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Title of Thesis — Titre de la thèse

Robert Kroetsch's Fictions

University — Université

Alberta

Degree for which thesis was presented — Grade pour lequel cette thèse fut présentée

MA

Year this degree conferred — Année d'obtention de ce grade

1981

Name of Supervisor — Nom du directeur de thèse

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ROBERT KROETSCH'S FICTIONS

by



DALE TAYLOR

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL, 1981

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

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Abstract

Robert Kroetsch does not, in his novels and poetry, pretend to mirror the world but on the contrary draws attention to the fact that the literary work is an invention, and that it creates its own world. I will argue that this narrative self-consciousness makes Kroetsch's work not only more intriguing but also more valuable. One of his central interests is the relation between the perceiving mind and the world it perceives; insofar as that world consists of other people, the relation is established by communication. Kroetsch's work presents some of the difficulties and successes of communication both in the themes and in the methods of the fiction. In my Introduction I will summarize some of his ideas about communication and community, especially in the context of contemporary Canadian writing.

In Chapter I I will analyze the significance of the narrative voice in The Words of My Roaring. The novel demonstrates how difficult it may be for a speaker to express his thought accurately and honestly. It shows, as well, that a speaker's attempt to communicate may be frustrated by the conventions of his language, and that he may remain isolated.

Chapter II will extend the consideration of how one may use language to isolate himself. In Gone Indian the protagonist fails to establish any meaningful human relations, and is finally reduced to a state of solipsism.

Since communication depends to such a large extent on the conventions and assumptions of a community, I will turn in Chapter III to Kroetsch's analysis of some of the common ideas and values of modern civilization. Jeremy Sadness's failure in Gone Indian results partially from the failure of his culture to help him understand his life. In The Studhorse Man Kroetsch presents his most severe criticism of modern values, showing that it is characteristic of our culture to affirm individualism and deny community.

It will be seen from these arguments that Kroetsch is sensitive to two opposite claims -- the individual needs a community and yet he may be stifled by it. In Chapter IV I will discuss Badlands and The Ledger. In both of these works, the protagonist imaginatively recreates past experience so as to understand his purpose in the present. Kroetsch shows that, although imaginative structures such as language may restrict both self-knowledge and a knowledge of human community, they are also the best means of achieving that knowledge. The value of fiction and other products of the imagination is that they acknowledge themselves as a means and not as the end of understanding.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr R.T. Harrison, for his wise and kind advice and well-trying patience, and Dr M.L. Ross for many valuable observations. I am also grateful for Agnes Hubert, Barry Nolan, and Candace Fertile who have assisted with typing and proofreading.

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"In a sense, we haven't got an identity until somebody tells our story. The fiction makes us real" (Creation, p.63).

Introduction

In an essay on Robert Kroetsch's first three novels Morton L. Ross has argued that "in Kroetsch's treatment, matters of craft are deliberately extended to engage analogous human and moral issues."¹ The analogy between techniques and themes is not surprising in a writer who takes communication itself as one of his subjects. One of Kroetsch's predominant technical interests has been narrative voice, and his novels often involve highly idiosyncratic first-person narrators. His focussing on the narrative itself and on the character who is speaking or writing the story draws attention to the attempt to communicate. A common characteristic of the first-person narrators in Kroetsch's fiction is their initial and sometimes continuing confusion about themselves and their consequent attempts to understand. One of Kroetsch's abiding interests has been the ways in which language works, or fails to enable people to communicate and to understand. He shows that although it may be a hindrance to a clear perception of the world and a barrier to contact with other people, it is also the most precise means of understanding as well as communicating. Kroetsch's understanding of the double-edged nature of the tool of language is, I will argue, one reason why his work repays study. He is, moreover, especially aware that language is not only valuable but also significant. It is only partially a structure of signs pointing to a world of objects.

More importantly, it is itself a total sign that represents the characteristically human reaction to the world. This reaction is, to a large extent, imaginative.²

This Introduction will describe Kroetsch's ideas about the use of language, specifically but not exclusively in literature. I assume, in this, that literary art differs from other kinds of communication primarily in its deliberateness and not in its intentions; it is a paradigm of communication and should provide a model for study that illustrates the essential characteristics. This description is preparatory to the critical explications that provide the evidence for my argument. The Words of My Roaring and Gone Indian illustrate the danger of the fictions a character creates through his speaking. The Stud-horse Man, however, with its interpretation of modern history and Badlands, in which the narrator offers an alternate version of a personal history, show that fictions may be the means of understanding. Kroetsch demonstrates that the test of a fiction is not in its fidelity to a prior (and forever unknowable) truth, but rather in its human usefulness.

The moral dilemma implied by this situation is that fictions may be exclusively individual. Kroetsch, therefore, analyzes the opposition between solipsism, the knowledge of no world beyond the self, and an acceptance of community. He raises this issue in his presentation of the difficulty a speaker encounters in communicating his particular experience in language; the value of language is that it is shared, but this very quality is problematic for an individual trying to define his unique experience. He resolves the opposition, insofar as resolution

is possible, by a critical analysis of some recent historical events, showing that the modern reliance on individualism has been destructive and that, despite some compromises, the lasting source of value is community. I must qualify my statement of this resolution because the argument from history begs the question of how an individual is to understand his unique life by means of shared and general truths. The value of Kroetsch's work is that it provides not an answer but a method. The abstraction and elucidation of experience in fiction exemplifies how meaning may be won from the chaos of experience. The meaning that is assigned, however, derives not only from the authentic and particular experience but also from remembered and evaluated experiences recorded in the words and structures of language. The individual's response to the world is imaginative, but that act depends upon a human community. Moreover, the imaginative act helps to create that community; it is in this sense that "the fiction makes us real."

Kroetsch's use of first-person narrators and his anxiety about the danger of solipsism may, I think, be illuminated by an observation Thoreau makes in the opening section of Walden: "We commonly do not remember that it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking. I should not talk so much about myself if there were any body else whom I knew as well. Unfortunately, I am confined to this theme by the narrowness of my experience."³ Kroetsch is, with Thoreau, intensely aware of the essential confinement and isolation of the self. One of his first interests, therefore, is the attempt to communicate. He identifies writing as one way "to deny the loneliness, to join the world and have consequences."⁴

Kroetsch's first-person narrators, whether or not they are actually writing their stories, are imaginatively reshaping experience in an attempt to make it comprehensible. Although they are for the most part not aware of themselves as artists, they embody and enact some of the issues that Kroetsch engages in his general comments about art. In fact, Kroetsch's statements indicate that art is not essentially different from other forms of communication. Some of the problems that he identifies for writers of fiction may confront all people who attempt to use words to communicate. Howard O'Hagan says in and of Tay John: "to tell a story is to leave most of it untold. You mine it, as you take ore from the mountain. You carry the compass around it. You dig down--and when you have finished, the story remains something beyond your touch, resistant to your siege."⁵ This description is equally accurate of the attempt to attach words to an experience. As a novelist and narrative poet, Kroetsch often uses stories as emblems or illustrations of his understanding of the world. Moreover, he argues that all people use this method. Good storytellers, he says, are found at

any kitchen table at which there are more than three people assembled--People tell stories and in that sense use narrative to construct a reality. I mean--stories about Aunt Millie, about a guy in the office, about driving through the traffic . . . [Kroetsch's ellipsis]⁶

The fact that narrative may construct reality accounts for both the difficulty and the success of this means of understanding and communicating.

The successful use of verbal constructs to express an understanding

of experience should need little proof. As F.R. Leavis says in The Living Principle, a "poem stands between us in what is in some sense a public world. Minds can meet in it. . . ." ⁷ The difficulty that Kroetsch is concerned with is that the worlds created by narrative are not only real but also vital and independent. He shows that language is not a passive tool for communication but an active force that may facilitate or prevent understanding. It may, in other words, allow individuals to communicate or entrench them more deeply in their isolation.

The basic dichotomy that allows for these different possibilities is the opposition between the unique and momentary experience and the structure that gives it definition. One of the fascinating images in Badlands (in which the chapters are captioned like photographs) is of Michael Sinnot with a large black cloth over his head, standing on the raft as it floats downriver but focussing his camera lens at the unmoving bank, framing a tiny scene while everything around him changes. He certainly misses more than he sees, and yet his photographs do preserve something of the past as it vanishes. Kroetsch has confessed that Sinnot "might be a sort of one-eyed novelist." ⁸ The photographer's method illustrates how people use structures (in this case literally frames) to contain and explain experience. The form, the picture, name, poem or story makes the world comprehensible. There is, however, an inherent danger: "we control the world by naming it and lose it by naming it. Because the name starts to replace the whatever else." ⁹ The expression of an experience is essentially different from sensory or emotional experience; it is necessarily

a selection and an abstraction. Hence Anna Dowe's question:

Action and voice: how strange they should have so little connection. Or is there any at all, any familiar knock at the closed door, between the occurrence and the most exact telling? (Badlands, p. 45)

The inherent difference between experience and expression gives rise to the possibility that the "telling," not tied to the "occurrence," may refer only to itself. The consequence of this severance is that the verbal constructs may replace that which they should communicate.

In his interviews and critical articles, Kroetsch often takes up the subject of how language, specifically literature, expresses or fails to express an understanding of the world. His observations on the nature of art are especially valuable if art is accepted as a paradigm of communication. His comments describe two characteristics: the individual speaker attempts to express a particular understanding of the world, to "make it new," and he has an essential relation to a community. Kroetsch addresses these points when he says that

Western man--in both senses--is vitally interested in the particularity of his experience and the way it relates to the general, to other people's experience. . . . After all, why do we read? Partly to share and partly to see something new. 10

He discusses the relation between the particular and the general as it is evident in language in a short article, "voice/in prose: effing the ineffable," which uses the categories of the Swiss linguist and father of structuralism, Ferdinand de Saussure: 11.

There are these two sides to language: langue and parole. Langue is the great-given, the sum total of words and grammar and literature and concluded speech. Parole is what one of us says, the uniqueness of the speaking (writing) person. If you are unlucky, the great-given swamps you, and

even when you speak, you are silent. If you are incredibly lucky, and if you work your ass off, the great-given sounds, not over, but in your unique speaking. If that happens, then you have found a voice.¹²

The tradition of the language, the sum total of all its uses, may overwhelm the individual, who must try to speak not against it but through it in order to assert his particular voice. There is, however, as great a danger from too much individuality as from too little; the highly assertive voice of Applecart in The Words of My Roaring becomes "a voice blasting away into the darkness. He didn't seem to have ears. He was one big blabbering mouth" (p. 94). The individual's awareness of both his audience and his tradition may help him to avoid this extremity of self-assertion.

