

**The Poetics of Alterity: Post-Colonialism and the Writing of Cultural
Identity in the Work of
Robert Kroetsch**

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Abstract of Thesis
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The work of the Canadian poet, novelist and critic Robert Kroetsch offers an exemplary meditation upon the question of post-colonial identity. In a special "Canadian issue" of the journal *Boundary 2*, Kroetsch defined his poetics as a challenge to "the American and English languages" that prevent him from "hearing his own tongue." The difficult task of exploring individual and cultural identity in a "mandarin language" is the central theme of his writing.

This thesis will argue that Kroetsch's response to the predicament of being caught between two worlds is to conceive post-colonial identity as the dialectical relationship of the "other" to the "same." It will accordingly chart Kroetsch's quest for a dialogical form capable of expressing this duplicitous condition. Each stage in Kroetsch's novelistic career, from the realism and pastiche of his early novels to the carnivalesque and Barthesian themes of his later fiction, will be considered in detail. A discussion of Kroetsch's poetry will also establish the philosophical background to his work, and explore the phenomenological and post-structuralist readings of history presented in his longer poems. By bringing together Kroetsch's artistic and theoretical interests in this way, it is possible to shed light upon both the shifting narrative strategies that his writing employs and the postmodern vision of the Canadian cultural sphere outlined in his critical work.

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Introduction

The work of the writer and critic Robert Kroetsch is little known outside his native Canada. The relative neglect of the Kroetsch *oeuvre* seems curious for at least two reasons. First, the last twenty years have seen the talents of a number of writers (particularly Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, and Margaret Laurence) bring Canadian fiction to the attention of an international audience. Meanwhile, the thematic and stylistic development of Kroetsch's work, as well as his activities as a critic and cultural commentator (culminating in his co-editorship of *Boundary 2*, a "Journal of Postmodern Literature"), have placed him at the centre of the debate about post-colonial identity.

It is unfortunate that Kroetsch's work has not received the recognition that it deserves because it focuses insistently upon the questions of identity, history, and difference that weigh so heavily upon the post-colonial imagination. Before I begin to develop these themes more extensively, a few words should be said about the meaning of the term 'post-colonial' in the Canadian context. In general terms, the description 'post-colonial' refers to a period in which a society begins to explore its historical and cultural identity in the aftermath of the imperial process of colonisation. Where the imposition of the colonising presence has been both physical and violent - in Africa, for example - the struggle for independence has taken the form of a war of national liberation. Because of Canada's status as a settler colony, the post-colonial revolt against the physical presence of the coloniser is transformed into a resistance to the enclosure of 'Canada' within the discourse of imperialism. From the first, the Canadian post-colonial experience challenges the implicit division between the unity and self-identity of the imperial centre and the fragmentation and formlessness of the colonial 'other.' However, this impulse towards cultural redefinition is complicated by the fact that any contestation of imperial history must be conducted within the language of the coloniser. The registration of cultural and historical difference is therefore contaminated by the systemic codes through which the hierarchical structure of imperial power was enforced and perpetuated.

For the Canadian writer, then, alterity and difference is always already inscribed within the process of self-identification by virtue of the language that he or she uses. An alienating distance is introduced between self and place by the imposition of

imperialist discourse onto the new land. The question of post-colonial identity is compromised and displaced from the beginning by the position of colonial culture as an 'other' to another culture. The term 'post-colonial' (which admits in the temporizing adjustment 'post' the tension between two different stages of cultural development) suggests that the image of the post-colonial is in fact constituted by this reciprocal exchange of identity and difference. The importance of Kroetsch's work to this area of concern is that his writing takes the relationship of the "other" to the "same" as its central theme.

It is not the place here to analyse the formation of the dialectic between "same" and "other" in its development from Hegelian philosophy through Sartrean thought into the contemporary continental philosophical tradition. The important point for a study of Kroetsch's work is that post-colonial discourse, in concert with postmodern and post-structuralist thought, wishes to respect the otherness of the "other" without compelling it to speak from the position of the self-identical or "same." Kroetsch's desire to think identity dialectically and to recover the marginalised "other" narratives of colonial history helps to account for his commitment, in both his artistic and critical work, to the self-reflexive and self-differing discourses of post-structuralism. For post-structuralism, particularly in the phase of its development consonant with Derridean 'deconstruction,' is perhaps best understood as a critique of the monolithic construct of the 'West' with its confident assertion of its own cultural unity and self-identity and its unacknowledged investment in the totalitarianism of the "same."

The connection between the post-structuralist assault upon the 'metaphysical' oppression of alterity and the Western incorporation and sublation of the cultural "other" can be made with reference to one of the primary texts of contemporary philosophical thought. In *Of Grammatology* Jacques Derrida explicitly links the critique of "logocentrism" (or the valorisation of speech and presence over writing and the dissemination of differences) with an "ethnocentrism" which is fundamentally "nothing but the most original and powerful ethnocentrism, in the process of imposing itself upon the world."¹ Picking up on this theme, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has drawn a comparison between the absolute self-identity of logocentric discourse and the imperialist construction of an image of Europe in which "Europe had consolidated itself as sovereign subject by defining its colonies as 'Others,' even as it constituted them for purposes of administration and the expansion of markets, into programmed near-

images of that very sovereign subject."² Approaching this ground from a different angle, Edward Said has observed the complex interrelationship between historicist forms of cultural analysis, which re-assimilate alterity into a universalised narrative of Western history, and imperialist strategies of domination:

So far as Orientalism in particular and the European knowledge of other societies in general have been concerned, historicism means that the one human history uniting humanity either culminated in or was observed from the vantage point of Europe, or the West. . . . What . . . has never taken place is an epistemological critique at the most fundamental level of the connection between the development of an historicism which has expanded and developed enough to include antithetical attitudes such as ideologies of Western imperialism and critiques of imperialism on the one hand, and on the other, the actual process of imperialism by which the accumulation of territories and population, the control of economies, and the incorporation and homogenization of histories are maintained.³

Kroetsch's work is, in a certain sense, an artistic response to the difficult project that Said outlines here. His seven novels and collected poetry represent a continuing attempt to re-open the question of Canada's position as an "other" to Western cultural discourse. As such, these texts resist the collusion of historicism and imperialism, inscribe difference within the "sovereign subject" of European cultural hegemony, and endeavour to think identity *otherwise*. Kroetsch's subaltern refusal to subordinate alterity to the demands of an homogenising history is most immediately evident in his prose fiction. Here, the connection Said hypothesises between an "antithetical" historicism and the "actual process of imperialism" directly informs the discursive strategies of Kroetsch's writing.

The typical structure of a novel of Kroetsch's middle period (*The Studhorse Man*, *Gone Indian*, and *Badlands*) involves the struggle between two opposed characters for recognition, independence, and authority. In *The Studhorse Man* Demeter Proudfoot writes a biography of Hazard Lepage that is continually brought into disrepute by Hazard's refusal to conform to the stereotypes that Demeter fashions for him. *Gone Indian*, meanwhile, charts the fatal tension between Mark Madham, a professor of English Literature at the State University of New York at Binghamton, and his doctoral student Jeremy Sadness, who leaves the American east to explore his own cultural identity in the untamed wilderness of the Canadian northwest. Finally, *Badlands* presents the battle for control of the Canadian past between the archaeologist William Dawe, who enters the dinosaur bone-beds of the Albertan badlands to establish

his own everlasting reputation, and his daughter Anna, who retraces her father's footsteps a half-century later to register the fact of her presence (and her difference) within a masculine discourse of history that has appropriated and colonised the site of Canadian history itself.

The importance to these three novels of the binary relationship between a representative of cultural order (Demeter, Madham, William Dawe) and a marginalised "other" that contests its position within a discourse that pretends to articulate its experience locates the dichotomy between "same" and "other" within the basic structure of meaning of Kroetsch's fiction. More than this, however, the correspondence Kroetsch creates between the textual manoeuvres of his paranoid narrators and the construction of images of colonial identity suggests that imperialist 'history' is a discourse of exclusion that expels alterity in order to universalise a particular set of ideological premises. This point becomes clear if we remember that Demeter's history of the rural Canadian west, Madham's cultural critique of Canadian identity, and Dawe's excavation of the lost fragments of New World origins demand the death of Hazard, the disappearance of Sadness, and the marginalisation of the female experience of history.

In opposition to these coercive forms of dominant cultural discourse, Kroetsch offers a textual space in which a counter-discourse of post-colonial history can be developed as a dialectical response to the hegemony of the "same." The ironic commentary that Sadness's tape-recorded messages deliver upon Madham's colonising discourse of history is one such example of this dialectical response. Kroetsch's poetry, which cannot easily reproduce the complex dialectical structure provided by the interchange of first-person narratives, inscribes difference within identity by appropriating the deconstructive logic of Derridean *différance*. Thus *The Ledger* exploits the status of language as an open field for the play of differences to deconstruct the closed book of colonial history and rehabilitate the "other" record of the settler experience. Meanwhile, *Seed Catalogue* problematises the metaphors of closure by exploring the connection between 'organic' or self-identical discourses of cultural identity and the murderous exclusions of modern totalitarian politics.

Kroetsch's repeated emphasis upon binary structures, antagonistic narrators, and double plots should be seen as an effort to ensure that alterity is not envisaged simply as a perspectival or relational concept, but rather as part of a *political* relationship in which terms are assigned a definite ideological position. By breaking with both a universalised and monological perception of alterity, Kroetsch hopes to avert the dangers of a naive identification with the "other" in which the experience of marginalisation and displacement becomes a form of interiorised oppression. The problems posed by the "other's" uncritical acceptance of its designation as "other" are familiar from some forms of feminist thought, in which women's historical exclusion from the grand narrative of Enlightenment rationalism leads to a politically dubious valorisation of the irrational. The principal difficulty of the "other's" identification of itself as "other" in the context of a post-colonial cultural politics is that alterity tends to become a monolithic concept negatively defined against the logic of the "same."

