

Amazing work on titles. I can't even begin until I have a title. I've written some pretty bad papers because I couldn't let go of a great title, even when the thesis it demanded stank. Kroetsch offers his editors as many as ten different titles just for what became But We Are Exiles; Badlands had almost as many.

Beautiful! Dawe's hump originally envisioned as wings. Wonder if anyone's picked up on that or done anything with it.

9 August 1990

I've gone through two whole packages of my 3x5's--had to go back to the bookstore. Not sure if that's a good sign or not. At any rate, I'm blown away by all this "finding," these trails left for me to find. Read through three handwritten drafts "Stone Hammer Poem" today. Beautiful to retrace the steps, like looking over his shoulder. Suddenly I understand the archaeology metaphor.

10 August 1990

My last day of digging and delving. Starting to wonder how much of this I can really use. The desire to fit it all in, to rename chapters and remake plans to do it justice. Eight full hours a day trying to decipher impenetrable handwriting. It's worth it. It will be.

18 Dec 1990

Gee, bit of a gap here. All my grand plans for getting started early disappeared once the school year began. (Archaeological expedition delayed on account of rain...) But now, the last papers are marked, the last bibliography assignment submitted, the last exam written. It's time to begin. (Then again, maybe I'll start after Christmas...)

31 December 1991

12:01 AM. Happy New Year! (I guess that makes it January 1, but I can't get used to it being a new day until I've gone to sleep and woken up). Locked myself up, turned down four party invitations and a lovely offer of a date with Dad, feeling sorry for me, promising to get me home early New Year's Day to get back to work. My arguing that starting the very moment of the New Year with the first chapter is symbolic, a fresh start, the impetus that this thesis needs.

13 January 1991

Still no first chapter. Still reading and re-reading. Still cleaning the oven and the fridge and the fireplace instead. Anything but face that computer, that blank screen.

16 January 1991

Hallelujah! A breakthrough. Not a whole chapter mind you, but parts of eight of them. (Like glimpses of fragments protruding from rock...) My finally facing that I always work according to a sort of all-at-once jigsaw puzzle method. Starting and finishing little parts just isn't in me. Gotta attack the whole and see what happens.

22 January 1991

Got a skeleton of each and every one of those damn letters. Starting to understand Liebhaver a lot better now too. I like to drink hot tea while I sit and hate my alphabet.

28 January 1991

Wrote the "Juvenescence" chapter tonite. Really neat how it happened. I had no idea how to begin and was getting very frustrated and just started to think about my own childhood and the beginnings that may have shaped whatever writing style I may have and I was writing it down before I was really aware of doing so, before there was any plan to approach the form or the semiotics of the chapter in any particular way. The process really did become the product and I was sitting there feeling quite pleased about that but then I started thinking that, theoretically, this is a big *SO WHAT?* There's no way for the reader to really know that, no way to differentiate the planned and edited from the spontaneous and pretty much left alone.

Clearly I think too much.

6 February 1991

I always tell my students the only stupid question is an unasked question. I always believed it too. Until that is, people started asking me about my thesis. They ask how many more chapters... I give them the number of the week. They say, Gee, that sounds like an awful lot. Why don't you cut a chapter or two or combine some so you can make it shorter. I say, because it's an alphabet. They say, So? I say, I can't just eliminate letters because I feel like it. They say, why?

It's you and me, Lieb.

15 February 1991

Michelle asked me today how come I started this whole alphabet thing and I absolutely had no idea! (Sometimes it's the answers that are stupid.) I literally forgot. I've been at it for so long that it just became a matter of course. I've stopped thinking about why... only if it is ever going to get

done. Went back to re-read my notes from this time last year. It seems the structure came out of a desire not to structure, and then, realising the impossibility of that, I decided to impose the most rigid, arbitrary structure I could. Yeah, sure, whatever I say.

28 February 1991

God I wish it was (were? the subjunctive always gets me) Leap Year. An extra day, an extra hour. Stop the world, I wanna get off.

3 March 1991

Wrote the System chapter today. Felt so good. Cathartic really. Hope it makes it through the revising stages.