One of Kroetsch's recurring subjects in his critical writings is the relation of the Canadian writer to his community and to the literary tradition from which he works. An interview with Dennis Cooley and Robert Enright in Arts Manitoba is especially valuable for Kroetsch's remarks on the effect of literary traditions. His analysis of the problems that confront writers may be extrapolated to apply also to other speakers. He describes the effect of conventional forms on perception:

the old stories, instead of illuminating the world, were stopping us from seeing the world because they were telling us what to see. It's like a pair of glasses that don't fit anymore. . . . You couldn't see through them.¹³

In another interview Kroetsch says that "[o]ne of the functions of honest writing is to make language reveal again."¹⁴ Commenting on the poetry of Williams and Stevens, he identifies the consequences of

breaking from a dead form:

When they got to the three-line stanza they made incredible changes in their work. I will offend a lot of my friends when I say the three-line stanza changed them. They want it to be life that changed people. That's not true, it's the goddamned three-line stanza that changed them. In something as simple as letting go of your left-hand margin the implications for what is ultimately vision are just staggering, they really are.¹⁵

Even while admitting his exaggeration Kroetsch insists that the forms of language may govern not simply communication but even perception.

He also expounds the idea of the value of a community and a "total tradition" most comprehensively in this interview. Again, the virtue of this analysis is not simply in the explanation of the situation of Canadian writers; Kroetsch's fiction and poetry provide evidence that the factors that characterize a writer's relation to his society operate also for other individuals. The observations in this interview help to define how one may understand himself in relation to his community. Kroetsch acknowledges that the poet, especially on the prairies, is often a spokesman for the tribe, even to the dangerous extent of losing his individual voice in submission to a communal language. Significantly, however, the sense of community derives not simply from present experience but largely from the memory of the past.

RK: . . . Obviously in the prairies the small town and the farm are no longer real places, they are dreamed places.

DC: Or remembered places.

RK: . . . Remembered certainly. . . . The memory of small towns I am willing to bet, I am betting, is going to account for much of our art. I don't care how big the cities get. It's going to account for our notion of community, our obsessive notion of community; it comes right out of the small town.¹⁶

The essential fact in this explanation is that the memory of the past defines "our" characteristics. Kroetsch's "Stone Hammer Poem" illustrates the relation of the individual to the past:

This paperweight on my desk

where I begin
this poem was

found in a wheatfield
lost (this hammer,
this poem).

Cut to a function,
this stone was
(the hand is gone --

Kroetsch uses the stone maul and the poem with which it corresponds to unite a series of images widely separated in time: himself at his desk, writing; his father, retired from farming and waiting for death; his grandfather, homesteading the prairie; the Indian who lost the maul; the Indian who shaped it; the stone first formed by "the/recreating ice." He concludes:

Sometimes I write
my poems for that

stone hammer.

Part of his understanding of himself and his purpose as a poet results from his awareness of his relation to the past.

Kroetsch explains the ambivalent attitude of Canadians and especially western Canadians to the past in an interview with Donald Cameron:

The Canadian sense of history is something that needs much exploring--but it must be unique. We can ignore history completely and with ease, and yet we can be overwhelmed by history at opportune moments.¹⁷

Part of the mystique of America was of a new life with no past.¹⁸

This idea has not been as prevalent in Canada as in the United States, but it has certainly not been without influence.¹⁹ While the early settlers in western Canada were not guilty of such a rigorous denial of the past as that of their United States counterparts, they did not accept that the land they homesteaded had had human inhabitants for several hundred years and that it already had a history. As Kroetsch says in Arts Manitoba:

There is a terrible scepticism about [our past], especially on the prairies where there was a kind of denunciation of the past by the people who came out here as immigrants. Then in the thirties, the past seemed to betray them even further so that they became "next year people."²⁰

Nevertheless, the human institutions and the habits of perception that these immigrants brought to the prairies were necessarily those of their past lives in another environment. In many cases these habits resemble, to use Kroetsch's figure, a pair of glasses that no longer fit.

The problem of transplanting a culture is largely a question of language. Dick Harrison argues in Unnamed Country that "[w]hen [the pioneer on the prairies] attempted to take inventory of the unnamed country, his choices were limited by the vocabulary of another place and another life."²¹ Harrison's use of "vocabulary" is accurate both literally and metaphorically. In "Unhiding the Hidden," a review article on Surfacing, The Manticore and The Temptations of Big Bear, Kroetsch writes:

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. . . . The Canadian writer's particular predicament is that he writes with a language, within a literature, that appears to be authentically his own and not a borrowing. But . . . there is in the Canadian word a concealed other experience, sometimes British, sometimes American.

He argues that "the process of rooting that borrowed word, that totally exact homonym, in authentic experience, is then, must be, a radical one." The method of this transplanting is epitomized by Rudy Wiebe's *Big Bear*: "In his talking--in the language of the novel--he and Wiebe decreate the literary tradition that binds us into not speaking the truth."²² The radical process is a decreation or deconstruction of the very structures that allow for communication.

Peter Thomas has commented on Kroetsch's "deep suspicion of all referential frames--myth, fictions, the sensory world," and quotes as evidence Kroetsch's comment: "I have this skepticism that works against ideas of community and self: reality resisting design. . . ." ²³

Nevertheless, Kroetsch's work is as full of design as of the resistance to design. A passage that Thomas quotes from Frank Kermode is illuminating in this context:

Fictions are for finding things out, and they change as the needs of sense-making change. . . . Myths make sense in terms of a lost order of time . . . fictions, if successful, make sense of the here and now.²⁴

Fiction is, in Malcolm Bradbury's terms, "exemplary . . . quest for reality and a grammar of it."²⁵ Demonstrating, in his fiction, the use of imaginative structures to understand the world, Kroetsch also evaluates the method and some of the consequences.

One of the main issues in The Words of My Roaring, which I will analyze in Chapter I, is Johnnie Backstrom's relation to the language he uses. He confesses at one point: "I have that trouble with my vocabulary; it gets out of hand"(p. 194). His lack of control is comic, but more significantly it is, however exaggerated, illustrative of a problem that may present itself to other speakers. Johnnie's roaring words help him to understand himself but they do not establish his connection with other people; on the contrary, he realizes at the end of the novel that he has "never been so alone"(p. 211). In Chapter II I will discuss Gone Indian, in which Kroetsch presents a more extreme case of egocentricity accentuated by language; Jeremy Sadness, through the repeated failures of his attempts to connect with a human world, is reduced to the solipsistic state of "dreaming the universe in his own little skull"(p. 108). The cause of his problem is not simply that he is speaking to no-one but also that he has been misled by some of the characteristic values of Western civilization. Kroetsch criticizes some aspects of Western thinking in both The Studhorse Man and Gone Indian; in Chapter III I will examine his interpretation of history, primarily in these two novels. He takes advantage of his lunatic narrator in The Studhorse Man to express his ideas by exaggeration, using the facts of modern methods of birth control and warfare to show how comprehensively the Western world has denied the value of community. In Gone Indian he suggests that the sources of this denial are to be found in some of the typical ideas of the modern world.

Kroetsch spends more energy as a writer showing the difficulty,

the deceptions, even the pain of community than showing its value. But although this theme is presented indirectly, it is central. It is implied by the fact that he finds social and historical criticism necessary as well as by the nature of that criticism, by the attention to the means of communication, and most importantly by the deep sense of the individual's isolation within his own perceptions. Self-knowledge entails a definition of oneself in a human context, that is, in relation to a community. One way of achieving this understanding is through an awareness of the past. In Badlands, as well as in his long poems, Kroetsch examines not history per se but rather the understanding of it. Thomas complains that "the problem [Anna Dawe's] truth-seeking cannot resolve lies in the impregnability of Badlands, the novel, to the assault of verifiable fact."²⁶ But Badlands is exemplary for exactly this reason. Novels, and other imaginative structures, do not deal with verifiable fact but with ways of perceiving and understanding. Anna replaces her father's fiction with simply another fiction. In resenting this, however, Thomas has forgotten the lesson he read from Kermode, that fiction by its very contingency makes sense of the here and now. Although he has, and with cause, been regarded as an iconoclast among Canadian novelists Kroetsch's subject is that of most fiction, the relation of the individual to the human world in which he lives.

Chapter I: The Voice of Loneliness in The Words of My Roaring

Bradbury contends in Possibilities that "[a]ll human beings are narrators, seeking to reconcile what they see and what they say, seeking to make whole and credible the world they speak into existence."¹ Johnnie Backstrom in The Words of My Roaring is very much at the centre of the world he speaks into existence. To say this implies that he is vain and egocentric; more significantly, however, he is also imprisoned by his language. The events of the novel include many humiliating experiences for him, so that he comes finally to a clearer and somewhat humbler understanding of himself. However, he is never able to speak more truly about himself. I have previously quoted Kroetsch's extreme statement that Canadians "must decreate the literary tradition that binds us into not speaking the truth." In The Words of My Roaring he examines the difficulty in speaking the truth on an individual, not an historical level. The novel shows how the created fiction may function independent of its creator.

Johnnie is most aware of his own untruthfulness in this drunken tirade:

I vilified myself. "You phony bastard," I said. "You pretender. . . . No more of your measly little promises, your chiseling lies. Sit up and tell everybody, speak out, stand up straight like a man and shout, tell the goddamn truth for a change. Just for five minutes tell the goddamn truth" (p. 97).

He is certainly not an habitual liar, and usually does not intend to deceive. However his most important statement, that he will bring

rain, is obviously untrue. Johnnie exaggerates partly out of vanity and partly out of desperation at finding no adequate means of expression. Ross has analyzed this second problem precisely:

Consider Backstrom's explanation for driving his hearse into a telephone pole: " 'I had a pretty good jag on. I was drunker than a skunk. I was three sheets to the wind. What a bagful. Right to the gills.' " . . . Kroetsch repeatedly shows us that it is Backstrom's habit to multiply and play with such phrases, and this verbal compulsion in turn convinces us of Johnnie's nagging dissatisfaction with any one of them, his near-desperate urge to name the experience by trying a succession of them.²

Johnnie uses this very imprecise method to try to capture the truth of his experience in language.

There is another factor in Johnnie's relation to his language that helps to account for his inability to say what he means. The novel demonstrates vividly that language is active, not passive. Words serve not simply to label experience but also to make it comprehensible. As Malcolm Bradbury argues in Possibilities, "the act of forming words and sensible and coherent structures is a struggle for meaning against disorder."³ However, the words and structures of language by which we understand may impose their patterns on perception and limit understanding. Although articulation may be essential in understanding, there is also the danger that the language is a far cry from that to which it refers. Johnnie, recalling his boyhood ambition to be a doctor, says:

Imagine me trying to study medicine, with all those unlikely names. . . . I used to page through the Doc's medical books looking for pictures, and after a while I ended up looking at names. That's a funny thing. That is probably what kept me out of the field, along with certain other problems. I

couldn't have given a name to what I knew (p. 150).