The internalisation of an ideological image of alterity not only compels the "other" to reinscribe the principle of centrality and self-identity that it nominally contests; it also threatens to engender an equally virulent politics of exclusion in which the "same" becomes an "other" *for* the "other." In *Badlands* Kroetsch satirises precisely this unconscious investment in the semiotics of imperialism by showing how Anna Dawe's 'feminist' counter-discourse of history reproduces the exclusions on which her father's phallogocentric narrative is based. The intriguing alternative that his work extends is that the monological perception of post-colonial cultural identity should be abandoned in favour of a dialogical model which theorises identity in terms of the dialectical play between opposites. The advantage of conceiving identity as part of a *dialogue* with the "other" is that "same" and "other" are brought into a relationship of mutual definition: the "other" is both "other" and "same" at different moments of the dialogical interchange. Because of the dialectical and open-ended nature of the dialogical model, lack and incompleteness are inscribed within the primary act of self-identification. The dialogical construction of individual and cultural identity therefore becomes an excellent form in which to express the lack of 'origin,' centrality and self-identity that define and produce the post-colonial experience of history.

The influence that dialogical thought has had upon Kroetsch's work emerges in an important recent essay "Disunity as Unity: A Canadian strategy." "Disunity" is significant because it translates Kroetsch's artistic interest in the reciprocal relationship

between identity and difference into a critical theory of Canadian cultural production. The essay evolves from the premise that the "shared story" is "basic to nationhood"; these shared stories are then cast in the role of those "meta-narratives" that traditionally circumscribe and define discussions of national identity.⁴ As an example of this "dominant narrative" Kroetsch cites the modern myth of "The American Dream." Yet in contrast to the "centripetal power"⁵ of cultural meta-narratives of this type, the Canadian national story is presented as a series of fractured narratives without centre, plot, or familiar patterns of development. In what is perhaps the text's pivotal moment, Kroetsch registers the incommensurability between overlapping versions of the post-colonial story and then paradoxically hypothesises this narrative disunity as the unifying feature of Canadian cultural identity:

To make a long story disunited, let me assert here that I'm suggesting that Canadians cannot agree on what their meta-narrative is. I am also suggesting that, in some perverse way, this very falling-apart of our story is what holds our story together.⁶

It is this transition from a monological to a dialogical vision of cultural identity that liberates Canada into its own national story. Putting the matter in extreme terms, Kroetsch suggests that the "willingness to refuse privilege to a restricted or restrictive cluster of meta-narratives becomes a Canadian strategy for survival."⁷ Noting Lyotard's influential description of postmodernism as "incredulity towards meta-narratives" Kroetsch declares "that by Lyotard's definition, Canada is a postmodern country."⁸ The defining feature of this cultural postmodernism is a "celebration of multiplicity" and a resistance to meta-narratives that reflect European and American cultural hegemony. It should be remarked that Kroetsch's critique of the repressive force that Western meta-narratives exert upon the expression of post-colonial cultural difference challenges the view put forward by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin that America is a typical post-colonial culture because it remains in a "state of tension" with "imperial power."⁹ For Kroetsch, however, the "unity of story and narrative" imposed by the "current domination"¹⁰ of American cultural discourse is merely one more incidence of the imperialism of the "same." Consequently, the "fragments" of the Canadian narrative of marginalisation, displacement, and exile can only speak their "incompleteness" when Canadians "come to a Bakhtinian version of the dialogic, in which the possibility of a simple or privileged voice announcing the *right* version of the narrative is talked away."¹¹

In a revealing passage from the same essay, Kroetsch remarks of his postmodern "strategy for survival" that "[t]he trick is, I suppose, to resist the meta-narrative and still avoid Riel's fate."¹² The arduous task confronting the post-colonial writer wishing to explore and redefine cultural identity is to assert difference while acknowledging that alterity is always already implicated in a difficult and dangerous relationship with established discourses of authority and power. What I am calling here the "poetics of alterity" is a provisional name for Kroetsch's prolonged effort to conceive identity in its dialogical relationship with the "same." The work he has published over the last twenty-five years continually searches for new and more challenging forms in which to present this dialogical vision. Thus his first two novels *But We Are Exiles* and *The Words of My Roaring* combine a fundamentally mimetic impulse with the suspicion that mimesis, which in its desire to eradicate the space between experience and representation tends to incorporate the "other" into the "same," is a problematic medium in which to articulate post-colonial difference. Following on from the troubled realism of these texts, Kroetsch begins to develop the properly dialogical fictive model outlined in his critical writing. This process of experimentation produces the three novels of his middle period which, I shall suggest, are linked by Kroetsch's desire to create a counter-discourse of Canadian history that dialectically engages with the meta-narrative constraints of Western cultural discourse. *Badlands* and *What the Crow Said*, which show the interdependence of Kroetsch's artistic and critical thought, present the poetics of alterity in their most sophisticated form. The complex dialogue between identity and difference is also heard in Kroetsch's poetry, which develops from a phenomenological investigation of colonial origins into the deconstructive and psychoanalytic examination of alterity that characterise his most recent work. I will therefore seek to outline the consistent development in Kroetsch's poetry and prose of his dominant themes and strategies, while showing the amplification and enlargement that these issues have received in his various interviews, reviews, and critical essays.

Due to the relative lack of critical commentary upon Kroetsch's work, his readers often feel the absence of a proper context in which to examine his artistic career. An important (if highly personal) context for Kroetsch's writing is provided by his own critical corpus, and I have followed him in applying the discourses of post-structuralism and postmodernism to his work. There are also a number of exciting, informative, and sometimes controversial critical articles on Kroetsch which I have introduced and discussed in this study. Outside these articles and Kroetsch's own

critical intervention, two sustained influences on my approach have been the full-length studies on Kroetsch (both entitled *Robert Kroetsch*) written by Peter Thomas and Robert Lecker.

The chief interest of Peter Thomas's book is the attention it pays to the influence upon Kroetsch of North American mythology. Thomas is particularly astute about the centrality to Kroetsch's vision of the trickster figure: the contradictory and schismatic figure of the trickster, who injects disorder into order and challenges established notions of form, structure, and meaning personifies for Kroetsch the disjunctive narratives of Canadian cultural discourse. In addition, Thomas's examination of the role played by the fluid and open-ended narratives of the oral tradition in Kroetsch's work bears out Kroetsch's remark that "[t]he whole business, I guess, is one of capturing process - especially in a country like Canada where things are being shaped but aren't already shaped, that's very important."¹³ I have drawn on Thomas's perceptive reading of oral culture and the mythological background to Kroetsch's writing in my chapters on *The Words of My Roaring* and *Gone Indian*.

Robert Lecker's recent study of Kroetsch situates his work more securely within the traditions of postmodern fiction. In Lecker's terms, Kroetsch's artistic stance is that of the "borderman"¹⁴ who replicates in his textual practice the schisms and bifurcations of postmodern culture. Lecker's singular focus upon the "multiplying set of tensions between extremes"¹⁵ that inhabit Kroetsch's work allows him to delineate very clearly important dichotomies in Kroetsch's work between east and west, male and female, the institution and the individual, and America and Canada. Lecker's conviction of the intrinsic doubleness of Kroetsch's imaginative vision also enables him to emphasise the importance of the *doppelgänger* figure to Kroetsch's fiction. Kroetsch often employs *doppelgängers* to suggest the sense of inauthenticity that haunts the Canadian imagination; identity, he remarks to Margaret Laurence, only becomes real to Canadians when they embrace "the *doppelgänger* thing" and "meet" themselves "in another form."¹⁶ Meanwhile, Lecker's astute presentation of the dialectic in Kroetsch's work between creation and decreation implies that Kroetsch's stated intention to discover "the name under the name"¹⁷ of Canadian identity can never transcend the fact that "[i]n a sense, we haven't got an identity until somebody tells our story. The fiction makes us real."¹⁸

The weakness of both of these critical studies of Kroetsch, however, is that they often do not take sufficient account of the crucial tension in his work between post-colonial identity and colonialist discourse. Because of his concern to establish the importance of the mythological background to Kroetsch's work, Peter Thomas sometimes neglects the subversive political effect that Kroetsch's employment of mythic archetypes produces. My reading of *The Words of My Roaring* and *Gone Indian* seeks to redress this imbalance by considering Kroetsch's satiric use of shaman, trickster, and *doppelgänger* figures. Although Robert Lecker takes more cognizance of Kroetsch's radical discursive strategies, he too fails to identify the political and philosophical background of Kroetsch's writing. Lecker's concept of the "borderman" is the main source of difficulty here, because this metaphor merely holds in place the schisms and tensions that Kroetsch seeks to displace and deconstruct. In contrast to Lecker, I will suggest that Kroetsch's continual elaboration and subversion of binary structures is not an unexamined feature of his textual practice, but rather a device that enables him to inscribe difference within the discourse of the "same." The deconstructive play between "same" and "other" is what in fact constitutes the act of self-identification in Kroetsch's work: his writing discovers disunity in unity, identity in difference, and the prior implication of the colonial 'margin' within the discourse of the imperial centre. Rosemary Sullivan, who has proved herself one of the subtlest of Kroetsch's critics, is wrong to suggest that for Kroetsch "only when we decreate ourselves and the inauthentic borrowings from other cultures which we have guarded with colonial tenacity, will authentic self-definition be possible."¹⁹ Authentic self-definition is established in Kroetsch's work by the constant act of decreation itself. By subordinating Kroetsch's deconstructive strategies to the fixed structure of a binary vision, Lecker often ignores the *allegorical* force of Kroetsch's work in which a binary model is used to construct and deconstruct the relationship between imperial and post-colonial culture. This failure to discern the wider political context in which Kroetsch's poetics of alterity is articulated blinds Lecker to the dialectical conception of post-colonial identity that Kroetsch outlines in "Beyond Nationalism: A Prologue":

Canadians seek the lost and everlasting moment when chaos and order were synonymous. They seek that timeless split-second in time when the one, in the process of becoming the other, was itself the other.²⁰