7 March 1991

my eyes ache my back aches i think even my tongue aches just burned it on hot coffee trying to stay awake to finish this insane project on which i embarked seemed like a good idea at the time that's what they all say i don't care if i never graduate i was a damn good bartender i could make a living at that who needs a master's degree anyway academics are nothing but stuffy useless old fogies with over-inflated egos what ever made me think i wanted to become one what ever made me think i could do this no one should have to go through this i'm a social person and i spend seventeen eighteen nineteen hours a day locked up in my study staring at my computer screen with only the humming of the hard drive and the blips of the cursor for company i can hardly remember what it was like to have a non-thesis conversation if one more person asks me how it's going i'm going to have to do something very drastic my imagination is so numb right now i can't specify what but if pushed to the limit i'll come up with somethin believe you me haven't even read a newspaper in three days and there's a war going on you know that's it i'll quit school and join the army or something you can't you're a pacifist okay so i'll join the red cross or the peace corps or something you can't do that either the peace corps is american and the red cross can't even get into kuwait you know the worst thing is that i start arguing with myself and i lose even at that

11 March 1991

A couple more chapters done and suddenly it doesn't look so bleak. Found a cool article on the breakdown of Kroetsch criticism by A. R. Kizuk. It's a drag that once again, something I've been trying to work out for myself has already been done, but... at least it'll make good fodder for one of the (far too many) chapters still to go.

14 March 1991

Colouring, glue-sniffing. The title-page and the collages coming together. I get to be five years old again and I love it.

16 March 1991

Re-digging through my xeroxes of Kroetsch's papers. The wonder of discovery all over again. He researched calendar dates for 1945 to ensure that he had the days of the week for Lent right. Trying, for the fourth time, to write the Archaeology chapter. Afraid of it. Afraid I won't be able to get it right. So important, so mind-boggling for me. The need to capture that feeling, the realisation before I start that I cannot even begin.

18 March 1991

Talked to the man himself on the phone tonite. Got home later than usual, bone-tired, and flipped on the answering machine as I headed into the kitchen to make some tea. Beep. Hi Duck this is Dad... Plugged in the kettle. Beep. Alanna? Kerry here. Just called to say... Most of that message drowned out by the kettle whistling. Beep. Hello Alanna. This is Robert Kroetsch. YIKES! I spilled boiling water all over the counter! I mean you don't get a message like that everyday. Anyhow, I called him back and the interview worked out fine and he was very nice. Made for a much-needed boost when I'm really starting to think this project will never be completed.

21 March 1991

Wrote "Risk" last night. Met with Laurie today to discuss my teaching evaluation. Turns out his reference letter is all about my pedagogical risk-taking. Got Kroetsch's interview responses in the mail tonite when I got home. He wrote that I am a lover of risks. Serendipity or conspiracy?

24 March 1991

Mom called tonite to read me my horoscope: "All stops out! Cycle high, invest in your own capabilities. You'll successfully meet challenge of deadline. Focus on intensity and creativity." Now, I would hardly consider myself a believer in astrology or any other "psychic" or "New Age" genres, but this seems a bit too good to be coincidence.

29 March 1991

Had an amazing conversation with Karen and Cherry about myth tonite. Both of them so knowledgeable about religion and philosophy--Karen can actually read Sanskrit. Me sitting there feeling so in awe of not just their knowledge but the grace and generosity with which they share it. I couldn't contribute much to the conversation, but I've got them reading Badlands so I'm looking forward to our next discussion.

1 April 1991

Lost an entire chapter today. The computer locked and it just disappeared. Back-up file and all. On April Fool's Day! It's too ridiculous even for fiction. If I wrote that into a novel, nobody would believe me.

3 April 1991

Another unbelievable "coincidence" in my horoscope: "Every day in every way you do more in less time. Live up to your own expectations. You could have a future in the publishing industry. Be patient with yourself until you find the right words." This is very strange. Is every Leo on the planet writing a thesis on Kroetsch?