The opposition between the disordered but authentic experience and the "unlikely names" by which it is understood is continual. It is analogous to the conflict between the typically human impulses to destroy and to create systems. Johnnie himself represents both of these impulses. In his attempt to see himself accurately and to order and thereby understand his world he is foiled by the established, and sometimes false, patterns of language that he has acquired and also by the unexpected consequences of his own words. However, his impulse to perversity, destruction and chaos is also frustrated, so that he is trapped by the systems and plots of the world.

Although it is cynical and unfair to claim that Johnnie, as a politician, is by vocation a liar, it is nonetheless true that his new profession allows for and even encourages an extraordinary talent in verbal legerdemain. Despite his sensitivity to nuances of language, however, he is prey to the devices of his own art. The way he becomes entangled in his egotistical dreaming when it is articulated in language is demonstrated in the gradual development of his promise of rain. He does not, when he first mentions rain in his campaign, promise that he will cause rain. He explains:

I had been drinking a little; I looked at the speaker and saw he was a farmer and I said: "Mister, how would you like some rain?"

More laughter.

"Right after the election," the farmer said, "if we vote for Johnnie Backstrom."

"No, sir," I said. "That's not what I said"(pp. 7-8).

Later that evening, in the Coulee Hill beer parlour, he is shamed into making his statement more explicit. Instead of saying simply that it

will rain before the election, less than two weeks off, he now promises that it will, and that his election to the Legislature should be one consequence. His audience in the beer parlour has started to take his words more seriously than they are intended:

"You say you're going to make it rain, Backstrom?"
 Not a question. A blunt simple statement. The walleyed farmer addressed me distinctly as if to teach me a very difficult equation or to ask me a very tricky riddle. His peculiar eye distracted me. . . . I was joking when I said that, about the rain. I had to give old Murdoch a smart answer. . . . The farmer here guzzled the free beer. . . . "Backstrom here was at Murdoch's spiel tonight. He says it's going to rain before the election."

This time I could feel little fragments of laughter pricking my skin. Sheer humiliation; from the very people who were pouring my last cent down their gullets. Splinters of laughter pierced my soul.

The slinger was standing at my elbow, waiting for the money.

"You going to make it rain?" someone asked. I swear, voices just seemed to speak at me out of the walls. I was confused. . . .

"I just said it would rain." . . .

"You say you're going to make it rain, Backstrom?"

"I just said it'll rain before the election."

"Oh, I see." The walleyed farmer let out a guffaw, his voice croaking again. "You're backing down."

"The hell I am. Hell no." . . . Jesus H., they knew nobody makes it rain . . . But if they wanted to believe--holy baldheaded Moses, it was bound to rain in thirteen days. That was a blue-eyed grizzly cinch. "Sure," I said. I damned near put that empty glass through the table top. "Hell, yes. Sure I said it'll rain. I promise you that, you clod-hoppers. You prairie chickens. And when it's so goddamned wet you can't drive to the polling booths, I hope you'll be men enough to walk, wade or swim so you can make a cross for John Backstrom (pp. 13-15).

So far, Johnnie is the victim primarily of his vanity and defiance of humiliation, although it is obvious from this sequence that his words are starting to take on more meaning than he intends. In the scene in

the rodeo arena, however, he explicitly offers rain as an election promise:

"So I'll add something else," . . . "And a penniless man hates to say this. You'd be bigger clowns yourselves for voting for me--unless it rains by election day."

I choked up in my throat. I've never been quite sure I intended to say that. I got carried away (p. 133).

Partly, this rashness results from his defying the reminder of his own mortality; he has identified himself with the rodeo clown, and after the goring he takes the clown's place as entertainer. However, the promise also results from his becoming more thoroughly entangled in his own oratory.

The most significant fact is that Johnnie's defiance of his own poverty, mortality, and inconsequence takes the form of the underdog anti-establishment rant he has learned from Applecourt. His "hind-tit" speech is the major indication of how the patterns that exist control his language and therefore, in this case, his behaviour. Johnnie had not, when he first listened to Applecourt's broadcasts, accepted either the message or the idiom. His sober criticism is that Applecourt "said grandiose windbag things about the present government ignoring its sense of moral responsibility"(p.93). His drunken criticism is as follows:

"But what in the Christly hell will you do?" I shouted.

Applecourt wasn't listening. He was a voice blasting away into the darkness. He didn't seem to have ears. He was one big blabbering mouth. Follow me, he kept saying. Follow me, my dear friends. . . .

" . . . No, no, Applecourt!" . . . You are a flatulent windbag!"(pp. 94-95)

However, in his speech at the rodeo arena he employs the Biblical rhythms and allusions, the accusation, and the exhortation "Follow me" that characterize Applecart's speech. Johnnie's compulsive use of words that he knows he does not believe is also evident in his imagined funeral oration of Jonah Bledd (p. 145). But the situation is much more serious in the last scene of the novel, in which he prepares his final pre-election speech. He has, in his last conversation with the prophet, realized that he has not caused the rain, and does not deserve the victory that the rain guarantees. But as he plans an explanation, he finds himself, despite himself, trapped within the familiar phrases:

"My dear friends, the time is at hand. We've had enough suffering, enough crying. We've had enough pain. Enough dried codfish--" No, dammit, no. Explain, explain. "We must forgive, my dear friends. We must forgive the selfish, the proud of heart, the whoremongers; we must forgive the plutocrats on easy street, the teetotalers, the pious--" No no no no. A man has to make amends. I owed it to the old Doc (p. 211).

His involvement in the oratory of the political campaign actually prevents his giving Coulee Hill voters even five minutes-worth of the "goddamned truth." The language develops its own patterns into which his thought must be distorted if it is to be articulated at all.

Kroetsch shows how the imaginative patterns that are projected onto the world can become real, and capable of independent action. As an epigraph to his introduction to the anthology Creation he quotes from Heinrich Zimmer's The King and the Corpse: Tales of the Soul's Conquest of Evil:

The involvement of the gods in the web of their own

creation, so that they become . . . the harried victims of their creatures, entangled in nets of not quite voluntary self-manifestation, and then mocked by the knowing laughter of their own externally reflected inner judge: this is the miracle of the universe. This is the tragicomic romance of the world.

Kroetsch adds: "Men, too, become involved in the webs, in the patterns of action and significance, which they create." Johnnie's "creatures" are verbal constructs, but he is nonetheless the victim of a force he has set in motion but cannot control. He dreams his dilemma before he has made his own Applecartish appeal in the rodeo arena, but after his realization that Applecart is a phoney and a liar:

. . . I dreamt that it poured rain. Endlessly. It got started and wouldn't stop. It was terrible. The crops started to rust. . . . Then the soil wouldn't soak up any more water and the crops began to turn yellow and drown in the low spots. Flooded out. . . . And for all this, people blamed me. . . . They said, Johnnie Backstrom did this, and now he's sitting in the Parliament buildings, warm and dry and drawing big money. He turned it on and now he can't turn it off (pp. 98-99).

The passage from Zimmer illustrates the role of the prophet and his relation to Johnnie. The prophet, repulsive and demented, is described as "a human dust storm" (p. 79) and a "black blizzard" (p. 79), and is thus associated with the 'thirties drought, which represents in the novel the force of destruction that leads to chaos. His character is an extrapolation of the irrational and defiant impulse in Johnnie, the impulse that prefers chaos to order, and that believes against all evidence and reason that it will rain, or that the world will end tomorrow. With his stubborn belief, which represents an exaggeration of Johnnie's confidence, he is the unwitting cause of

Johnnie's realizing that he did not cause the rain and does not, at least under the circumstances, deserve victory. Thus although the prophet is not created by Johnnie, the fact that he embodies this extreme of Johnnie's character makes him an agent of Johnnie's "not quite voluntary self-manifestation." The prophet unintentionally demonstrates that Johnnie "had nothing to do with the rain" (p. 192). Because he is responsible for this lesson in self-knowledge, he also serves ironically, as Johnnie's "externally reflected inner judge," showing him the truth behind his self-delusions. Finally, his is the knowing laughter of mockery, when Johnnie realizes the meaninglessness of his life:

"... a man has a duty. If your job is preserving the dead--" Suddenly I interrupted myself: "What could be more useless?" I cried.

A voice that seemed to have no head burst into a maniacal laugh (p. 196-97).

Johnnie claims that the prophet, who is absolutely irrational, proves the complete uselessness of human effort, presumably because he is beyond the control of reason and representative of "the old chaos" before creation. And yet Johnnie himself displays a defiant extravagance that is part of an impulse to damn the expense and affirm, even create, chaos. He is aware of his longing for "[t]hat old earth, without form and full of the void" (p. 101). And countering this impulse is the plot of his life, the story of his pyrrhic success as a rain-maker.⁴ In his introduction to No! In Thunder Leslie Fiedler argues that contrived plots are the stock-in-trade of sentimental art:

What life refuses, the anti-artist grants: the dying catcher hits a three-bagger, and everyone loves him; the coward, at the last moment, finds the courage to

fight the segregationist and his hired thugs; the girl in the office takes off her glasses and wins the heart of the boss's playboy son.⁵

The plot of The Words of My Roaring may seem to fit this pattern: rain falls and fulfills the promise of the loveable, incorrigible boy-politician. And yet Kroetsch's achievement here is exactly the opposite of sentimental. Johnnie is not saved but trapped by the plot in his life; his middle name, Judas (given him because his mother felt that Judas has been sadly misunderstood), associates him with another character who was trapped by the plot of the story he was in. The way in which events fall out just as they should is terribly ironic. Johnnie realizes, when Helen tells him that she has told her father about them, that he will never be credited with an honest victory:

It was the alibi the world would use to cudgel me.
If I took victory now, the world would mock me with:
who couldn't win? . . . I was utterly defeated by her
quietly saying, it was the rain. Because I could have
gone straight into Coulee Hill barehanded and bare-
knuckled and I could have whipped old Murdoch fair
and square: I could have done it without the rain (p. 208)..

For the sake of his self-respect and because he finally has come to a more honest understanding of himself, Johnnie must try to explain to the voters that they should not elect him, and of course he will not succeed.