This thesis seeks to challenge the emphasis of contemporary critical discussions of Kroetsch's work by exploring the broader political implications of his reflections upon post-colonial and postmodern cultural identity. It is also my intention to establish a more concrete connection than has hitherto been made between Kroetsch's artistic and critical meditations on these themes. My analysis of Kroetsch's texts will consequently draw upon the phenomenological tradition that links Edmund Husserl and Jacques Derrida, as well as the post-structuralist writings of Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan. The influence of phenomenological and post-structuralist thought upon Kroetsch's work will be outlined in Chapter One, which contains a reading of five of Kroetsch's longer poems. Each of the next seven chapters is devoted to a consideration of one of Kroetsch's novels, which are approached in chronological order. Because Kroetsch speaks simultaneously of his native Canadian west and the impact upon the New World of Western cultural discourse, I have, to avoid confusion, adopted his typographic habit of assigning the lower case to descriptions of his home place. Documentation throughout is in accordance with the latest MLA guidance.²¹

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- ¹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976) 3.
- ² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Rani of Sirmur," *Europe and Its Others*, vol. 1 ed. Francis Barker *et al.*, (Colchester: University of Essex, 1985) 128.
- ³ Edward Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered," *Europe and Its Others*, 22.
- ⁴ Robert Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity: A Canadian Strategy," *The Lovely Treachery of Words: Essays Selected and New* (Toronto: OUP, 1989) 21.
- ⁵ Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," 22.
- ⁶ Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," 21-22.
- ⁷ Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," 23.
- ⁸ Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," 22.
- ⁹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989) 2.
- ¹⁰ Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," 22.
- ¹¹ Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," 24-25.
- ¹² Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," 22. Louis Riel was the Metis leader hanged for his part in the rebellion of 1885.
- ¹³ Russell M. Brown, "An Interview with Robert Kroetsch," *University of Windsor Review* 7 (1972): 7.
- ¹⁴ Robert Lecker, *Robert Kroetsch*, Twayne's World Authors Ser. 768 (Boston: Twayne, 1986) 21.
- ¹⁵ Lecker 3.
- ¹⁶ Robert Kroetsch, "A Conversation with Margaret Laurence," *A Place to Stand On: Essays by and about Margaret Laurence*, Western Canadian Literary Documents Series, vol. 4, ed. George Woodcock (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1983) 51.
- ¹⁷ Robert Kroetsch, "F. P. Grove: The Finding," *The Stone Hammer Poems: 1960-75* (1975; Lantzville, British Columbia: Oolichan Books, 1976) 47.
- ¹⁸ Robert Kroetsch, "A Conversation with Margaret Laurence," 54.
- ¹⁹ Rosemary Sullivan, "The Fascinating Place Between: The Fiction of Robert Kroetsch," *Mosaic* 11. 3 (1978): 173.
- ²⁰ Robert Kroetsch, "Beyond Nationalism: A Prologue," *The Lovely Treachery of Words* 68.
- ²¹ Walter S. Achtert and Joseph Gibaldi, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 3rd ed. (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1988).

Chapter One
From Immanence to Différance:
The Construction of Identity in Kroetsch's Poetry

In this opening chapter I wish to explore some of the issues raised by my introductory remarks in relation to a number of Kroetsch's long poems. Although Kroetsch has written poetry for over thirty years, and published it at intervals over the last twenty, his poetic output has received far less critical attention than the seven novels that have appeared during the same period. One of the primary impulses of this chapter is to redress this critical imbalance by relating Kroetsch's poetic explorations of place, history, and subjectivity to the broader theme of post-colonial cultural identity that this thesis will address.

My discussion of Kroetsch's poetry is organised around a consideration of five poems: "Stone Hammer Poem," *The Ledger*, *Seed Catalogue*, *The Sad Phoenician* and "Sketches of a Lemon." In these readings I will seek to identify a progression within Kroetsch's work that takes him from a phenomenological approach to history and place ("Stone Hammer Poem") through a deconstructive revision of discourses of historical and cultural identity (*The Ledger* and *Seed Catalogue*) to an imaginative exploration of the constitution of subjectivity by language (*The Sad Phoenician*). Because Kroetsch's poetry simultaneously develops and re-examines these core themes I have taken "Sketches of a Lemon" from its proper chronological position at the end of this sequence and considered it in relation to "Stone Hammer Poem." By juxtaposing Kroetsch's early phenomenological poetry with a more recent poem that meditates upon the limitations of a phenomenological poetics, we can judge more successfully the reasons behind Kroetsch's adumbration of a deconstructive form that problematises the relationship between language, history, and identity. Another advantage of sharpening the critical dialogue between poems from different periods of Kroetsch's work is that it allows us to gain a firmer impression of the consistency of his underlying themes and concerns.

Perhaps the central fact around which discussions of post-colonial culture revolve is the tension between history and place implicit in the locution 'post-colonial' itself. One of the abiding ironies with which writers exploring cultures formerly

colonised by the European powers have to deal is that the prefix "post," with its confident prediction of a new beginning in the wake of the imperial experience, in fact posits an historical 'origin' prior to the defining moment of independence. Consequently, the formative identificatory gestures of post-colonial societies often betray a nostalgic longing for a time before the colonial subject understood itself to be the product of historical 'difference.' Alternately, the post-colonial writer who seeks to exploit the potential for cultural redefinition that the fact of difference extends must accept that the language that he or she uses is the same language of the imperial centre that formerly repressed the expression of native 'colonial' experience. The concealed imperial presence within the post-imperial word helps to explain the curious 'other-worldliness' of post-colonial culture, which exists both in and between the worlds of European cultural discourse and the home place. Similarly, the interdependence of Old and New World discourse defines the tenor of post-colonial responses to the complex relationship between language, history, and identity, which range from silence at one extreme to the deconstruction of hegemonic readings of colonial cultural history on the other.

In an important passage from his critical writing, Kroetsch has related the questions of deconstruction and difference to the Canadian search for a post-colonial identity:

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

In recent years the tension between this appearance of being just like someone else and the demands of authenticity has become intolerable - both to individuals and to the society. In recent Canadian fiction the major writers resolve the paradox - the painful tension between appearance and authenticity - by the radical process of demythologizing the systems that threaten to define them. Or, more comprehensively, they uninvent the world.¹

These words, which posit the "uninvent[ion]" of "the systems that threaten to define" Canadian experience, anticipate the deconstructive revision of colonial history which finds its finest expression in *The Ledger*. The tension that Kroetsch identifies here between the specificity of Canadian experience and the 'foreignness' of the language in which it is inscribed is also present in early work such as "Stone Hammer Poem." However, the latter poem is best understood not as a deconstructive intervention into the codes of imperial history, but rather within the set of tensions Kroetsch's critical

work institutes between history and archaeology, and between metaphor and metonymy.

The dichotomy that emerges in Kroetsch's critical work between history and archaeology is of central importance to an understanding of his work. The distinction between these two terms is valuable to Kroetsch because if language represents at once a liberation and a new kind of imprisonment for the post-colonial subject, the discourse of 'history' presents problems of an equally pressing kind. As Kroetsch remarks, "[i]n this postmodern world, we trust a version of archaeology over the traditional versions of history. History, in its traditional forms, insisted too strongly on a coherent narrative."² In *The Ledger* and *Seed Catalogue*, as well as the novels of his middle period, this "coherent narrative" is linked directly to the completed text of imperial history. With the material interest of expansion in mind, the discourse of colonialism imposes an alien identity and history upon the new land through the bestowal of language. Because the colonial subject is historically defined as "other" to this discourse, it necessarily occupies an ambiguous position within the enlightenment narratives of European historiography. In a later phase of cultural development, the post-colonial writer finds that his or her share of the common inheritance is a history of roots and beginnings represented to it in a language that simultaneously establishes its 'otherness' and its distance from any authentic sense of historical origins. Kroetsch reproduces this dual experience of self-registration and alienation in his poetry by showing how a variety of Canadian voices are excluded from the closed ledger of Canadian history or relegated to the margins of the historical page. His poem *The Ledger* is therefore a meditation upon history that feeds upon its own emptiness, supremely conscious of the stories that the book of history excises, bewailing the secret absence at its core.

'History,' then, becomes a deeply suspect empirical category for the post-colonial imagination. Kroetsch has written movingly of his youth in the Canadian west that "[t]he authorized history, the given definition of history, was betraying us on those prairies."³ His response was to search for a way of exploring the past that allows the Canadian voice to speak outside the "authorized text"⁴ of its colonial history. A provisional answer to this dilemma becomes available to him by modelling his writing upon the local juxtaposition of historical evidence intrinsic to the archaeological method. In his remembrance of his adolescent experience of alienation on the prairies

Kroetsch declares "I was that day on my way to embracing the model of archaeology, against that of history."⁵ "Archaeology" signifies here for Kroetsch a syncretic form of cultural analysis: the discovery and juxtaposition of archaeological fragments offers a tentative discourse of history that emphasises the local and particular against the closure and "system" of imperial codes of recognition. The significance of the archaeological reading of the past is that it is fundamentally a discontinuous discursive activity that leaves an interstitial space through which neglected layers of story can be recovered to our attention. Kroetsch underlines the discontinuity and ellipsis of his archaeological poetics by making a metaphorical connection between the counterpoised fragments of the archaeological site and the play of meaning between signs in the postmodern literary text. The new archaeological text imposes no hierarchy between discordant readings of its details; its closest affinities are with the work that Derrida describes as "henceforth no longer a finished corpus of writing; some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces."⁶ As Kroetsch puts the matter in an interview:

I suppose one of the things the archaeological model allows us to do is keep those systems very tentative. Instead of a sense of failure at not being able to put it all together, what excites us is that very incompleteness. Systems are open to adjustments, to change, to game, to our elaboration. And I think we are more at ease with that tentativeness.⁷

A tentative connection can also be made between Kroetsch's employment of the term 'archaeology' and Foucault's more celebrated usage. Foucault introduces the idea of archaeology to signal his dissent from the continuity and teleology of the post-Cartesian 'history of ideas' with its faith in the onward, omnivorous march of reason. In particular, he deplors the process by which the history of ideas remaps and transforms existing disciplines in order to re-interpret them from the outside. Against this linear, totalising translation of phenomena into 'coherent' bodies of discourse, Foucault posits an archaeological reading which resists such translation, acknowledges contradiction and discontinuity between discourses, and challenges the conventions that order canonical notions of 'history':