5 April 1991

It's done! Still needs some revising of course and I haven't typed the table of contents or the bibliography or any of that academic-requirement-type-stuff, but it's done! And, I became an aunt today. My brother Ken and sister-in-law Terri had a baby boy--8 lbs. 5 ozs.--Scott Kenneth--healthy and hollering. Terri and I complete our overdue, 9 month projects on same day. Beautiful.

Left a note saying "It's a boy!" with his weight, etc. for Karen and Cherry and at first they thought I was joking. Thought I was talking about Kroetsch and the weight of my thesis which, as I have been saying for weeks now, is BIG and HEAVY, arguing that theses should be graded according to sheer weight alone. My life so dominated by this project it's become impossible for friend's to imagine I could be speaking of anything else. (Dawe, yelling: "It's a bone!")

10 April 1991

Laurie sent back the draft for final revisions today. Lots of helpful comments but one really disturbing remark: my field notes aren't field notes. "Field notes," Laurie tells me, "are not, generically, self-reflexive. They don't normally contain thoughts about the procedure of digging or the *meaning* of doing all that digging." Great. Fabulous. I never really liked Dawe anyway. Badlands would be a pretty boring read if it weren't for Anna's inclusion of her thoughts and feelings (says the non-field-noter, self-reflexively self-justifying...)

APPENDIX A**HOLOGRAPH NOTE, PAGE 125 (27.10.1)**

It seems to me that I have to sit down and write the whole novel in one great uninterrupted outburst--This is the only way I can put into it a sustained energy, a sustained tension. This worked with both previous novels.

HOLOGRAPH NOTE, PAGE 126 (27.10.1)

Don't hear the voice yet

the situations are fine--so many good things going but humour does not quite come across--tone seems indefinite obvious
sex too strong?

(a little more humour perhaps--perhaps not the one to one relationship between him and his profession?

The war is brought in well. How does he get out of scene with [illegible] ?
Not clear?

Why are the men angry with him? What are the bones used for: fuel?

He is a "poet"--so is Johnnie--is this good?

APPENDIX B

TRANSCRIPTIONS OF REPRODUCTIONS OF KROETSCH'S RESEARCH MATERIALS

PAGE 181 (27.10.2)

[Re: The Studhorse Man]

Stallion

Studhorse man charges by the jump, by the colt, or by the season.

Usually by the standing colt--\$15 to \$20.

Heavy horses: Percheron--grey, or some are black. Bronson [apparently a surname] used Clydesdales. Belgian is also a draft horse.

Keep a stallion tied in a barn two ways: halter and a chain around the neck.

Jim puts a bridle on when they jump. Then he runs a snap and chain from the rear ring of the bridle through the ring on the far side and back to his hand. By pulling on 2 straps attached to the back he can tighten up the horse's jaw and it won't hurt. With his other hand he grinds the penis--to save time.

Jim, travelling a stallion for two years, led it with a chain run through one ring of the bit and fastened to the other. Used this "for Satan purchase."

Chain binds the jaw.

Stallion bit--rough on one side (like a wood screw), smooth on the other. Use smooth side for a gentle stallion; rough side pulls down on the jaw.

Kept his stallion shod.

Penis--16"(?)--dark with white across the top.

PAGE 182

A stallion will make for a gelding. Knows by smell it isn't a mare. Chew a gelding to pieces.

Used a loaded buggy whip to control the stallion--once cut upon the flank in two places when the stallion made for a four-horse team that was being watered.

As soon as a stud sees a mare it starts to get excited. The master has to handle it. In restraining it, he angers it; the stud may turn on the man.

Stallion gets bold with its tail and shakes its head. Teeth usually slip and tear hair off.

Jim got kicked in stomach with both feet.

Once a studhorse man came in, had lost his nerve, the woman of the house went and unhooked the stallion (used to pull the buggy). Four farmers refused to let a studhorse man come by because he couldn't control the stallion. Two men were crippled on the job.

A mare "going out of season" might put up quite a fight. Have to bring in another mare to arouse the stallion, then when he is aroused, switch him to the 1st mare.

Stallion often won't go near a mare that has a sucking colt.

Sometimes a mare won't take a stallion without being worked up. Use a pole or a stall to protect the stallion from kicks while he works the mare up.