The Words of My Roaring provides a means to understanding much of Kroetsch's work because it illustrates most simply the relation between the individual speaker and the patterns of his language. The novel shows the difficulty in narrowing the discrepancy between experience and expression; even after Johnnie understands the truth about himself he is not able to utter it. Although he understands, he will continue

to be misunderstood. That is, he will still have difficulty establishing meaningful contact with other people. Despite his occasionally addressing "you," there is clearly no listener in the novel. Johnnie is not, like Demeter Proudfoot, concerned about his "dear reader" because he is not writing his story; the narrative style is colloquial and distinctly oral, although it is imagined and not actually spoken. The fact that it is intended to sound spoken when there is no audience creates the impression of a voice speaking in a vacuum. Kroetsch has said that Backstrom represents several Johns; one is surely the voice of one crying in the wilderness.⁶ The epigraph from Psalm 22 is therefore especially poignant: "Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?" The narrative style suggests that there is no-one to hear; Kroetsch uses narrative voice to illustrate the difficulty in communicating.

Chapter II: The Voice of Solipsism in Gone Indian

In The Words of My Roaring Kroetsch chooses an ordinary man as narrator to show how a speaker may imaginatively construct reality. Johnnie Backstrom, however, finds himself in a situation where his reality is not shared. The novel shows his progress toward a better understanding of himself and his social relations, but it ends with a scene clearly indicating that his language will not allow him to communicate that understanding. Jeremy Sadness in Gone Indian exemplifies another way in which language may be a barrier to communication; whereas Johnnie can not reach past the given patterns, Jeremy starts and ends with simply his own expression.

In Gone Indian Kroetsch creates the effect of the emptiness surrounding the narrative by using two narrators. Jeremy's comments are addressed directly to Professor Madham, and Madham's to Jill Sunderman. The voices are both highly self-conscious, Jeremy's because he is actually speaking into his cassette recorder, and Madham's because he assumes a deliberate and narrow tone, that of pompous and patronizing scholarship. The technique creates a dialogue that could more properly be called a pair of parallel monologues; two people are talking but nobody is listening. By this means, Kroetsch creates an impression of the silence against which the voices speak. The sense of speakers between whom there is no communication reinforces the idea that the worlds a narrator speaks into existence may be complete and exclusive. The consequence of this exclusiveness is solipsism, the knowledge of

no world beyond the self.

Although there are narrative similarities between the two books, the situation presented in Gone Indian is more complex than that in The Words of My Roaring. Jeremy undertakes a symbolic and allegedly successful quest "[f]or the voice that spoke the first word"(p. 22). His avowed success must be questioned, however, for its consequence is disastrous. The voice that Jeremy finds and becomes wholly absorbed in is his own. Most significantly, he is speaking to no-one and about nothing; his last words are a travesty of the function of language, for they purport to record experience as it occurs, without reflection, abstraction or judgement: "I lie here. Ha. I am going to lie here for the rest of my life, talking, recording everything. Until I can think nothing that I do not speak"(p. 149). He denies the characteristic virtue of language; Professor Madham, albeit in his usual offensive tone, has hit on the truth: "the mere onslaught of detail merely overwhelms. We grasp at something . . . the world of reflection, of understanding. . . . The word made human"(p. 13). Jeremy, in his "absolute fear of involvement"(p. 13), rejects all human experience but his own.

Jeremy's journey to the frontier can be interpreted psychologically; his surreal and therefore dream-like experiences in the northwest represent an exploring of the frontiers of consciousness. The ostensible cause of his journey is his looking for a job, for a vocation and a place in society. What he really seeks is something to redeem his life from its miserable failures. Madham identifies Jeremy's "deep American need to seek out the frontier"(p. 5), but

although this quest has usually been manifested geographically it is also, perhaps even essentially, an inner journey.¹ This duality of inner and outer is implied by Madham's reference to "a far interior that [Jeremy] might in the flesh inhabit"(p. 6). The idea of psychological searching also informs Jeremy's observation: "always the lost man circling blindly, come back upon him self . . . finding himself only"(p. 44). Jeremy claims that his quest is for "the first word" (p. 22).² He seeks a logos, a centre of values that will give reason and purpose to his life.

Kroetsch's epigraph from Turner aptly describes a psychological frontier: "the bonds of custom are broken and unrestraint is triumphant." The triumph of unrestraint does not mean simply the freeing of unconscious motives and reactions from conscious control, although as witnessed by Jeremy's dream of the massacre of Edmonton this is a factor. What is also significant, however, is breaking the bonds of custom and habit that vitiate perception. To illustrate how "custom doth stale"(p. 115) perception Kroetsch creates surreal pictures of commonplace events. Madham, in this case, describes to Jill what she and Jeremy observed at the university:

you found a group of young men, curling. You saw them through glass: they slid as they walked as if they wore invisible skates or were only dreaming. They played without speaking, as if they were playing in their sleep, bending to set the bright rocks coasting up the ice, bending to sweep, then turning away indifferent before the last rock struck, into random disorder, the other. Out of the painted circles (p. 58).

Jeremy's dreams are much more fully realized and meaningful than his physical experience, as illustrated by the contrast between his dream

of Buffalo Woman and his trial as judge of the beauty contest. The world he perceives is confused and insignificant, a "seething cauldron of noise, sweat, carnality, venal selfishness, human ambition, vain hope, covetousness and prideful slander"(p. 109), beside the world he imagines. After his union with Bea he finds this means to unify his experience:

I am going to lie here for the rest of my life, talking, recording everything. Until I can think nothing that I do not speak. Speaking. Until the inside and the outside are one, united—(p. 149).

In this resolution, however, he has not reconciled external reality with the life of the mind but has, rather, denied all but inner reality. His quest for the unknown takes him thoroughly into himself, so that he becomes both the centre and circumference of reality. He is freed from the dulling superficiality of habit, but he has lost all possibility of contact with other people. Significantly, the means he chooses is to talk, "recording everything." He is not attempting to communicate; his observations throughout the novel are only slightly retrospective and minimally reflective, and his final speaking is almost totally immediate and thoughtless.

Jeremy's decision never to move and always to speak is a consequence of his new and desperate knowledge of the void to be filled. This knowledge comes partly from his response to the environment. On the prairies, he is aware of the space and the silence not only on the highway in the winter at night, or on the High Level Bridge in a blizzard, but in a crowd:

We were surrounded by tables that were surrounded by men who were drinking beer and laughing and trying

to make themselves heard over the juke box. And yet there was a silence in the noise: a secret and yawning jaw behind the carousing. A cave that out of its silence made sound (p. 91).

The other influence from which Jeremy learns is Bea Sunderman, who is not so much a character as a force in the novel.³ In her passivity, her lack not only of volition but almost of personality, she understands the silence against which a living voice asserts itself.

She is . . . at the core of her being, one of those listening women. She has been listening all her life, not just for a voice, the phone to ring. No, she has listened for a door to open among her plants and flowers, a stair to squeak. A twig to break in her private forest. The wind to rise. The snow to tap at the window (p. 32).

She has lost her husband "to vacancy itself" (p. 129). The fact of Robert Sunderman's suddenly but maybe not absolutely vanishing has shown her how life is balanced against the vacancy of death. William Barrett interprets Heidegger and Sartre on this issue:

Suspended over death, "over seventy fathoms," moving at every moment within this perpetual possibility of nothingness, which is the authenticity of death, we are also released at last into an authentic human freedom. . . . whatever movement, whatever project, we launch against the background of this void, has nothing to rest on but ourselves.⁴

Jeremy's last dissertation explains one reaction of the self to the void it encounters:

Christopher Columbus, not knowing that he had not come to the Indies of his imagination. Imagined that he had come to the Indies.

He may be, as he says, "freed from his freedom" (p. 149), but he is also inescapably bound within himself, and the next step is his death.

Although Jeremy is certainly immature and egocentric, he is not

wholly accountable for his fate. He uses his dissertations to associate his westering quest with that of Columbus, thus making himself representative of some characteristically modern ideas. I wish to turn next to Kroetsch's presentation of Western history, to show the cultural basis for Jeremy's denial of human community.

Chapter III: The Lessons of History

The word "history" may refer both to past events and to the study--the interpretation and understanding--of those events. But the distinction between these is not as clear as it is often assumed to be. To attempt to know what really happened is an interpretive act. The concept and the details of history are fictions, that is, imagined structures by which people try to make sense of the world. In this chapter I will analyze the historical details in Kroetsch's fiction; he takes "history," the past events that contemporary society assumes to be important, as a subject (especially in The Studhorse Man and Gone Indian), and offers an alternate interpretation. His criticism of popular misconceptions about the significance of events calls into question the validity of general, that is, public or communal answers. And yet his work demonstrates the pathetic failure of characters who attempt to define themselves in strictly individual terms. One of his recurring themes, especially in his poetry, is that a relation to a community may be established by an understanding of what T.S. Eliot calls the presence of the past.¹ I will turn to this theme in Chapter IV.

It may be well to begin with Kroetsch's earliest fiction, which is useful as an illustration of how not to write about the past. Gone Indian shows that the extreme of self-expression is solipsism. Kroetsch's earliest published works, some short stories that appeared in the 'fifties, reveal the opposite problem: the individual voice in

them is not sufficiently assertive, and therefore cannot overcome the conventions that already exist in the language. One of these early short stories "That Yellow Prairie Sky," is narrated in the first person: the others ("Who Would Marry a Riverman?", "Mrs. Brennan's Secret," "The Blue Guitar," and "The Harvester") are narrated by an omniscient third person. Except for "Who Would Marry a Riverman?", which is set on the Mackenzie, they deal with a stage of prairie life slightly before the time of their writing. Most significantly, all except "That Yellow Prairie Sky" are, despite their precision of detail, sentimental and occasionally even maudlin. They fail because without the restriction of an idiosyncratic narrator Kroetsch cannot (or at least at that time could not) maintain the control and distance that are necessary to view past events, especially those of one's own experience, critically.

"The Harvester"² typifies both the strengths and the flaws of these stories; the subject is the destruction of an idyllic agrarian communal ideal on the prairies by the increased use of machines in agriculture. A man who can no longer find work on a threshing crew, because the threshing machines have all been replaced by combines, is befriended and fed by the waitress in a truck-stop restaurant; the idealized past when work was done by a community of men is contrasted with the harsh present in which technology rules. The contrast is presented in the story by the symbolism of food; Maggie, the waitress, takes the old harvester back to the kitchen and cooks him a thresher-man's meal, complete with potatoes and gravy, creamed carrots and buttered peas, and Dutch apple pie, while the paying customers in the

restaurant are served greasy hamburgers, greasy french fries, and so on. What is most interesting about the story is that the subject far outweighs the theme; significantly, it does so because the narrative method is not precise, or to rephrase, the narrator cannot escape the patterns of significance that already exist as accepted ways of viewing his subject. "The Harvester" presents a memory that has not been critically analyzed; the only idea the story offers is that the past was better than the present but there are still some good people left.