In its most general form, it can be said that it [the history of ideas] continually describes . . . the transition from non-philosophy to philosophy, from non-scientificity to science, from non-literature to the *oeuvre* itself. It is the analysis of silent births, or distant correspondences, of permanences that persist beneath apparent changes, of slow formations that profit from innumerable blind complicities, of those total figures that gradually come together and suddenly condense into the fine points of the work. Genesis, continuity, totalization: these are the great themes of the history of ideas, and that by which it is attached

to a certain, now traditional, form of historical analysis. In these conditions, it is normal that anyone who still practices history, its methods, its requirements and possibilities . . . cannot conceive that a discipline like the history of ideas should be abandoned; or rather, considers that any other form of analysing discourses is a betrayal of history itself. But archaeological description is precisely such an abandonment of the history of ideas, a systematic rejection of its postulates and procedures, an attempt to practise a quite different history of what men have said.⁸

The identification of Kroetsch's archaeological poetics with Foucault's archaeological method must remain tentative because there is, as my reading of "Stone Hammer Poem" will reveal, a recuperative movement in Kroetsch's early poetry towards a pre-linguistic moment of origin that Foucault's thought simply will not countenance. However, if we concentrate instead briefly upon Foucault's antagonism towards the urge to "totalization" reflected in the great themes of the history of ideas, an analogy can be made with Kroetsch's hostility to those European and American meta-narratives that hierarchise and order other discourses of history. Kroetsch's desire to preserve the uniqueness and specificity of the open 'site' of Canadian experience, and his resistance to the translation of that experience into the closed "system" of certain forms of historical narrative, has concrete implications for his textual practice. This becomes most immediately apparent in his valorisation of *metonymy* over metaphor and his search for a rigorous 'metonymic' poetics. Clearly, if Kroetsch envisages his archaeological method as a 'postmodern' disruption of closed textual and historical structures, it is complemented by the trope of *metonymy*, which emphasises the local, discrete, and particular by enforcing a contiguous relation between signs. Conversely, the analogous and substitutive movement of metaphor provides a tropological model for precisely that 'translation' of one form of experience into another that Kroetsch's early 'archaeological' poetry is determined to contest.

The importance that Kroetsch attaches to the distinction between metaphor and *metonymy* is more easily understood if the pioneering work upon the two tropes by the Russian formalist critic Roman Jakobson is taken into consideration. Jakobson sets out his analysis in the following terms:

Similarity in meaning connects the symbols of a metalanguage with the symbols of the language referred to. Similarity connects a metaphorical term with the term for which it is substituted. Consequently, when constructing a metalanguage to interpret tropes, the researcher possesses more homogeneous means to handle metaphor, whereas metonymy, based on a different principle, easily defies interpretation.⁹

Metonymy, which in Jakobson's words "easily defies interpretation" and frustrates the construction of a "metalanguage," resists hierarchical structures of meaning and therefore problematises the relationship between narrative and meta-narrative. The 'horizontal' metonymic tension between signs is therefore far more appropriate to Kroetsch's poetics than the "notion of trans-ference" involved in the "vertical" metaphoric relation between language and meta-language:

The notion of trans-ference that's
involved in metaphor moving from one place to another And I think its that
moving that we distrust That's why we aren't historians we're
archaeologists We want to see the thing in its place what we want to do is
record exactly where its sitting where it's found and not make any
assumptions not disrupt the ground and then read from there ¹⁰

"Stone Hammer Poem" combines the impulses of an archaeological and a metonymic poetics. It explores the imaginative possibilities suggested by a particular fragment of cultural history within a discourse that endeavours to "see the thing in its place" by circumscribing the metaphoric potential of language. Interestingly, the desire to find an exact and necessary relation between the object of poetic discourse and the language in which it is described is fundamental to the artistic movement known as Imagism. A fascinating parallel between the imagist desire for a proper language of the object and Kroetsch's search for a rigorously local discourse in which to inscribe the unwritten landscape of the Canadian imagination is provided by T.E. Hulme. Travelling in Canada at the end of 1906 Hulme, one of the leading theorists of Imagist poetics, was convinced of the need to redefine the relationship between language and landscape by his experience of the "virgin" prairie of western Canada. "Speaking of personal matters," he reflects, "the first time I ever felt the necessity or inevitableness of verse, was in the desire to reproduce the peculiar quality of feeling which is induced by the flat spaces and wide horizons of the virgin prairie of western Canada."¹¹ Commenting upon this passage, George Woodcock has noted "the sense of locality which is indispensable to a consciousness of regional identity."¹² "Stone Hammer Poem" is written out of the "peculiar quality of feeling" produced by Kroetsch's simultaneous "consciousness of regional identity" and his sense of the failure of the Canadian "locality" to receive representation in a discourse of its own.

**The Problem of Origin: "Stone Hammer Poem"
and the Poetics of Place**

"Stone Hammer Poem" is an appropriate text with which to begin a discussion of Kroetsch's poetry because it brings to a crisis the tension implicit in post-colonial culture between the new country and the old language while drawing attention to a fundamental contradiction in Kroetsch's 'archaeological' poetics. Both of these issues have their basis in the rhetorical question about language Kroetsch addresses to himself in his critical writing: "How do we lift an environment to expression? How do you write in a new country?"¹³ Language is a problematic medium for Kroetsch because it is contaminated by the residues of the discourse of colonialism and therefore remains awash with the silt of the imperial inheritance. Instead of providing the post-colonial writer with the means to forge an independent identifying relationship between self and place, language imposes an inherent sense of otherness upon him or her because its fundamental nominative gestures name the land with the words of the former colonising power. Thus the old language always introduces a lost point of 'origin' into discussions of New World identity, contaminating identity with the experience of difference, and placing the Canadian imagination at one remove from an authentic experience of the home place.

Kroetsch's hypersensitivity to the alienating distance that inhabits even the most rudimentary discourse of post-colonial self-registration is doubtless responsible for his somewhat confused initial response to the problematic status of colonial history. For "Stone Hammer Poem" bears witness to two irreconcilable tendencies in his work that both make use of his theoretical distinction between archaeology and history. In order to remove this preliminary obstacle from critical discussions of Kroetsch's writing, I intend to retain the notion of the 'archaeological' only after enforcing a firm distinction between the two available meanings of the term. The first sense in which 'archaeology' should be understood in the poem is in terms of the 'horizontal' metonymic relation between signs. In this reading, the poet's interest in the prehistoric hammer possesses a deep symbolic significance: it introduces the idea of the archaeological site in which meaning is produced by the local juxtaposition of fragments outside the totalising narrative of Western history. Kroetsch's metonymic version of history accordingly promises to reproduce the elliptical and discontinuous relationship between archaeological fragments by means of a fractured and disjunctive poetic syntax that

compels the reader to make connections across the space between individual words. In place of the inherited story of colonial history, Kroetsch's dislocated series of poetic metonymies seek to recover the fragments of Canadian experience without surrendering them to the rhetorical transference of metaphor.

One of the most striking features of Kroetsch's writing, given the amount of credence that commentaries on his work accord to his valorisation of *metonymy* over metaphor, is the sheer difficulty of identifying concrete examples of this metonymic textual practice. The fact that his emphasis upon the metonymic connection between archaeological fragments clearly functions as a *metaphor* for the act of writing offers some insight into the problems raised by a doctrinaire distinction between the two tropes. Indeed, I will argue at the end of this section that the theoretical distinction Kroetsch employs between metaphor and *metonymy* will not stand up to the rigour of a deconstructive examination. While it is true that Kroetsch does structure "Stone Hammer Poem" around the juxtaposition of textual fragments, this strategy is better understood as a rudimentary deconstruction of the notion of organic form. Robert Lecker explains Kroetsch's insistence upon the integrity of discrete shards of meaning in precisely this way when he writes of Section Six of the poem that "[i]t is a mistake to give these lines a specific order, or to treat the sections as fragments working towards a whole. The poem invites its self-destruction by supporting contra-diction, it asks us to explore the chaos of meaning produced in wedding oppositions."¹⁴

There is, however, another way of interpreting metonymy and 'archaeology' in "Stone Hammer Poem." In this alternative reading of Kroetsch's textual strategies, the metaphor of the archaeological/linguistic site is used by Kroetsch in his search for a moment of epistemological presence prior to the operation of language. By the physical act of entering the ground the archaeologist identifies a stratum of Canadian history uncontaminated by the binary codes of imperial discourse. Consequently, the archaeological fragment constitutes a point of historical origin anterior to the experience of difference and otherness.¹⁵ Far from offering a postmodern or "intertextual"¹⁶ model for cultural discourse, Kroetsch's archaeological poetics are much more concerned with establishing a *pre-linguistic* moment of historical origin. It is in the context of the impulse to recover a unity of experience prior to the alienations of language that Kroetsch's 'metonymic' repression of the metaphoricity of language attains its full importance. In fact, his archaeological poetics of origin admit an implicit

distinction between conscious experience of the land and the medium by which that experience is related. By privileging the integrity of individual conscious experience over the 'impure' semantic associations of an alien language in this way, Kroetsch attempts to circumvent the problem of writing in colonial space by means of a direct engagement between the intending consciousness and the unwritten history of the Canadian past.

For the current purpose of a discussion of "Stone Hammer Poem," I will use the term 'archaeology' to signify this desire on Kroetsch's part for a pre-linguistic experience of historical origin. As such, this section will plot the narrative of his inevitable disillusionment as he comes to realise that experience and representation cannot be distinguished from each other in such absolute terms. Indeed, he will later satirise precisely this nostalgic longing for a pre-discursive union with the land in the figure of William Dawe in *Badlands*. Before this narrative begins, though, it might be helpful to explore the broader intellectual context that informs some of Kroetsch's central ideas. A useful analogy can certainly be made between Kroetsch's need to posit experience before the sign in order to discover a necessary and unmediated relationship between place, history, and consciousness, and some of the theoretical predicates of Husserlian phenomenology. Indeed, the opaque internal argument of "Stone Hammer Poem" is greatly elucidated if it is understood as an attempt to unravel the tangled relationship between language, meaning, and epistemological 'presence' that appears in Husserl's writings.