Have to keep other horses away while breeding a mare.

One man holds the mare; other holds the stallion. One man could tie up the mare and do it alone.

Studhorse man goes on the road for a week at a time.

Jump three mares in one day but not 2 days running. Best to "stay by two a day." Too many--the stud isn't sure enough--you may destroy him.

PAGE 183 (27.10.2)

[Re: The Studhorse Man]

1. The artificial vagina

An outer tube made of heavy rubber

An inner tube or lining of thin rubber

The space between is filled with warm water

At one end an opening so the penis may enter

At other end a beaker--or rubber semen receptor--to catch the ejaculated semen

The operator must be skilled; the animal trained.

Studs insist on the correct temperature, pressure, and lubrication.

Temp. between 105 and 115 degrees F.

A special lubricant is commercially available

Let the stud mount an estrous female--and then guide the penis quickly into the open end of the artificial vagina

--see encyclopedia also estrus

2. Very active males can be trained to mount dummy females.

Semen should be used within the day of collection from a stallion

With the development of freezing techniques, it should be possible to store semen for several years

PAGE 184 (27.16.8)

[Re: Badlands]

They tear up their underclothes and boil flour to wrap specimens in wilderness--anything to enable them to bring out an extra specimen--

have that happen--they find the bones they've been seeking, at end of trip--no plaster or burlap left--they take off their clothes and boil up their remaining flour--then comes disaster--

1500 lbs. of plaster too [sic] bring one

father collected ---- 76

near Drumheller

--as many as 120 people came in one day to see a skeleton he was collecting--a 40 ft. duckbill skeleton--arranged to have one day to show.

burlap dipped in fluid plaster--

made the plaster right there--

cut underneath in middle, supported in 2 places, the complete wrapping and turn over--no rock showing--haul into canyon and build case on a rainy day--

outline the skeleton--

smaller one in one piece--larger ones, break at a natural crack or a weak point

one black boxed--3500 lbs.--the biggest boned dinosaur--close to 3000 lbs.

--if any bone is exposed, cover it with rice paper, then put on sticks cut by river--then wrap in strips of [other pages not available]

PAGE 190 (27.6.3)

[Re: Words of My Roaring]

Questions:

1. *Do the scrutineers count the ballots at a provincial election?*

They are there to check the count [sic] also to watch the poll during the day.

2. *Are the ballots counted at the polling booth?*

They are counted at the polling station, the booth is the little corner, set aside, for marking the ballot.

3. *In a provincial election, is electioneering allowed on the day before the actual vote?*

Yes.

4. *To vote in a provincial election--do you make an "X"?*

Yes.

5. *Is there a name for the men on horseback at a stampede who ride out to take a rider off a bucking horse?*

They are called pick-up riders.

6. *If you had no rain for 35 days, would a heavy rain still save a wheat-crop? At what time of year could a crop be saved--in August sometime, for instance?*

Off [sic] course Bob it all depends on the amount of reserve moisture at the beginning of the drought, but with a good reserve, a crop can stand a 35 day drought, for instance last year (1964) we had hardly anything--but a little sprinkle of rain from the middle of May until the first part of August. But we had a terrific amount of sub-moisture. With the methods of farming these days, fertilizer, deep tillage cultivation instead of plows and the combine putting the straw back on the land, make quite a lot of difference in the amount of moisture we need.

I sincerely hope this answers the questions for you. Sorry I didn't get it off sooner, but I just found the letter, it was put away in my desk, any time I can answer any questions please feel free to ask. Hope to see you soon.

As ever,

Harley

P.S. Hello to Jane and Laura

PAGE 192 (27.6.3)

[Re: The Words of My Roaring]

RAIN

The homesteader's generation--a great shared service that severed the past and gave these men a new beginning in common.

West of Red Deer-- swamp fever killed the horses the homesteaders brought with them.

Stopping house. Farmers who would put up people who lived farther from town.

The man and his part-Indian wife that Jane and I talked to in Snowy House, London, at breakfast. In the old man, the only truly significant experience in his long life was that of homesteading, when he was 17 years old.