In all his fiction after these early stories Kroetsch restricts himself to a limited and particular point-of-view, and presents or suggests his ideas about the past either indirectly through his narrator or dramatically in the action of the novels. (But We Are Exiles uses a third-person voice, but it is very carefully limited and not omniscient. What the Crow Said is also told in the third-person, but here the voice is even more self-conscious than those of Kroetsch's first-person narrators; moreover, the subject is not so much the past as the remembering and idealizing of it.) Despite his using an indirect approach, however, his analysis of recent history is unusually comprehensive and seriously critical. The focus for his interpretation of some characteristic modern ideas may be found in a lecture paper, "The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction: An Erotics of Space."³ He argues in the essay, and has shown in his fiction, that one of the failures of the modern world has been a refusal to acknowledge community.

In his first novel, But We Are Exiles, Kroetsch creates the most fully human character in his fiction. Peter Guy's arduous if reluctant

journey towards self-knowledge is circumscribed by two passages, the novel's epigraph from Golding's Ovid and the verse of a song that supplies the title:

This Lade bare a sonne
Whose beautilie at his verie birth might justly love have wonne.
Narcissus did she call his name. Of whom the Prophet sage
Demaunded if the childe should live to many years of age,
Made aunswere, yea full long, so that him self he doe not know.⁴

Fair these broad meads, these hoary woods are grand--
Bat we are exiles from our fathers' land.⁵

This novel does not explore in any detail the connection between self-love and exile, but it does indicate the direction that the later fiction takes. Peter Guy resembles most of Kroetsch's other protagonists in his separation from his father. In fact, as Harrison shows in his description of the motif of the disappearing father in prairie fiction, Guy resembles many typically western characters. Harrison says:

In Kroetsch's novels the vanished fathers are emphasized by the way in which his characters search for substitutes. Jonny is in an uneasy filial relationship with Doc Murdoch; Demeter seems to be trying to make a father out of Hazard Lepage; Jeremy Sadness, whose father is said to have taken one look at him and disappeared is dependent upon Professor Madham.

Part of his general summary of the pattern as it appears in some of the major contemporary prairie novelists is that:

the search for a father is, of course, a classic form of search for one's own identity, but there is a more specific implication here of lost continuity with the past.⁶

This loss of continuity entails a loss of human community.

William Dawe in Badlands personifies a perverse denial of commun-

ity. In 1916, "with all of Europe filling its earth with the bones of its own young--he removed himself from time [and] . . . ceased to dare to love"(p. 139), sacrificing the living bones of his surrogate son Tune for the dead bones of the creature that would carry the name of "the reknowned if momentarily unknown Dave dynasty"(p. 34) through the future. He makes a selfish and destructive attempt to resurrect a non-human past and remake it in his own image; his vanity is illustrated by the fact that he had chosen the name for his new fossil, Daveosaurus magnificatus, the hunch-backed dinosaur, long before Web discovered the unique hadrosaur specimen that was, in fact, crested. The mystique that he embodies, the Western ideal of a heroic questing and solitary man, is delineated and criticized in The Studhorse Man and Gone Indian. In The 'Crow' Journals Kroetsch refers to "the pattern in The Studhorse Man. The posture of the hero demanding of him the quest-flight. The fear of domesticity, of community"(p. 20).

The Studhorse Man extends the presentation of prairie life that was begun in The Words of My Roaring, taking the reader from 1935 back to World War I and forward to 1945 and the late 1960's. However, Kroetsch's intention here is more than to record the past, and the treatment of his historical subject is complex. I wish first to comment on his technique before returning to the actual subject.

In "Robert Kroetsch and His Novels" Morton Ross describes and finally criticizes the presentation of the relationship between Peter Guy and Kettle Fraser in But We Are Exiles:

Restrained from direct explanation, Kroetsch's method seeks to illuminate inner states by a technique akin to Eliot's objective correlative, a

reliance on the precise image of external detail to evoke and thus display the equivalent feeling. . . . Kroetsch's choice of a restrained narrative perspective, devoted largely to the precise display of detail and gesture, is simply too limited to contain and shape the potentially rich consequences it sets in motion.⁷

After this first novel, however, Kroetsch usually does not risk the creation of three-dimensional characters and the "potentially rich consequences" of their interactions, but restricts himself to suggestions about the idea rather than the experience of love. But although he moves from a limited third-person to an even more limited first-person form of narration, one significant factor is constant. He still uses detail, precisely defined by its context, "to evoke and thus display the equivalent feeling," and thus to illuminate his themes. The detail is very often colored by the personality of the narrator, but this additional control does not make the method less effective. The death of Hazard Lepage, for instance, is described very sparingly:

The huge blue stallion, his breath coming in quick nervous snorts, his short tail held high, ran in dizzying circles. The legs pumped high and strong.

And in the middle of the room on the floor lay the figure of a man. . . .

The stallion . . . went up on his hind legs over the motionless figure of Hazard, and landed astride the man. . . .

And then it was too late for me to fire; the two heads were together, the man's, the stallion's. The stallion's yellow teeth closed on the arm of the man.

And Hazard Lepage flew upward through the air as if he were a spirit rising to the sky; but his body came back to earth, under the sickening crunch of the stallion's hooves. . . .

Martha and I raced to Hazard's side. I turned him over before I threw up.

Only Martha looked at the crushed and flayed and formless face. The formless head (pp. 163-65).

I have not quoted the entire description. However, this passage accurately indicates both the precision and the indirection of Kroetsch's presentation. The reader's horror at the event results from the careful selection of detail, his sympathy with the quest for perfection with which Demeter has invested Hazard, and the contrast between the humor of the novel and the shock of its violent ending. This scene is the object that correlates to Kroetsch's understanding of the historical events with which he makes it contemporary.

On a local level, The Studhorse Man shows the transformation of the prairies, in memory if not in fact, from a pastoral to a technological society with the rapid industrialization of agriculture at the end of World War II. Mechanization, in this case, means not simply the replacing of men and horses by tractors but also the change from natural to artificial methods of insemination. Hazard's brief success with the Lepage horse parallels the short life of Western Canada as a discrete society between its creation ex nihilo and its assimilation into the modern world when, in 1945, the twentieth century came to the prairies.

More importantly, however, this novel is an interpretation of Canadian life A mari usque ad mare. G.S. McCaughey makes this point in "The Studhorse Man: A Madman's View of Canadian History," in which he argues (on the basis of some independent research into the expulsion of the Acadians from Isle-St-Jean, the history of the Lepages of Rimouski, and the participation of Canadian forces in the two world wars) that Hazard Lepage "becomes a representative of the Canadian Historical Fact."⁸ Hazard Lepage is a composite Canadian, a Quebecois from a

French Acadian family, who has received his patrimony, the first Lepage horse, from an Indian, and who lives in the West in a ship-like house completed on the day of Queen Victoria's death by a mad Englishman who refused to acknowledge the end of World War I. The alternating blue and gold lions and fleur-de-lis of his wallpaper represent the uneasy English and French union in Canada. Although Hazard, like the pioneers Kroetsch discusses in Alberta, seems to deny the past, he represents that past when he adopts the costumes of the mounted police and missionaries who opened the West and when he is mistaken for the central Plains Indian totem, a coyote. He represents Canada's initiation into world affairs in World War I—at the battle of Passchendaele ridge, where Canada lost 16,000 men, Hazard permanently injured his back killing a German officer. McCaughey argues that Passchendaele was the "real birth of Canada at war--rather than the earlier success of Vimy Ridge. For it was at Passchendaele that the Canadian Corps finally fought under a Canadian Corps Commander In the three brief weeks that followed, it cost the Canadian army one in every three men sent into the line."⁹ World War II forms the most important context of the novel. Demeter's father (serving under Lieutenant John Backstrom) has been killed at Dieppe, "another specifically Canadian point of global military history."¹⁰ Moreover, as McCaughey also points out, the novel "begins in death . . . where bones of the charnel house are needed to make death (help the war)."¹¹

The War, or more often the idea of war, is unobtrusively present in much of the novel. Demeter says of the opening scene:

Fortunately the war was in progress: the government

was scouring Alberta for bones. BONES FOR WAR, the ad and posters read:

BRING IN YOUR BONES
WE PAY CASH

(p. 8)

The war is a blessing because it provides, or at least may provide, an answer to Hazard's financial dilemma--just as it resolved the problems of the 'thirties Depression. Later in the same scene, Tad Proudfoot accuses Hazard of laziness:

You won't work. You won't earn an honest dollar. With these men right here short of help. Why the hell aren't you in the army?

Hazard, instead of explaining that he'd hurt his back recovering a bayonet from an enemy soldier whose rank was much higher than his own, responded simply, "Thou shalt not kill"(p. 15).

Demeter had mentioned several times that Hazard was troubled by back pain, before casually referring to the fact that the injury had been incurred "while removing his bayonet from a German captain"(p. 12) at the battle of Passchendaele ridge. Although Demeter makes frequent mention of Hazard's action in France and of his injured back, he does not provide an explanation or, in some cases, even an adequate context for the reference. In situations such as this the necessary distinction between the author and the narrator is made clear.¹² Kroetsch's subtlety in maintaining this distinction ensures that Demeter will be allowed to maintain a consistent narrative while Kroetsch develops his themes.

Describing Hazard's encounters with the military when he was looking for Poseidon in Edmonton and masquerading as an army officer, Demeter makes these notes on his file cards.

Corporal says human skull was found in boxcar full of

bones; search is in progress for insane killer who was cornered by police and turned loose hundreds of horses in effort to escape. Hazard expresses concern at seriousness of offense and desires offender might be captured and punished.

Second soldier comes through deep snow leading Poseidon by a rope. Hazard feigns interest while soldier speculates; is shocked that any man should wish to kill another. Hazard agrees, putting on snowshoes; amused by distortion of facts he suggests killer must be captured and hanged at public hanging, a fine old custom that must be revived. Both soldiers agree (p. 39).

Although Demeter appears, from his tone in these passages, to be aware of the ironic twisting of values, there are significant cases where he is not aware. His perversion of values is sharply contrasted by Hazard's reaction in two important scenes.

In the chapter that concerns the pig-sticking at Mrs. Lank's Demeter describes in vivid detail the butchering of the first pig. Hazard arrives at the farm just after the pig-sticker has killed the first animal, and he takes over the business skillfully. He has finally, however, to kill the second pig. Demeter's description of this needs to be quoted at length:

Now the widow invited Hazard to get on with the killing; this time she herself sharpened another knife, more like a bayonet, on the carborundum stone, and she led Hazard to the back stall.