Before we can begin to explicate this nexus of somewhat complex terms, it is necessary to consider the benefit accrued by reading Kroetsch's poetics of place from a phenomenological perspective. Such consideration focuses attention upon the primary features of Husserlian thought. The fundamental axiom of phenomenology is that consciousness is intentional (it is consciousness *of* something): every act of consciousness therefore has to have an object. Consciousness is the absolute condition of the possibility of knowledge; and the world is the totality of objects that can be known through conscious experience. Crucially, the object of consciousness is never given to us all at once; it is revealed through and across the infinity of its different aspects. Consequently, sensory perception is the primary mode of cognition of things because there is no level of experience more 'deep' or 'essential' than an experience of the object perceived perspectively and non-absolutely. To sum up: the sensible object

is revealed to consciousness through sensory perception; and what is known through sensory perception *without mediation* is real. All knowledge of the world can be traced back to the original founding intuition of the thing perceived; so all worldly knowledge is predicated upon the originary 'presence' of the intending consciousness.

The possibilities opened up to Kroetsch by phenomenological methodology emerges from this brief rehearsal of Husserlian axiomatics. Because Husserl's philosophy accords primacy to experience and grounds knowledge in epistemological presence, the post-colonial experience of displacement by language is deferred. With the value ascribed to direct and unmediated intuition of the object, consciousness becomes sovereign and meaning is generated by the primary ontological act of being. Wolfgang Walter Fuchs, upon whose seminal essay on the philosophy of Husserl entitled *Phenomenology and the Metaphysics of Presence* most of these remarks on phenomenology are drawn, points out that for Husserl "the *only* ultimately validating criterion of knowledge is that evidence which is self-evidence, that which is obtained through direct intuition, that is, an intuition of the object in its 'bodily presence.'"¹⁷ Thus the direct intuition of the object provided by the "act" of evidence offers a "mode of *experience* of truth"¹⁸ that reciprocally guarantees the identity of the intending subject. Through the act of evidence in this strong sense, consciousness coincides with itself and knows itself fully for what it is. Intention is completely fulfilled in the object; it refers "to nothing 'other,' nothing alien, nothing absent to what is given; the object in total presence."¹⁹ Since the relationship of consciousness and being to truth is underpinned by the act of evidence, alterity is expelled, and identity comes to reside in the privileged sphere of the "same":

The relation of being and truth, as Husserl makes clear, is that of two sides of the same meaning. Being is manifested as truth; that which is manifested in truth is absolute being. The *experience* of truth, the experience which brings absolute being to presence, is the experience of evidence. Evidence as the experience which manifests truth is the act which brings truth and absolute being into presence. Evidence brings to presence what is, as it is, without otherness, and thereby negates absence and negativity. Evidence is the experience of absolute being absolutely present across truth.²⁰

However, Husserl's negation of absence and negativity is undermined by the philosophy of language upon which he bases his thought. Because his understanding is that "it is the meaning which is essential, whereas the words themselves are contingent," he believes that as long as one can discover the necessary relationship

among meanings "one will have determined necessarily the relations possible among certain types of signs which express their meanings."²¹ Yet the Saussurean critique of language, which ushers in the modern discipline of structural linguistics, begins from precisely the opposite premise: meaning, for Saussure, is produced by the differential tension that operates between words in the absence of the complete set of linguistic permutations that comprises an individual language. The radical Saussurean intervention has a consequence devastating to the Husserlian emphasis upon meaning as presence: absence becomes the ground of presence and meaning. Absence, manifested in the "langue" or complete system of language from which the individual word is selected, determines the meaning of the sign and in so doing comes to govern the boundaries of the iterable.

With the recognition that the fact of difference, rather than the state of presence, underlies and produces meaning, Husserlian phenomenology is forced to admit, in Spivak's words, that "[t]he structure of alterity (otherness and absence of meaning or self) must be operative within the sign for it to operate *as such*."²² The presence of absence and 'otherness' within the sign itself introduces an inevitable degree of mediation into the relationship between world and consciousness. In his subsequent work, Kroetsch discerns that the over-determination of the sign consequent upon its implication within a system of differences makes it impossible to sustain one single unitary image of Canada as 'other' and therefore helps him to resist the closure of colonialist meta-narratives of history. But in "Stone Hammer Poem" his discovery of a 'difference' within the phenomenological moment of presence robs him of the illusion of absolute interpretative agency and compels him to re-examine the relationship between language, history, and identity.

"Stone Hammer Poem" reproduces the foraging movement of the intelligence searching for its identity among the leavings of history. It takes as its subject an archaeological relic - a stone hammer found by the poet's grandfather - and examines it as an historical index of the relationship between the post-colonial subject and the land that sustains it. If the Husserlian emphasis upon the primacy of experience and the sovereignty of the intending consciousness is kept in mind, we can see that Kroetsch's aim is to create a phenomenological poetics of place in which a direct intuitive experience of the *evidence* of the past provides a moment of supreme conscious self-knowledge. Consequently, the poem records the movement of Kroetsch's eye across

the inexhaustible aspects of the hammer's profile, which are revealed perspectively in a welter of visual fragments. Because the hammer is given to Kroetsch's sensory perception "as a possible infinite series to [the] consciousness that perceives it,"²³ it is only recovered by him in its bodily self-presence by the synthesising power of his imagination. By predicating the existence of the object upon his unmediated intuitive experience of its multifarious aspects, Kroetsch therefore simultaneously privileges the founding 'presence' of his own consciousness and secures an unbroken connection between self and place.

Yet Kroetsch's desire to develop a reading of the Canadian landscape "that would bring back, in all its purity, the distant, precarious, almost effaced light of the origin"²⁴ is gradually compromised by his realisation that the stone hammer is also in fact a linguistic construct whose existence is inextricably linked to the language in which it is described and represented to consciousness. At the very moment that Kroetsch celebrates his transformation of the "other" (language and colonial history) into the "same" (the founding 'presence' of the intending consciousness), alterity is reinscribed by the fact of descriptive language. Because this dialectic between identity and difference characterises all of Kroetsch's writing, the tension in "Stone Hammer Poem" between the existential and the textual acts as an exemplary preface to the development of his art as a whole.

"Stone Hammer Poem" begins by placing the hammer firmly before the interrogatory gaze of the poet:

This stone
become a hammer
of stone, this maul

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

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

the stone is
shaped like the skull

of a child.²⁵

The immediately noticeable feature of these lines is that Kroetsch's careful scrutiny of the stone hammer slowly brings the object into presence. It is a language of revelation and embodiment; the stone *emerges* directly out of Kroetsch's intuitive exploration of its attributes. The tone of magical invocation ("This stone / become a hammer / of stone") is exactly right because a transformation is taking place. The hammer is totally present to the poet's consciousness; he is fulfilled and made whole by the act of perception. Already, at this early stage, Kroetsch's declarative style and confident use of subject/predicate structure show him in direct contact with the truth of the object before him; and truth, in phenomenological terms, is "the manifestation of being itself."²⁶ Kroetsch makes the connection between truth, being, and presence by means of a visual pun; the typographic lay-out of the stanza's final clause ("the stone is / shaped like the skull / of a child") mimics the hammer's coming-to-presence by reproducing the physical shape of a hammer in the spatial disposition of its lines. The *idea* of the object is made tangible; it becomes a palpable presence before the poet's phenomenological vision.

Another aspect of the stone hammer evident from this stanza is that it is initially divorced from historical context and cut off from human association. It is at first a pure symbol of a pre-linguistic origin of meaning. Robert Lecker notes that the poem opens with "virgin element - stone undefiled, alone. This will be a stone to return to, the state before the poem, a tabula rasa as well as a responsibility to go back before becoming."²⁷ But by the act of bringing the stone to presence before his registering gaze, Kroetsch also gives expressive form to a series of isolated fragments of history that lie outside established discourses of Canadian self-identification. The poet's synthesising consciousness makes a connection between the undefiled surface of the stone "tabula rasa" and the uninscribed narratives of the Canadian past. In the third stanza Kroetsch discovers a suitably fractured spatial syntax with which to record the stone's concealed and discontinuous history of usage:

Grey, two-headed,
the pemmican maul

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

It is a million
 years older than
 the hand that
 chipped stone or
 raised slough
 water (or blood) or (FN 14)

It is therefore appropriate that the hammer is found by Kroetsch's grandfather, a man whose native adherence to a foreign language ("This stone maul / stopped a plow / long enough for one / *Gott im Himmel*.") excludes him from his share of the common idiom of the New World and leaves him at the mercy of those with access to the language in which history is written.

However, by juxtaposing the newly realised historical presence of the the stone hammer with the absence of certain stories from the historical record, Kroetsch inadvertently focuses attention upon tensions apparent elsewhere in the poem. These tensions are the result of his desire to disengage conscious experience from the diacritical movement of language. If we return momentarily to Section One, it is evident that Kroetsch's phenomenological perception of the hammer is accompanied by a rigorous delimitation of the referential potential of words. Thus the first seven lines of the poem are spent in an effort to establish the proper sequential order between three basic nouns "maul," "colour," and "bone." Throughout the poem the move towards analogy is carefully policed; transitions between *stanzas* are frequently effected by a form of metonymic cutting between the hammer's different titles: "stone," "paperweight," and "pemmican maul" for example. This extreme form of semantic invigilation becomes explicable if we understand that Kroetsch's language of embodiment is intended to be a transparent idiom that provides unmediated access to the object of the mind's attentions. Unfortunately his wish to enforce an ontological separation between language and experience is frustrated because the hammer may also be interpreted as a symbol for the semantic duplicity of language. It is both a physical object and a verbal construct, created, in Section One for example, by the delicate play of assonance between "stone," "bone," and "buffalo." The ambiguity of the hammer's status is the explicit theme of Section Two:

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 - (FN 13)

Kroetsch begins this passage by perceiving the hammer solely in terms of its physical function: it is the "paperweight" on his desk; and it has been given a point of origin from its initial appearance in his grandfather's "wheatfield." Yet this attempt to preserve the integrity of the historical object founders because of the polyvalency of the term "paperweight" which functions simultaneously as the sign of the stone hammer and as a metaphor for the acts of spacing and deferral ("paper-wait") that produce meaning by the temporal dislocation of referents across the space of the printed page. The ineradicably *textual* character of historical experience becomes apparent through Kroetsch's increasing inability to keep the referents "hammer" and "poem" apart. By the middle of Section Two they are virtually interchangeable terms, held together within the privileged space of a parenthesis. Later, the brief seventh section completely eradicates the identificatory space between the historical and the textual and destroys the ontological distinction upon which Kroetsch's phenomenological vision is based:

The poem
 is the stone
 chipped and hammered
 until it is shaped
 like the stone
 hammer, the maul. (FN 16)

By introducing in his play on "paperweight" the idea of language as a diacritical process in which elements function and signify only by referring to other past or future elements in an economy of traces, Kroetsch acknowledges "the co-primordially of presence and absence; that is to say, the *non-absolute* nature of the *presence of meaning*."²⁸ No matter how committedly the subject endeavours to establish the quiddity of experience through a meaning given to consciousness in perceptive intuition, the recovery of that experience in language reintroduces the series of absences upon which meaning is predicated in a structural system. The interdependence of epistemological presence and linguistic 'absence' is elucidated by Derrida in a remark that points out the impossibility of attaining a pure meaning in language uncontaminated by difference:

In the extent to which what is called "meaning" (to be "expressed") is already, and thoroughly, constituted by a tissue of differences, in the extent to which there is already a *text*, a network of textual referrals to *other* texts, a textual transformation in which each allegedly "simple term" is marked by the trace of another term, the presumed interiority of meaning is always worked upon by its own exteriority. It is always already carried outside itself. It already differs (from itself) before any act of expression.²⁹

The implications of this statement are radical. Kroetsch's phenomenological response to the alienation of post-colonial subjectivity, which underpins identity by appropriating and sublating alterity within the consciousness of the experiencing self, is undone by the systematic dissemination of differences within the language by which that identity is articulated. Meaning is not produced and guaranteed by a single originating intention; the phenomenological assimilation of difference into identity is frustrated by the play of differences through which language signifies. The contradiction between Kroetsch's desire to establish an intuitive and personal ground for experience outside language and his recognition that 'history' as a category of experience is indissociable from the interweaving of textual traces by which it is communicated emerges in the sixth section of the poem. Here the poet's confidence in his own phenomenological poetics collapses as the imperative "I have to / I want to know," which insists upon an intuitive and foundational connection between world and consciousness, comes into conflict with the parenthetical rejoinder "not know," which disputes the possibility of such privileged access to the meaning of the fragments of history:

This stone maul
stopped a plow
long enough for one
Gott im himmel.

The Blackfoot (the
Cree?) not

finding the maul
cursed.

?did he curse
?did he try to
go back
?what happened
I have to/I want
to know (not know)
?WHAT HAPPENED (FN 16)

This unresolved tension between Kroetsch's demand for historical *evidence* (or an intuitive knowledge of historical origins vouchsafed in a moment of epistemological presence) and his sense of the implication of 'history' in the play of differences by which language produces meanings ruptures the poem's closed structure. Although the numbered sections of "Stone Hammer Poem" offer it an ostensible formal unity, it lacks the univocity of a final statement of fact. Bereft of the epistemological centre that Kroetsch's excavation of the past promised to provide, the poem dissolves into a series of different registers, such as the clipped objectivism of Section Seven or the formal elegy of Section Ten. Paradoxically, however, the over-determination of the linguistic sign, which frustrates Kroetsch's efforts to establish an intuitive connection between the hammer and its place of historical origin, opens the way for another approach to the ambiguities of colonial history. The outlines of a different strategy of reading the past are clearly visible in the first half of Section Five:

It is a stone
 old as the last
 Ice Age, the
 retreating/ the
 recreating ice,
 the retreating
 buffalo, the
 retreating Indians (FN 15)

In this passage, Kroetsch exploits the resistance of language to fixed points of semantic resolution in order to undermine closed structures of historical classification. At one level these lines, with their reference to "the retreating / buffalo, the / retreating Indians," offer a poignant image of the eclipse of an historical era. Yet there is a countervailing force at work here centred upon the phrase "recreating ice" that denies the prevalent theme of declension, loss, and abandonment, and suggests the possibility of regeneration and renewal. Significantly, the idea of resurgence only becomes available if we adopt a new politics of reading. In stark contrast to his use of orthodox predicate grammar at the beginning of the poem, Kroetsch asks us to attend here to the differential play between words and to read with the grain of that difference. There is, after all, only the difference of a letter between "retreating" and "recreating"; but the dialectical tension between the two words breaches the surface of the text and opens a space in which another history might be articulated.

After "Stone Hammer Poem" Kroetsch's poetry increasingly demands that we read against the letter to recover the repressed material that the official historical record conceals. His work begins from the premise that linguistic transactions create a surplus of meaning that cannot be totalised; he then disseminates this surplus throughout his writing by means of a sophisticated form of lexical play which problematises the connection between word and world and compels us to reconsider the relationship between discourse, history, and cultural identity. In an important reversal he decides that instead of attempting to extirpate the post-colonial experience of 'difference' by repressing the signifying possibilities of language, it is more productive to use the referential excess of language to disorder totalising forms of historical representation. A deconstructive reading of history facilitates this enterprise by ceaselessly exploring the boundary drawn between identity and difference and thereby challenging the assumed 'otherness' of post-colonial subjectivity. Fittingly, then, the stone hammer is last pictured lying on the poet's desk, occasion and symbol for a poem that traverses the unploughed field of Canadian history, opening up its historical possibilities in time to the disorderings and reconstitutions of language.

"Stone Hammer Poem" is at once the beginning and the end of Kroetsch's phenomenological poetics of place. Throughout the 1970's he develops a deconstructive reading of Canadian history that examines the hierarchical oppositions and metaphors of totalisation by which the discourse of colonialism has constructed Canada as "other." The crucial factor behind this transition is his recognition that the fundamental post-colonial experience of alterity is most effectively contested by a mode of writing that exploits the play of linguistic difference to deconstruct the narrative frames in which colonial history has been written. We should note that this decision to open up the narrative of history to the repressed metaphoricity of language deals a mortal blow to Kroetsch's dream of establishing a metonymic poetics that eschews the "temptation to read metaphorically."³⁰ Such a project would have foundered in any case since the trope of *metonymy* may be shown to depend upon the *metaphoric* principle of analogy.

The concealed metaphoricity of the metonymic function can be explored with reference to Derrida's critique of traditional theories of metaphor in his essay "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy." The logical development of the argument of "White Mythology" is important and needs to be outlined in some detail.

Derrida begins with the idea that Western metaphysics is merely a series of dead metaphors - figural representations of the *sensible* whose origins have been erased. He then outlines the Nietzschean position: the sensible origins of philosophical metaphors are irretrievable. However, Derrida goes on to assert that what has been obscured in this call for philosophy to recall its metaphorical origins is the process of *metonymy*. Metaphysical concepts are not merely sensory perceptions elevated to the ideal (that is, brought into language); they were linguistic in their origins. They did not arise from a single perception of resemblance but were constituted by the systematic process of signs.

At this stage, Derrida's position corresponds to Kroetsch's desire to bring metonymic processes into the examination of a history of concepts. But Derrida proceeds to make a further point that questions the presuppositions and possibilities of the critique of metaphor he has just outlined. He asserts that the idea of metonymy can only arise if one has already established the similarity between one system and another. In Derrida's case this resemblance is established between the system of economy and the system of signs; in Kroetsch's case it inheres in the juxtaposition of archaeological fragments and the system of signs. In either context it is clear that the fundamental metonymic relation can be grasped only through the metaphoric process of analogy. Derrida therefore acknowledges the metonymic origins of signification while pointing out that *such origins can only be conceived ex post facto as metaphors*. In words that have a particular pertinence to Kroetsch's deconstructive poetics he concludes that "there is no access to the use of a linguistic phenomenon without giving it some figurative representation."³¹

This metaphoric movement within the trope of metonymy suggests how Robert Lecker can describe the rigorous alignment of word and world in Kroetsch's volume *The Stone Hammer Poems* as the issue of a "metaphoric complexity."³² It also helps to account for the curiously paradoxical status of the practice of 'archaeology' in Kroetsch's work, which stands simultaneously for a metonymic connection between fragments and as a metaphor for the fictive process of unearthing the Canadian past. In conclusion, the significance of "Stone Hammer Poem" is that it records the disintegration of Kroetsch's archaeological poetics of origin under the pressure exerted by the differential tension between signs. In many ways, Kroetsch's transition to the deconstructive poetics of *The Ledger* may be seen as the consequence of his experience

of the repressed metaphoricity of language. His subsequent appropriation of the discourse of post-structuralism, which posits the impossibility of enforcing a permanent alignment between signs, may therefore be seen as a strategic harnessing of the metaphoric potential of language to disorder closed textual and historical structures.³³

**"Sketches of a Lemon": From a Phenomenological
to a Deconstructive Poetics.**

We may gauge this occultation of a metonymic practice more successfully if we juxtapose "Stone Hammer Poem" with "Sketches of a Lemon." "Sketches" occupies a curious place in the Kroetsch canon: it has received little critical attention, a fact due mainly to its uncertain location between the registers of meditation and comedy, philosophical speculation and play. Responses to the poem have ranged from the assertion that within it Kroetsch uses language "as a signifier of 'absence' within 'presence'" thereby "foreground[ing] language as an open field for the play of difference"³⁴ to the more dismissive view that "Sketches" "means nothing . . . it is about unconnection, about the poet's inability to write the poem."³⁵ Although "Sketches" provides space for both these interpretations, it is most usefully approached as a satire upon the very possibility of the phenomenological discourse of the object that "Stone Hammer Poem" strives so hard to establish. By reading the later poem as a parodic reinvestigation of the relation of world to consciousness, we can shed light upon the contentious meaning of "Sketches" while clarifying the importance of the re-emergence of metaphor in "Stone Hammer Poem."