LIST OF EPIGRAPHS AND TEXT WINDOWS

ARCHAEOLOGY

- page 1 -- "The poets as..." (P&E, 97)
- page 2 -- "I'm going to write..." (27.1.13.7)
- page 4 -- "God help us..." (BL, 2)
- page 7 -- "Dawe stepped off..." (BL, 172)
- page 10 -- "He let himself..." (BL, 189)

BIOGRAPHY

- page 11 -- "A biographer is..." (SHM, 165)
- page 11 -- "I have lived..." (27.1.11)
- page 11 -- "Mental Meanderings..." (27.17.14)
- page 11 -- "Canada looked..." (NYJ in LTW, 137)
- page 12 -- "Graduate College..." (334.84.1.1.2)
- page 13 -- "I had an incredible..." (SOS, 111)
- page 13 -- "Kroetsch, Hilda Marie..." (334.84.1.1.1)
- page 13 -- "I only learned..." (Acknowledgements, LTW, ix)
- page 13 -- "Dear Son..." (27.1.11.97)
- page 14 -- "EDUCATION DIRECTOR..." (334.84.1.1.1)
- page 14 -- "Residence from Birth..." (334.84.1.1.1)
- page 14 -- "I thought everybody..." (SOS, 115)
- page 14 -- "I was quite astonished..." (SOS, 111)
- page 15 -- "PERSONAL HISTORY..." (334.84.1.1.1)
- page 16 -- "Yesterday, while..." (MsC 42)

- page 16 -- "I didn't think..." (SOS, 122)
- page 17 -- "in my family..." (SOS, 119)
- page 18 -- "during harvest..." (MDAC in LTW, 4)
- page 18 -- "I lived four..." (SOS, 113)

CANONICITY

- page 18 -- "Since I define..." (Brown, 1)

DIALOGISM

- page 25 -- "I believe in a dialogic..." (UST, 36)

EDUCATOR

- page 39 -- "the mere onslaught..." (GI, 13)
- page 41 -- "Saturday, April 2..." (CJ, 67)
- page 42 -- "Thursday, September 7..." (NYJ in LTW, 144)
- page 43 -- "Simon and Schuster..." (27.2.4)

FEMINISM

- page 45 -- "This Miss Coehn..." (GI, 45-46)
- page 46 -- "Hello? Carol?..." (GI, 46-47)
- page 47 -- "Her tits were like..." (SHM, 41-42)
- page 48 -- "Martha's own nipples..." (SHM, 42)
- page 49 -- "The only woman..." (GI, 48)
- page 50 -- "Total and absurd male..." (BL, 76)

GENRE

- page 51 -- "We have to face..." (Enright, 27)

HANGOVER

page 72 -- "Begin: the body..." (TR, 67)

page 72 -- "Interviewer: Would you ever..." (Twigg, 116)

JUVENESCENCE

page 91 -- "A whole unlearning..." (CJ, 14)

page 93 -- "Hey, wait a minute..." ("Seed Catalogue," FN, 42)

page 95 -- "How do you suppose..." ("After Paradise," FN, 266)

page 97 -- "Does your mama know..." ("Excerpts from the Real
World," FN, 242)

page 98 -- "oops is the right..." ("After Paradise," FN, 267)

page 98 -- "Stone Hammer Poem are..." (SHN, 134, 136)

KROETSCH

page 99 -- "no camera..." (27.1.13.32a)

LANGUAGE

page 100 -- "it seems to me that..." (LV, 142)

page 101 -- "Language itself is..." (VK in LTW, 189)

page 101 -- "A face that is only..." (CJ, 30)

page 102 -- "We are taught..." (EI, 23)

page 103 -- "I despise words..." (BL, 34)

page 106 -- "Language itself, the trickster..." (CJ, 25)

METAPHOR

page 107 -- "The notion of..." (RDT, 46)

page 109 -- "Kroetsch: I guess I have..." (LV, 93)

page 110 -- "I have learned..." (LV, 117)