And then it came in full force to Hazard's mind: the knife entering the throat, his hand becoming sticky as the blood ran wet and warm down the knife's handle, the hollow rasp of the pig's breathing as it stood braced on its four legs, the front knees beginning to tremble, the blood gurgling from the small slit in the throat, the steady bright gush dwindling to a trickle. The pig. The horse. The horse. The pig. In all the violent yokings of Greek wisdom, in all its peculiar combinations of the parts of the different animals, of the combinations of the parts of animals and men, I have found no reference to a creature half horse, half hog.

And now Hazard thought of the sow going down on its front knees, silent, its eyes open but looking at

nothing. He thought of the pig collapsing onto its side and beginning to thresh, still silent, at each kick the blood spurting bright--

Dear reader, I ask you, forgive the erring man. But he could not bring himself to kill(pp. 78-79).

This scene illustrates how Kroetsch is able to present his own intention through Demeter's. The purpose of such complete detail in a scene only imagined and not enacted is, as the comparison of the knife to a bayonet makes clear, to suggest Hazard's killing the German soldier. Demeter assumes that Hazard hesitates because the pig reminds him of Poseidon; this assumption shows his own monomania about Hazard's presumed dedication to the stallion, and his consequent irresponsibility.

Hazard's memory of Passchendaele ridge influences another, even more significant scene, which shows how the understanding of history shapes values. Surrounding the bed of the museum curator P. Cockburn are wax statues of Alberta historical figures. Hazard's "terror of history," as Demeter calls his reaction to these figures, is in fact guilt: " 'It's not my fault,' Hazard shouted. 'I killed one man in my life. That's all. I was doing my duty' "(p. 33). The symbols of the past represent the law he has violated and, most significantly, by which he is judged. The public memory as represented by the museum is the repository of moral standards.

There is another important feature of the war-time setting of The Studhorse Man; Kroetsch has actually to distort the truth in order to make the novel more precisely significant. In the last chapter, Demeter uses "a little scientific jargon"(p. 165) to explain the PMU or Pregnant Mares' Urine industry. Kroetsch has researched his subject thoroughly, and is meticulous about all the details--except two. The

product is not, as Kroetsch has it, shipped south to Montana but east to Brandon and Montreal; his change simply clarifies the fact that the controlling financial interest is in the United States. More significantly, there was no birth control pill in 1945, and the PMU industry was not established on the prairies until the 1960's. Kroetsch's collapsing of the actual historical sequence indicates the importance of the historical context of the events of the novel. Hazard learns of the indignity done to Poseidon, nearly dies by fire and ice, and ends his quest for the perfect mare when he finally meets with Martha on August 6, 1945, the day of the bombing of Hiroshima.¹³ He dies three days later on August 9, the day of Nagasaki. Demeter shows the extreme and foolish bitterness of Gulliver in his final judgement of birth control:

Scurrilous, barbarous, stinking man would soon be able, in the sterility of his own lust, to screw himself into oblivion, to erase himself like a rotting pestilence from the face of God's creation (p. 167).

But underneath his mad disgust the sad irony remains: Poseidon, the symbol of fertility and the continuity of life, is made to serve sterility. Part of Kroetsch's purpose is to show a world in which, as in his epigraph from Chaucer, love is sin.

The description of modern civilization begun in The Studhorse Man is completed in Gone Indian, in which Kroetsch's treatment of history is nearly comprehensive; he moves forward to the present and back to Columbus and the beginnings of the modern world. Although Jeremy's quest leads to his destruction, it does provide, by the way, some valuable lessons. The stages of his journey are marked by his learning

to question the value of work, success, science, religion, law, property, even the sense of personal identity—that is, many of the defining categories of his individualistic civilization. His confession to an uncomprehending priest mocks the inefficacy of religion, his arrest for resisting arrest parodies law. However, the most important aspect of Kroetsch's historical subject is Jeremy's "great western quest for manhood"(p. 37). He shows that some of the basic principles of western civilization are dangerously antisocial.

Jeremy, particularly through his dissertations, associates his seeking out the unknown with the westering impulse that brought Columbus to America. Kroetsch further identifies Jeremy's experience as being representative of Western society by interpreting it according to the opposite boundaries of modern thought, idealism and empiricism, as represented by the systems of Berkeley and Bentham. As a Berkeleyan idealist, Jeremy contains the entire world within his perception of it, as in his exhaustion during the snowshoe race:

My mind was the landscape. The magpie, so neatly black and white against the sky, against the snow, was encompassed by my head. My body was totally spent. And thus I was free of my body. There was no goal now: I was following the magpie. And yet he was in my head (p. 88).

As a Benthamite materialist, he judges and grades everything from his students' sexual performance to his letters of application for employment. He identifies Bentham as the "ultimate crowned head of professorhood. He who would give a grade to justice, law, luxury, will, duty, ambition, honor, pain, belief, fiction, chaos . . ." (p. 123). His final solipsism illustrates the danger of going too far with Berkeley.

But the utilitarian standards of Bentham are as bad, for they assume the competition, and hence the winning and losing, that Jeremy learns to reject.

Jeremy's quest represents an impulse to fight and conquer; the central lesson of the Winter Carnival is that the distinction between winners and losers is inessential, even ridiculous. Disgusted and perhaps embarrassed by Daniel Beaver's refusing to win when he could, Jeremy outdoes himself to win the snowshoe race. By doing so, however, he turns himself into a loser; he is taken for an Indian and beaten. He has then to make an impossible decision in a meaningless beauty contest. He discovers that the competitive standard by which he has judged himself a failure is pointless. He has been, somewhat halfheartedly, trying to fulfill an academic image of the great white hunter, who must assert himself and succeed: "publish, head a committee. Become a dean and die"(p. 19). The values of his civilization have only fragmented his life, and offer him no means of integrating or understanding his experience; the most coherent and fully-realized scenes in the novel are his dreams.

The ideals that Jeremy is trying to achieve are typically, although not exclusively, American. Charles Olson says at the beginning of Call Me Ishmael, "I take SPACE to be the central fact to man born in America."¹⁴ In his provocative lecture "The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction" Kroetsch acknowledges this subject and asks: "How do you establish any sort of close relationship in a landscape--in a physical situation--whose primary characteristic is distance?"¹⁵

As with the references in Gone Indian to the interior journey, the

geographic terms in "The Fear of Women" are metaphoric; Kroetsch makes this clear by identifying "the geography of love and the geography of fear." Jeremy Sadness's experience of unbounded space concentrates his natural egocentricity to an exclusive and absolute state; he fails totally to establish any close human relationship. The space of America is at best a metaphor and at worst an excuse for the isolation of individuals. The burden of the essay is the question "How do you make love in a new country?", or to rephrase, how do you establish community without history? Kroetsch discusses the solutions to this question provided, or rather not provided by As For Me and My House and My Antonia, which he takes to be representative of Western thinking. Ostensibly they are typical novels of western Canada and the western United States; his treatment of "Western" in Gone Indian, however, shows that the word should also be applied in a larger sense.

The purpose of the essay is not to show how to do the impossible; rather, Kroetsch uses the occasion to discuss one of the reasons for the failure of close relationships. The close relationship that is missing in prairie fiction is community. In the novel and in society it has been represented by marriage. And yet Kroetsch says in the lecture:

It seems to me that we've developed a literature, on the Great Plains, in which marriage is no longer functional as a primary metaphor for the world as it should or might be. The model as it survived even in Chaucer (for all his knowledge of the fear of women), through the plays of Shakespeare, through the novels of Jane Austen and D.H. Lawrence, has been replaced by models of another kind.¹⁶

Those other models are isolatos.¹⁷ In Western literature, "[w]e have

only the isolation of the self--the not being heard, the not hearing." One manifestation of isolated selves is in the profoundly antisocial male prototypes that characterize the Western mystique. Kroetsch says of the artists Philip Bentley and Jim Burden: "The male is reluctant to locate and to confront the muse." "Locate," here, is ambivalent, for it means not only to locate or find the muse, but also to settle and by locating be identified with a place and a community. The behaviour of these characters illustrates the problem:

The women can dance. Their appropriate partners cannot. The harmony suggested by dance--implication of sex, of marriage, of art, of a unified world--all are lost because of the male characters. The males are obedient to versions of the self that keep them at a distance--the male as orphan, as cowboy, as outlaw.¹⁸

This is a comprehensive historical judgement. Gone Indian is a modern western that traces these versions of the self to the "restless thing [that] Western man was becoming in Columbus' day."¹⁹ Jeremy's first dissertation begins, "Christopher Columbus, not knowing that he had not come to the Indies, named the inhabitants of that new world--" (p. 21); and across the bottom of the page Roger Dorck has written, "THIS, THEN, IS HOW IT ENDED"(p. 230).

Kroetsch's identifying the role of orphan as one Western prototype recalls Harrison's analysis of the phenomenon of absent fathers, especially as it suggests "lost continuity with the past." One of Kroetsch's means of establishing continuity is, as in The Studhorse Man and Gone Indian, to present an interpretation of history as part of a satirical criticism of contemporary society. In Badlands and even more specifically in his long poems he shows how a character may use

his understanding of the past as a means of understanding and
validating his present life.

Chapter IV: Revising the Past

Kroetsch's treatment of history and his satire of contemporary life presuppose, or at least imply, that an interpretation of the past has a strong influence on the present; machismo ideas about heroic quests are commonly believed to be grounded in and even validated by historical fact, and derive part of their influence from this belief. The salient fact is that the interpretation, even if it is inaccurate, may be as significant as the actual event. Morag Gunn in Margaret Laurence's The Diviners observes that:

A popular misconception is that we can't change the past--everyone is constantly changing their own past, recalling it, revising it. What really happened? A meaningless question. But one I keep trying to answer, knowing there is no answer.
[Laurence's italics]¹

Kroetsch shows how this revising takes place; his characters manipulate memories just as the narrators manipulate words to create fictions. The validity of these fictions is in their use and consequences.

The Words of My Roaring provides a clear illustration of memory as well as language in action. The novel may appear to conclude abruptly, before the plot has been resolved. In fact, the organizing logic of the story is not according to the details of the election but rather according to Johnnie's attempts to understand what he is doing and to say what he means. The novel ends when it does because that is when he speaks those imagined words, recalling the events leading up to his present situation on the evening before the election in order to understand how he has been caught in such a bind.