The identification of "Sketches" as a parodic and satiric response to "Stone Hammer Poem" is crucial to its meaning. The interrelationship of the two texts is obvious at the level of content because they both explore the nature of the connection between the perceiver and the object of consciousness. The 'plot' of "Sketches" is perfectly simple: Kroetsch examines a lemon in his kitchen, and tries to put into words the essential qualities that make a lemon a "lemon." Behind this somewhat rudimentary form of enquiry lies a further set of questions that take us back to Kroetsch's primary artistic concerns: How can we know otherness? What is the relationship between the individual and what lies outside its conscious domain? How is identity established through language? These questions return Kroetsch to the dilemma that confronted him in "Stone Hammer Poem." Since, in phenomenological terms, the perceptive intuition of the object reciprocally constitutes the intending subject as an awareness, the concreteness of the relationship between subject and object is of vital importance. However, Kroetsch's experience as a perceiving subject in "Sketches" is continually confounded by his experience as a *writer*, which alerts him to the systematic and *differential* possibilities of language. The discovery that Kroetsch is led to in

"Sketches" is, *contra* the first half of "Stone Hammer Poem," that meaning is not guaranteed in a moment of epistemological presence, but is produced by the endless self-difference of language. In a sense that is a little dialectical, it might be said that meaning for the phenomenological subject is always on the point of collapse in "Sketches"; and that this collapse is what gives the poem its *meaning*.

"Sketches" offers an ironic commentary on the epistemological crisis that fractured "Stone Hammer Poem." Its action takes place in the gap between experience and representation, meaning as intentional event and meaning as grammatical structure. The poem offers entrance to a world thoroughly mediated by language, in which the desire to ground meaning in presence has become a distant dream. Our sense of the evanescence of Kroetsch's phenomenological dream of origin is reinforced by his playful retention in "Sketches" of the dislocated form of "Stone Hammer Poem." Indeed, "Sketches" evinces a comic delight in detailing the lemon's inexhaustible phenomenal aspects. Yet Kroetsch does not linger over the infinite series of the lemon's profiles in order to privilege perception as a type of intuition to which the object is given in its bodily self-presence; on the contrary, "Sketches" begins from the premise that truth is missed in its meaning as soon as one attempts to account for phenomena outside the language by which it is represented to consciousness.

Poetic form in "Sketches" is then, to borrow the words of Paul De Man, "never anything but a process on the way to its completion."³⁶ The intrusion of language as a system of structural possibilities into the field of consciousness explains the radical incompleteness of Kroetsch's relation to the object. His attempt to grasp the fact of the lemon in its essential 'lemonness' and thereby establish an original truth immune to breakdown into prior intention or structure is permanently frustrated by the process of deferral and difference through which the sign "lemon" is brought into presence.³⁷ As if to emphasise this point, the implication of the object in the logic of displacement and temporisation by which meaning is produced across the intervals of the signifying chain is enacted in the poem as Kroetsch's "lemon" eventually dissolves back into its various phonic possibilities. The transition in Kroetsch's poetics from a theory of presence to a celebration of process reaches its apotheosis as the lemon is converted into a symbol for the play of differences that constitute the literary text.

It should be remarked that Kroetsch's insistence that every fundamental truth constitutes itself in the discrepancy of its identity (a belief signalled by his deconstructive acknowledgement of the paradoxical slippage of notions like 'truth' and his constant reassertion of the excess of meaning with regard to a single concept) registers a blow against interpretative expropriation that is *political* in its consequences. By emphasising the over-determination of the sign in relation to the epistemological moment, and therefore its constitutive self-difference from its own meaning, he shows that the acts with which we represent and control meaning are always themselves a little out of control. Meaning, in Kroetsch's deconstructive poetics, is always at a structural distance from itself: the possibility of the sign's other meanings, in other places and at other times, becomes the condition of its identity. The recognition that identity and meaning are an effect of difference inscribes alterity within the logic of the "same" and reveals the "other" to be a *product of discourse*. Once the transition from the self-presence of consciousness to the self-difference of discourse has been made, the absolute distinction between identity and difference is exposed as fraudulent, and the question of alterity is opened to political contestation.

From the poem's opening lines, Kroetsch shows himself to be trapped between the demand for a direct intuitive experience of the object and his sense of the inexorable mediation of language:

A lemon is almost round.
Some lemons are almost round.
A lemon is not round.

So much for that.

How can one argue that a lemon
is truly a lemon
if the question can be argued?

I said, to Smaro
(I was working on this poem)
Smaro, I called, is there
(she was in the kitchen)
a lemon in the fridge?
No, she said.

So much for that. (FN 123)

This section is inhabited by a doubt concerning the relation of world to consciousness that was conspicuously absent in the declarative beginning of "Stone Hammer Poem." In place of perception and intuition, Kroetsch relies upon a naive syllogistic logic for knowledge of the object. He is displaced, somewhat against his will, to the arena of argumentation and the conditional mood: "*How* can one argue . . . *if* the question" The poet's unsettling sense of the interpretative distance that language imposes between subject and object is comically heightened by his inability to guarantee the individual status of the text's referents. Everything seems to be on the point of dissolution: Kroetsch has to interrupt his text to underline his (and Smaro's) physical existence in a couple of clumsy parentheses. Meanwhile, the lemon, whose ontological essence it is the purpose of the poem to discover, isn't even *present*. All Kroetsch has is the words on his page, the ironic refrain "[s]o much for that" punctuating each stanza in a sardonic echo of Vonnegut's "so it goes," hinting gently at our inevitable failure either to separate world from word or to exhaust worldly being in language.

Kroetsch's unhappy awareness of the interdependence of the existential and the textual forces him to revise his interrogatory tactics. Perhaps, he argues, the quiddity of the object can be established by direct appeal to the visual sense. But this gesture, which tries to make a tentative distinction between the sensual and the discursive, results merely in a hermeneutic circle:

What about oranges?
 At least an orange
 looks like an orange.
 In fact, most oranges
 bear a remarkable resemblance
 to oranges. (FN 125)

If we examine these lines closely, it is easy to see why they represent a subtle form of defeat for the phenomenological poet. Kroetsch's attempt to privilege the visual over the discursive is the outward expression of his desire to return to the thing itself; but the recovery of the visual in linguistic terms demands the semantic equivocation of *similie*. An orange *looks like* an orange; it bears a *remarkable resemblance* to other oranges. This move from the ontological specificity of the individual case to the rhetorical generalisation of a hypothesised collectivity undermines Kroetsch's ambition to "see the thing in its place." From here, it is but a short step to

working "by a kind of analogy" and readmitting the metaphors of displacement that his archaeological poetics of origin were committed to expunge:

I went and looked at Francis Ponge's poem
on blackberries. If blackberries can be
blackberries, I reasoned, by a kind of analogy,
lemons can, I would suppose, be lemons.

Such was not the case. (FN 124)

By embracing the analogous and substitutive logic of metaphor, Kroetsch signals his recognition that difference is inscribed within identity itself. Metaphor, as his critical reflection on 'archaeology' suggests, is the perfect trope by which to express difference: the tension between tenor and vehicle encapsulates the dialectical play between identity and difference in a single rhetorical gesture. The development in Kroetsch's work away from a metonymic poetics bespeaks his willingness to think identity differently: from this point on, he consistently exploits the fact that rhetoric cannot be monadic (or tied to a single meaning) in order to suspend the linguistic gesture towards closure between multiple and incompatible meanings. In *The Ledger*, this deconstructive practice implies that 'history' is a totalising discourse of power that marginalises and effaces the visible sign of difference. Kroetsch's reversal of the stance of "Stone Hammer Poem," and his insistence that absence is the prior discursive condition of presence, is comically outlined in Section Four of "Sketches," where the eponymous lemon is described in terms of anything except its quintessential being:

Sketches, I reminded myself,
nor of an apple,
nor of a peach,
nor of a banana
(though the colour
raises questions),
nor of a nectarine . . . (FN 124)

In an exquisite parody of what form an undifferentiated identity might take, Kroetsch tries to ground being in the grammatical structure of subject and predicate. Section Six of the poem accordingly suggests that the essential structure of truth and of the proposition is a response to the intrinsic structure of the thing described. The semantic order of language therefore becomes an effect of the absolute self-identity of geometrical logic:

Smaro is rolling a lemon on the breadboard.
 The breadboard, flat, horizontal, is motionless.
 The lemon rolls back and forth on the motionless surface.
 Smaro's hand moves horizontally, back and forth,

One could draw a diagram of the three related objects,
 deduce therefrom a number of mechanical principles.
 (FN 125)

Yet this quest for an *a priori* grammar underlying linguistic exchange is vulnerable to the Heideggerian critique of Western ontology, which questions the "natural" relation between the thing and the linguistic unit, and asks whether it is not the structure of the proposition that determines the way we envisage the world:

But this "natural" opinion is absolutely *not* natural. This means that its supposed firmness dissolves itself into a series of questions. These run as follows: Was the essential structure of truth and of the proposition suited to the structure of the things? Or is it the opposite: Was the essential structure of the thing as a bearer of attributes interpreted according to the structure of the proposition, as the unity of "subject" and "predicate"? Has man read off the subject of the proposition from the structure of the things, or has he transferred the structure of the proposition into the things?³⁸

Heidegger's conclusion, which is that man has "read" the thing in a manner dictated by the structure of the propositions with which he relates the objects to consciousness, posits the construction of the world by language. In accordance with the logic of the Heideggerian critique, Section Nine of "Sketches" identifies the object as the product of difference, brought to presence by the network of its phonic possibilities:

If someone asked me,
 how is a lemon shaped?

(the salmon
 (the oven
 (the lemon

I'd say, a lemon is shaped
 exactly like an hour.

(Now we're getting somewhere.)
 (FN 126)

In this passage, the lemon is "shaped" by the play of assonance between different signifying possibilities. The lemon is a "lemon" precisely because it is *not* "salmon" or "oven." Kroetsch's emphasis here upon the arbitrariness of the signifying process has several important consequences. Put simply, if there is no natural or necessary relationship between signifier and signified, meaning is determined by the social and cultural practices within which language is used. Kroetsch makes this point by his use of street-slang: to be a lemon is, in the American argot, to buy a second-hand car. This insight into the social and cultural construction of identity obviates Kroetsch's need to search for essence and origin; instead, he begins to conceptualise history as a thoroughly mediated category of human experience sustained and regulated by those granted access to the order of discourse. His recognition that reality is constructed by the temporal play of meaning along the signifying chain also serves to reintroduce time into his closed phenomenological poetics; the lemon is, in its latest incarnation, "shaped exactly like an hour": now, as Kroetsch notes with satisfaction, we're really getting somewhere.