NOTE

- page 119 -- "It seems to me that..." (27.10.1)
- page 120 -- "Don't hear the voice..." (27.10.1)
- page 120 -- "more of the labyrinthine..." (7.1)
- page 121 -- "Let the chips fall..." ("To the Wahs," FN, 107)
- page 121 -- "Let the surprise..." ("Back in the Spring of '76:
For Laurie Ricou," FN, 114)
- page 121 -- "Listen to the voice..." (EI, 23)
- page 121 -- "Sinnott took great..." (BL, 124-25)
- page 122 -- "No mail at all..." ("Letters to Salonika," FN, 147)
- page 122 -- "I liked the telegram..." ("Excerpts from the Real
World," FN, 229)
- page 122 -- "6. This stone maul..." (27.18.7.3)
- page 123 -- "Grey, two-headed..." ("Stone Hammer Poem," FN, 2)
- page 123 -- "* I have removed..." ("Mile Zero," FN, 132)
- page 123 -- "I am tired of..." ("Letters to Salonika," FN, 141)
- page 124 -- "To town to buy..." (CJ, 73)
- page 124 -- "What is a letter?..." ("Letters to Salonika," FN, 153)
- page 124 -- "From you I could..." ("Letters to Salonika," FN, 150)
- page 124 -- "Even the two ends..." ("Excerpts from the Real
World," FN, 253)
- page 124 -- "I am in China..." ("Postcards from China," FN, 168)
- page 125 -- "page 33: James Darling..." ("The Ledger," FN, 11)
- page 125 -- "I only buy used..." ("Excerpts from the Real
World," FN, 231)
- page 125 -- "Winter was ending..." ("Seed Catalogue," FN, 32)

ORAL

page 127 -- "I am still..." (LV, 13)

page 127 -- "I was tuning in on..." (LV, 39)

RISK

page 139 -- "A serious writer..." (LV, 50)

page 141 -- "The poet not as maker..." (P&E, 104)

page 142 -- "I play on the edge..." (LV, 50)

page 142 -- "I used to..." (Brown, 1)

SYSTEM

page 146 -- "I suppose I write against..." (LV, 159)

page 147 -- "The thing that strikes me..." (LV, 165)

page 147 -- "The whole notion of..." (LV, 190-91)

page 150 -- "...I have less and less..." (LV, 142)

TALL TALE

page 158 -- "the tall tale tradition..." (AECV, 50)

page 160 -- "One time in my callous..." (SHM, 134)

page 164 -- "during harvest..." (MDAM in LTW, 4)

page 166 -- "Why didn't you go..." (BL, 135-36)

UN

page 167 -- "There are no rules..." (CJ, 70)

page 167 -- "When you write about..." (SHN, 133)

page 168 -- "At one time I considered..." (UH, 17)

page 169 -- "the form must violate itself..." (EP, 63)

page 169 -- "One build into a system..." (LV, 32)

VERACITY

page 171 -- "itinerant prairie printer..." (CJ, 11)

page 172 -- "Stallion..." (27.10.2)

page 174 -- "1. The artificial vagina..." (27.10.2)

page 175 -- "They tear up their..." (27.16.8)

page 180 -- "QUESTIONS..." (27.6.3)

page 182 -- "RAIN..." (27.6.3)

WEST

page 186 -- "From Tristan to Columbus..." (27.1.13.32d)

page 188 -- "I think the prairie..." (CANAM, 2; 27.28.3)

page 189 -- "I look at my hands..." (CJ, 52)

XYZ

page 193 -- "The beautiful truth..." (MNS, 62)

page 193 -- "The story is concealed..." (VK in LTW, 182)

page 193 -- "I like mathematics..." (SOS, 134)

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SKETCHES OF A THESIS

A thesis is a unified argument.
Some theses are unified.
This thesis is not unified.

So much for that.

How can one argue that a thesis
is truly a thesis,
if such a question can be argued?

So much for that.

I said, to myself
(I was working on this thesis)
Alanna, I said, is there
(I was reading Completed Field Notes)
(and eating alphabet soup)
any possibility of a
convincing,
single,
unitary/unified
POINT
on the works of Robert Kroetsch?
No, I said.

So much for that.