In "That Yellow Prairie Sky" and Badlands Kroetsch also presents characters who are recreating the past in order to come to terms with their situations in the present. Memory, like language, is not passive but active, and, also like language, it may impose false patterns or be creatively reshaped and revived. The narrator of "That Yellow Prairie Sky" recalls an incident in his past; the obvious point in retelling the story is to understand the experience and its continued effect on his life, but he uses the occasion also to justify his actions. One theme of the story is the impotence of human efforts in the face of the brute strength and insensitivity of nature. However, Kroetsch also develops a subtler theme, using the confessional form of a first-person narrative to show the lack of communication that causes the failure of a relationship. The emptiness of the narrator's marriage is evident to the reader from the time of the engagement. The only reported conversation between him and his wife Julie begins in inanity, grows into manipulation, and gradually becomes a quietly bristly altercation in which she uses petulance and silence to extort from him the promise of a new house. When hail destroys their crops and their hopes Tom's wife Kay is able to assure him that they still have the land and next year and each other. But, as the narrator mentions twice, his wife "didn't say a word;" bound to his promise, then, he leaves the farm for the security of a job in the city and a monthly paycheque. This story reads as not simply a reminiscence but almost a confession. The narrator has cause to want to confess, for he blames his wife for their leaving the farm although the fault, if there is one, lies largely with him. He did not, as did Tom, express rage or

even frustration over the disaster; it is not surprising that his wife did not console him.

A tone of brooding reverie is established in the first paragraph, which indicates that the narrator is recalling not simply the events of the story but a previous recollection of them:

I was looking at the back of a new dollar bill, at that scene of somewhere on the prairies, and all of a sudden I was looking right through it, and I wasn't in Toronto at all any more-- I was back out west (Creation, p. 16).

Except for occasional metaphorical passages, set in italics and describing memories that the narrator does not articulate, the story employs the idiom of casual and familiar conversation: "I mean, we knew them all our lives. But you know how it is, eh?" Further, the contrast between the two marriages is worried subtly, but with a persistence that implies that the narrator is still trying to understand (by explaining) what has happened. Because his relationship with his wife, founded on no real communication, was doomed from the start, it is not surprising that he should mull over the problem of what he has done, and what his experience means.

The narrator uses his memory to give significant form to experience. The two events he remembers, his courtship and marriage and the hailstorm are not necessarily related but are abstracted from a year in his past. In his memory, however, they are symbolically associated so that the hailstorm serves to climax the story of the failure of his and Julie's relationship; the separate elements are fused into an imaginative whole. Memory, here, is not simply the passive storehouse of past experience; it is, like speaking and writing, an active attempt

to order experience and make it comprehensible.

The force of memory as an act of imagination is obvious also in Badlands, in which Anna Dawe's effort to understand the past results in both her increased self-knowledge and serenity and the novel itself.

Anna gives this description of her life at the beginning of the novel:

I bought my gin by the case, bought and read my books
by the parcel, imagined to myself a past, an ancestor,
a legend, a vision, a fate (p. 3).

She realizes that she can live in the present and face the future only by facing and knowing the past, and this entails exorcising the ghost of the memories that haunt her. To do these things she recreates her father and his passions. Anna's quest is similar to that of Morag Gunn, who learns to use the creative power of memory to construct a past that explains and validates the present, and who finds that self-discovery through coming to terms with, and where necessary inventing her past, is a process exactly congruent with artistic creation.

The fact that Anna narrates the primary story, that of Dawe's expedition, is evident from its being contained within her own story. She adapts the material from Dawe's field notes, gradually discovering, like Ike McCaslin in Faulkner's "The Bear," the sin in her family history. The original evidence is scanty, consisting as it does of "cryptic notations made by men who held the words themselves in contempt" (p. 2). She has in the notes no more of the truth than Dawe, with his collection of bones, has of the dinosaur; like him she must imaginatively recreate the living substance. An example of how she does this is in her retelling of Tune's death. Anna describes Dawe's recording of the incident in two passages, both on pages that he sub-

sequently tore from the field book (pp. 239-44). Significantly, nothing in Dawe's notes indicates that the turkey vultures found Tune's body. This "fact" is consistent, however, with Anna's need to explain the ferocity of her father's ambition and his refusal to love.

In those sections of the novel in which she speaks in the first person, Anna reveals the fact, and the cause, of her obsession with her father. The last two sections indicate that her nearest approach to a sexual relationship was with her father, and that she is implicated in his suicide. The sexual attraction between Anna and her father is made explicit when Dawe returns home to find his wife dying, and tells fifteen-year old Anna about the other Anna, also fifteen when Dawe knew her, after whom she was named. The sexual aspect of Anna's attitude to her father has been suggested from the start, by her referring to him as "the man who violated my inherited dream of myself, if not me--assuming I did not seduce him into it"(p. 3), and it is kept in the reader's mind by the many, and otherwise gratuitous, allusions to the possibility of confusing the two Annas. Anna Dawe, drunk, confesses to Anna Yellowbird her own near-encounter with her father:

. . . he came to my room instead of going to my dying mother, his dying wife; and he lay down on the bed beside me . . . and he kissed my neck, my shoulders, my young breasts. And I told that Anna. "I was frightened. But I touched his back. And he kissed my breasts--"(p. 262).

She has been, for thirty years, haunted by this scene; only after she has faced it, and has been able to ask the essential questions of Anna Yellowbird, "Did you have any children?" and "What was he--like?" (pp. 262-63) can she free herself from the memory.

Her responsibility for Dawe's death is presented obliquely, yet the fact of her confessing shows that she is aware of her guilt. Although Dawe committed suicide, Anna had unwittingly pushed him to the decision by deliberately awakening his guilt for the death of Tune.

She confesses:

Dawe had come; unexpectedly, to visit, had caught me drinking, had criticized me like a child for it (p. 233).

To punish him she tries to stir his conscience:

I dwelt on the occasion of Tune's death. Perhaps because my father reprimanded me and I wanted, in turn to reprimand him. Or because, when I started to cry, he would not say one word, give me one glance, that confessed he was sorry (pp. 233-34).

Immediately after this conversation, and after reminding Anna that he cannot swim, Dawe goes out in the old canoe, and, as we learn many pages later, his drowned body is never recovered. Anna enacts by pilgrimage and reshapes by narrative the central event of Dawe's life in order to free herself of his influence. For Anna as well as for Dawe the expedition through the badlands is a journey to the land of the dead. After it she can say:

. . . that is why, now, I am staying--living--here in the mountains, where I can look to the east, and downward, to where it is all behind me (p. 264).

This understanding of the past is set against Dawe's dreaming of death as he sat on the verandah of the house on Georgian Bay and gazed out to the west. Whereas Dawe surrenders to the past, Anna conquers it by remaking it to help her give meaning to her life in the present:

"This is the use of memory:/ For liberation."²

Kroetsch has said that all of the characters in Badlands are

attempting to understand what history is, and that the idea of history is a necessary fiction.³ Harrison's analysis of Morag Gann helps to explain this second statement.

As novelist, Morag knows that the memory creates, that there is no accessible past which has not been creatively shaped by human desires and convictions. . . . contemporary novelists, [like Morag], . . . seem to be exploring the relationship between history and fiction, between the fictions of the historian and the other fictions with which man attempts to order the chaos of experience.⁴

These ordering fictions include both public and private history. The historical subject in Kroetsch's novels that I discussed in Chapter III implies an historical theme, that is, it implies that a fictional analysis of the past is valuable. In his poetry Kroetsch analyzes not simply the past but also the relation to it. This analysis, like satire, functions as an exercise in self-knowledge. His most important poems are those in which the protagonist is himself as a poet, and the subject his relation to his personal and cultural inheritance.

Kroetsch's method may be illuminated by this passage from

"Sentence," another poem in the volume Stone Hammer Poems:

Not to recover but
simply to fact/ force
the past to discover:

e.g., that time is
space

His exploring the past in "Stone Hammer Poem" is a discovering of a structure of complex inter-relationships, in which the attitudes of the characters in the poem to the objects (the stone maul and the wheatfield) help to explain their relations with each other. Susan

Wood has commented on this in "Reinventing the Word: Kroetsch's Poetry:"

The process of association is weblike. Each separate strand (Indian, German grandfather, father, inheritor-poet) is finally perceived to be part of a pattern, with its centre the inheritance of life represented by the hammer: a tool to kill buffalo, a mere stone impeding another tool, the plough; a relic; now a paperweight and talisman for the modern poet, suited to his function.⁵

"Stone Hammer Poem" contains the reach of time in the space of the poem, but also by grounding the unique events in a place.⁶ In his other autobiographical poems, Kroetsch uses significant books rather than objects to focus his recollections of the past.

The Ledger is, in both its interpretation of the source material and its resolution of the thematic issues, more successful than "Seed Catalogue." Kroetsch examines, in order to define, his relation to his ancestors. In tracing the various current and obsolete definitions of "ledger" and in exploring the stories that are clustered around the Ledger from the family sawmill, he finds that many of the opposites are seen to be mutually dependent. For instance, despite the element of destruction in the creation of a new settlement, nothing is ever lost.

Shaping the trees
into ledgers.
Raising the barn.

That they might sit down
a forest had fallen.

to a pitcher of Formosa beer /

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

"They had to cut down three trees in order to bury the first man dead in Formosa."

Shaping the trees.
Pushing up daisies.

I'll be damned.
It balances.

Kroetsch also balances his own account with his forebears. His debt to them is obvious, and appears unreconcilable:

What do I owe you?
WHAT DO I OWE YOU?
WHAT DO I OWE YOU?

In the absence of an answer, how can he repay them? But just as he owes his life to his ancestors, so they owe to him the only life they now have, in his memory and in the poem. "Tombstones are hard/ to kill;" the poem is not only about, it is, the ledger that survives.

Another additional pair of opposites that the poem balances is significant. The first definition Kroetsch gives of "ledger" is: "in bookkeeping, the book of final entry, in which a record of debits, credits, and all money transactions is kept." And the last definition: "a book that lies permanently in some place." The book that lies, the fiction, is also the book of final entry in which the truth is revealed. Kroetsch insists that "the ledger itself/ survives," not merely to record the past but also to instruct the present. He confesses this intention in his quotation from an immigration promotional pamphlet, near the end of the poem:

"With no effort or pretension to literary merit, the object will be rather to present a plain statement of facts . . . in such a manner as to render future comparisons more easy, and offer to the rising generation an incentive to emulation. . . ."

That past which is, in Harrison's phrase, humanly accessible, has been

created by the imagination. More significantly, it has been created for a purpose.

The value of fictions as aids to understanding is that they are not fixed but contingent. Eliot contends in Four Quartets that:

There is, it seems to us,
 At best, only a limited value
 In the knowledge derived from experience.
 The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,
 For the pattern is new in every moment
 And every moment is a new and shocking
 Valuation of all that we have been.
 ("East Coker," II)

Kroetsch has observed that we read "partly to see something new; that's the novel, the very word itself."⁷ Fiction, as the most consistently analytical use of language, provides the means for the necessary examination and revision of that knowledge.

Conclusion

I have, in order to make my analysis more clear, attempted to separate two actions that are essentially related, speaking and remembering. That which is shared in language is the remembered experience of the people who have used the language. One of the "danger[s] of merely living" results from the precariousness of balancing personal immediate experience and a generalization (derived from the common experience recorded in language) that gives significance and shape to the particular experience. In The Living Principle Leavis explains how equilibrium is achieved. He argues that

One has the power [to bring each new particular to the bar of judgement according to a principle, a standard] because, in that way which defies 'clear and logical' statement -- defies deliberate thought unless in a creative writer's use of language -- one belongs to a community. The standard, though personal . . . is not merely personal; it is a product of immemorably collaborative creativity. 1

It is not consistent with Leavis's purpose for him to emphasize that the memory that lives in language is not fixed but fluid, and therefore susceptible of revision by individuals. However, his statement that only the creative use of language can adequately define the relation of the individual to the community is an acknowledgement of this fact.

The communication that establishes community is the individual's attempt, through his imagination, to reach beyond the limits of his self-consciousness. Once again, Thoreau is instructive. He asks, in a tone that seems to deny the possibility of affirmative answers,

"Who shall say what prospect life offers to another? Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant?"² Walden, of course, attempts such a miracle. Even Demeter Proudfoot, despite his vaunted satisfaction with his seclusion, his freedom from social relations, makes a pathetic effort to establish contact. He concludes: "To [Martha's daughter], as a kind of fatherly advice, I dedicate this portentous volume" (p. 168). The world that Demeter has withdrawn from is one that includes "the terrors of human relationships" (Exiles, p. 19). There are, however, only two alternatives, which Kroetsch identifies in The 'Crow' Journals as "the alone and love" (p. 66). In an autobiographical sketch on his beginnings as a writer he concludes that "you must take the risk, finally, of loving words. Of loving/ words."³ The risk of relying on imaginative structures cannot be avoided; the more valuable fictions, therefore, are those that acknowledge their fictive nature.

Notes

Introduction

¹ "Robert Kroetsch and his Novels," Writers of the Prairies, ed. Donald G. Stephens (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973), p. 102.

² Jacob Bronowski, arguing the importance of sight in human evolution, discusses the connotations of "image," "imaginary," and "imagination," and the two kinds of "vision." He suggests that the relation between sight, that is, perception, and imagination is essential to and characteristic of a human response to the world. (On the Origins of Knowledge and Imagination [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978])

³ "Walden" and "Civil Disobedience", ed. Owen Thomas (New York: W.W. Norton, 1966), p. 1.

⁴ Geoff Hancock, "An Interview With Robert Kroetsch," Canadian Fiction Magazine 24/25 (Spring/Summer 1977), p. 50.

⁵ Tay John (1960; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), p. 167.

⁶ Hancock, p. 39.

⁷ The Living Principle: English as a Discipline of Thought (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975), p. 36.

⁸ Hancock, p. 47.

⁹ Hancock, p. 40.

¹⁰ Donald Cameron, "Robert Kroetsch: The American Experience and the Canadian Voice," Conversations With Canadian Novelists (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), p. 90.

¹¹ Saussure's theories, especially as they bear on the understanding of literature, are outlined by Terence Hawkes in Structuralism and Semiotics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 19-32.

¹² "voice/ in prose: effing the ineffable," freeLance 8, No. 2 (November 1976), p. 35.

¹³ Dennis Cooley and Robert Enright, "Uncovering our Dream World: An Interview With Robert Kroetsch," Arts Manitoba 1, No. 1 (January - February 1977), p. 35.

¹⁴ Hancock, p. 48.

¹⁵ Cooley and Enright, p. 35.

¹⁶ Cooley and Enright, p. 36.

¹⁷ Cameron, p. 84.

¹⁸ In Unnamed Country (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1977)

Dick Harrison examines the specifically Canadian manifestation of the idea that the West, like Eden, "has no past, only a present beginning when the settler arrives, and a better future" (p. 33). The argument is made for western United States fiction in Harold P. Simonson's The Closed Frontier (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970):

"That the frontier promised freedom from the burden of history was

the great American Dream" (p. 14).

¹⁹ F.P. Grove, for instance, is identified (by Kroetsch in "Unhiding the Hidden") as the paradigmatic Canadian artist, yet one of his central works is A Search for America. In In Search of Myself he "recalls" his early decision to be the spokesman of those who "feel the impulse of starting anew, from the ground up, to fashion a new world which might serve as the breeding place of a civilization to come."

²⁰ Cooley and Enright, p. 34.

²¹ Harrison, p. x.

²² "Unhiding the Hidden: Recent Canadian Fiction," Journal of Canadian Fiction 3, No. 3 (1974), pp. 43-45.

²³ Robert Kroetsch (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1980), pp. 14-15. The quotation is from Hancock, p. 38.

²⁴ The Sense of an Ending (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 167 (quoted by Thomas on p. 7).

²⁵ Possibilities (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 23.

²⁶ Thomas, p. 96.

Chapter I

¹ Bradbury, p. 23.

² Ross, p. 108.

³ Bradbury, p. 15.

⁴ Backstrom's pyrrhic successes follow him through his life.

In The Studhorse Man we learn that he "was decorated for bravery at Dieppe, where he lost thirty men but blew up a bridge" (p. 116).

⁵ No! In Thunder (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), p. 9.

⁶ In Russell M. Brown's "An Interview With Robert Kroetsch," University of Windsor Review 7, No. 2 (Spring 1972), Kroetsch says: "[Backstrom is] also associated with John -- with one or two Johns" (p. 9). And later: "who's he talking to, did you ever wonder? I really think he's talking to the silence, creating himself into it" (p. 15).

Chapter II

¹ Richard Poirier has analyzed this subject in A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature. Margaret Atwood's "Progressive insanities of a pioneer" and "The Immigrants" also pursue this theme.

² The importance of this idea in nineteenth century and contemporary American fiction, respectively, is the subject of R.W.B. Lewis's Trials of the Word and Tony Tanner's City of Words.

³ Jeremy's description of her influence presents her as an Earth Mother. The following passage is, I think, wholly successful in creating the impression of non-human nature.

(She gave to the whole room the smell of earth: not of flowers only but the dark breathing silence of ferns in crevices of rock. The lichens, orange and yellow, on a rotting limb. The green moss, cool to the sliding mouse.

The smell of a northern forest, where the snow melts itself black into the last shade. The muskeg waters of the north, cold and bottomless and darker brown, than any handful of clay, redolent of all our beginnings. The deserted nest. The beaver dam, broken. The only trail, and that one hardly more than the track of a stalked hare, the stalking lynx. The forgotten signal on the still air. The mating coyotes. The smoke of a burning prairie. The bones of a buffalo not long dead, and the grass and the crocus and the first violet, stemming sweet from that final odor (p. 147)..

⁴ What is Existentialism? (New York: Grove Press, 1964), p. 66.

Kroetsch establishes an existentialist context in the novel through the use of symbolic bridges, which suggest one of the primary metaphors of existentialist philosophers, a tightrope. Madham's description of Jeremy's transformations also echoes existentialist writers on "the diffusion of personality into a complex of possibilities rather than a concluded self" (p. 152).

Chapter I | I

¹ This statement is in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," which is an attempt to define the relation of the individual to a community as it is created by language.

² Maclean's 69, No. 20 (September 29, 1956), beginning p. 22.

³ "The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction," Crossing Frontiers, ed. Dick Harrison (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1979).

⁴ Golding's translation of this last phrase is ambiguous: does he mean that Narcissus will live such a long life that he will no longer know himself, or that he will live if (so long as) he doesn't

know himself. Rolfe Humphries' translation (1955) says: "if he doesn't know himself."

⁵ Kroetsch quotes this couplet to Donald Cameron (p. 94). I have been unable to identify the boat song from which it is taken.

⁶ Harrison, pp. 187-189.

⁷ Ross, pp. 104-105.

⁸ "The Studhorse Man: A Madman's View of Canadian History," Revue de Université d'Ottawa 44, N. 3 (juillet-septembre 1974), p. 410.

⁹ McCaughey, p. 410.

¹⁰ McCaughey, p. 413.

¹¹ McCaughey, p. 411.

¹² The symbolism in the novel also indicates this distinction.

The Studhorse Man is unified not so much by the narrative as by the pattern of symbolic references to the sea (la mer), bones, the number five and so on. Kroetsch indicates that much of this is Demeter's doing in the passage where Demeter describes Hazard's dream of the circus: "A dozen mice rustled up out of the bones -- I beg your pardon, the sawdust --" (p. 109).

¹³ The date is given on p. 132.

¹⁴ Call Me Ishmael (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1947), p. 11.

¹⁵ "The Fear of Women," p. 73.

¹⁶ "The Fear of Women," p. 82.

¹⁷ Kroetsch borrows this word from Melville (in the Arts Manitoba interview, p. 36) to indicate what prairie poets, with their strong sense of tribal obligation, are not.

¹⁸ "The Fear of Women," p. 97. Henry Tilney in Northanger Abbey says: "I consider a country-dance as an emblem of marriage. Fidelity and complaisance are the principal duties of both." (R.W. Chapman, ed. The Novels of Jane Austen, 3rd. ed. [London: Oxford University Press, 1933] Vol. V, p. 76.)

¹⁹ Olson, pp. 11-12.

Chapter IV

¹ The Diviners (1974; rpt. Toronto: Bantam Books, 1975), p. 60.

² T.S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," III.

³ Hancock, p. 43.

⁴ Harrison, p. 184.

⁵ "Reinventing the Word," Canadian Literature 77 (Summer 1978), p. 30.

⁶ Peter Thomas analyzes this distinction between "ground" and "place" in "Keeping Mum: Kroetsch's Alberta," Journal of Canadian Fiction 2, No. 2 (Spring 1973), pp. 54-56. He quotes this passage from Kroetsch's unpublished journal:

For me: the imagined Alberta begins to be a place through which I can say all the things I want to say. . . .

Ground. That word so much in use today. What does it mean beyond the dirt that the dirt farmer uses to grow

wheat? Some kind of ur-condition, existence itself before any meaning. The stuff before the stuff that is history or culture or society or art. That which is before the self, even. The stuff of which "place" is made. By dwelling on place we hope to get back through the naming to the ground.

⁷ Cameron, p. 90.

Conclusion

¹ Leavis, p. 33.

² Walden, p. 6.

³ "Taking the Risk," Salt 16^a (Summer 1977), p. 5.

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