"Sketches" offers clear retrospective evidence of the transition in Kroetsch's work from a phenomenological to a deconstructive poetics. His initial determination to repudiate alterity by asserting identity in a moment of adiscursive epistemological presence is transformed into an awareness that discourse structures the history that we inhabit as subjects. Meanwhile, the inextricability of the historical and the textual opens the question of alterity up to radical re-examination since linguistic meaning, in its resistance to totalisation, defiantly refuses to coincide with itself and reproduce identity indefinitely through time. The delight that "Sketches" takes in the hostility of language to closure offers an interesting clue to the direction that Kroetsch's writing was to take in the years after "Stone Hammer Poem." Thus in the 1970's Kroetsch begins to use the self-differing discourse of post-structuralism to deconstruct the unilinear narrative of colonial history and to articulate the silences and absences at that narrative's core. Indeed, he develops a counter-discourse of national self-identification in which the erasure of indigenous history is transformed into a 'postmodern' history of erasure. For this important transition in Kroetsch's artistic career we need to consider *The Ledger*, his deconstructive history of nineteenth-century provincial Ontario.

**An Other History / An Other Language: History and
Différance in *The Ledger***

In my discussion of "Stone Hammer Poem" I made reference to a significant contradiction in Kroetsch's 'archaeological' poetics. On one hand archaeology connotes a metonymic and discontinuous textual practice that resists the substitutive logic of metaphor; on the other hand, it symbolises Kroetsch's desire to dispense with the mediation of language in order to establish an intuitive connection between the intending consciousness and the scattered fragments of Canadian history. We have seen that the discrepancy between Kroetsch's archaeological poetics of origin and the structuralist philosophy of language upon which his early work is predicated forced him to reconsider the relationship in his writing between language, history, and identity. Such reconsideration was inevitable given the manifest failure of his 'archaeological' poetry to sustain a discourse of self-registration uncontaminated by difference and alterity. "Sketches" offers a comic insight into the unresolved tension between identity and difference that lies at the heart of Kroetsch's metonymic revision of colonial history.

Somewhat against his expectation, however, Kroetsch's inability to suppress the tropological "trans-ference" of metaphor must be counted one of the key turning points of his career. In particular, his discovery that meaning is an effect of difference opens up the narrow narrative boundaries of colonial history to modification and displacement. Because "no element can function as a sign without reference to another element which itself is not simply present"³⁹ in the order of spoken or written discourse, difference is always already inscribed within the meta-narrative of colonial history. In accordance with this deconstructive logic, Kroetsch sets himself the task in *The Ledger* of reconstructing colonial history as a network of textual traces which are ordered and hierarchised by the discourse of colonialism. By using the spatial possibilities of the typographic page to counterpoint hegemonic accounts of Canadian national development with the marginalised narratives of the first pioneers, Kroetsch continually dissolves meta-narrative into a series of fragmentary narratives. Kroetsch's vision of colonial history in *The Ledger* as the relentless totalisation of a discursive multiplicity that will always reassert itself is repeatedly enacted across the typed columns of the poem, as the voices of the forgotten and the dispossessed clamour for inclusion into the history that excluded them.

Kroetsch's commitment to the dissemination of the play of linguistic difference throughout the official ledger of nineteenth-century Canadian history betrays the influence upon him of the discourse of Derridean "deconstruction." Following "Stone Hammer Poem," which was composed in the late 1960's and published in *Creation* in 1970, Kroetsch's artistic and critical work begins to inhabit a new idiom: it speaks of "difference," "trace," "erasure," and "deconstruction" in order to explore the *textualisation* of historical origins. Kroetsch's co-editorship of *Boundary 2* (a "Journal of Postmodern Literature") with the Heideggerian William V. Spanos throughout the 1970s provides an important critical focus for this theoretical move.

One of the most significant features of Derridean thought for our discussion is his radicalisation of Husserlian phenomenology. As we have seen, Husserlian phenomenology endeavours to establish a personal ground for experience in consciousness. However, Derrida's critique of Husserl revises the relationship between language and consciousness by positing the sign as *anterior* to thought itself.⁴⁰ The sign therefore becomes the first stage in the production of knowledge. Since the written sign is a typographic 'presence' that 'stands in' for the absence of immanent or transcendent meaning, the prior implication of conscious experience within the movement of signification institutes an originary difference between being and meaning.⁴¹ Consequently, the foundational "origin" of history produced by the self-presence of thought to itself is displaced into the "non-origin" of language generated by the ceaseless circulation of signs. Derrida names this "originary" non-origin as *différance*.⁴²

The idea of signification as a "non-origin" that originates meaning and history is important to Kroetsch because it offers a metaphoric 'translation' of the colonial experience of history. Seen from the perspective of a colonial culture, history has no authentic point of origin because the language in which its experience is recorded and communicated is always already contaminated by the discourse of colonialism. Indeed, for many colonial peoples language symbolises the conflictual moment when the cultural codes of European colonialism were transferred to the unwritten spaces of the new place. Here we must mark a simultaneous process of identification and displacement: the colonial space is represented and transfigured by language in the same

instant. The language that appears neutral and possessed of a certain "discursive transparency"⁴³ discriminates *from the very first moment* between "the mother culture and its bastards, the self and its doubles, where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something *different* - a mutation, a hybrid."⁴⁴ Homi Bhabha, whose words I have just quoted, has shown how the rhetoric of colonialist discrimination receives an archetypal representation in the image of the English Book discovered amid an alien cultural environment:

The discovery of the book installs the sign of appropriate representation: the word of God, truth, art creates the conditions for a beginning, a practice of history and narrative. But the institution of the Word in the wilds is also an *Enstellung*, a process of displacement, distortion, dislocation, repetition - the dazzling light of literature sheds only areas of darkness.⁴⁵

In a move that challenges the primacy of the Ur-texts of European culture, Derrida's deconstructive displacement of 'history' and 'meaning' into the process of signification subverts the idea of an origin that was not already an effect of *différance*. He works unceasingly against a "metaphysical" concept of history that envisages "history as the history of meaning . . . the history of meaning developing itself, producing itself, fulfilling itself."⁴⁶ Instead he tries to gain an understanding of *plural* histories "*different* in their type, rhythm, mode of inscription - intervallic, differentiated histories."⁴⁷ This notion of an infinite series of heterogeneous and stratified histories which continually undermine the metaphysical connection between being and meaning has a powerful appeal for a post-colonial culture that has hitherto experienced history as the narrative of its displacement from a lost moment of origin. In particular, Derrida's reconceptualisation of the past as a *general text* which overflows the limits of a discourse of history regulated by ideas of essence, meaning, and truth, presents history as the movement of *différance* itself. It therefore provides a philosophical ground for Kroetsch's strictures against the "coercive" narrative of Western history which "begins from meaning instead of discovering meanings along the way."⁴⁸ Kroetsch's artistic response to Derrida's assault on the metaphysical concept of history emerges in *The Ledger*, where he opens up the closed narrative of colonial history to the systematic play of *différance*.

Deconstructive practice has had a profound and lasting influence on Kroetsch. But before his work is uncritically situated within the economy of *différance*, it is necessary to make a distinction between Derridean 'deconstruction' and Kroetsch's

deconstructive poetics that will assume increasing importance as Kroetsch's career progresses. To do so, we will need to return momentarily to the sometimes neglected axiomatics of Derrida's work. For Derrida, the deconstruction of metaphysics is a systematic exposure of the effacement of certain key binary terms - writing before speech, unreason before rationalism, the realm of the sensible before the intelligible, for example - within Western thought. His intervention is explicitly directed towards the historical configuration of epistemic production. As Jonathan Culler observes, "in its critique of philosophy and of other essentializing discourses, deconstruction emphasises that discourse, meaning, and reading are historical through and through, produced in processes of contextualization, dcontextualization, and recontextualization."⁴⁹ Derrida is scornful of the idea that there is a position 'outside' language or metaphysics from which one could overturn the traditions of Western conceptualisation.⁵⁰ Reason, in the form of the Logos, will always reconstitute itself by virtue of the "violent hierarchy"⁵¹ through which it sustains its governing binary distinctions. Deconstruction is therefore a game played within rigorous constraints; an endless struggle against an indefatigable opponent.

The deconstructive incision accordingly opens a gap in Western metaphysics that will always close. There is no simple choice for Derrida *between* the historical and textual: he asserts the historicity of discourse at the same moment that he reminds us that 'history' is a weave of differences. "If the word 'history' did not in and of itself convey the motif of a final repression of difference," he writes, "one could say that only differences can be 'historical' from the outset and in each of their aspects."⁵² The rich legacy that the deconstructive approach leaves Kroetsch is the correspondence it identifies between the effacement of various binary terms and the production of historical meaning. In *The Ledger*, perhaps Kroetsch's finest poem, he makes exemplary use of this insight by showing the connection between the marginalisation of certain forms of discourse and the consolidation of the narrative of Canadian nationhood. However, there is at times a contrary impulse at work in Kroetsch's poetics that degrades the rigour of *différance* to 'difference' or a simple celebration of linguistic play. Consequently, Kroetsch's poetics sometimes display a regrettable tendency to ascribe a positive value to semantic indeterminacy *outside* the historical conditions in which it is produced.

The problem with Kroetsch's valorisation of semantic 'difference' is the damage it inflicts upon the integrity of the historical referent. A poetics that continually dissolves the historical scene of writing into the associational patterns of language is pushed towards the uncomfortable position that historical contexts do not help to determine meaning. Such a stance makes it particularly difficult for a post-colonial writer to contest the hegemony enjoyed by imperial cultural codes in the construction of colonial identity. The tension in Kroetsch's work between his fascination with the discursive hierarchy of colonial history and his promotion of a dehistoricised poetics of 'difference' is, I believe, the reason behind his transition, in *The Sad Phoenician*, to a search for cultural renewal in the politics of the 'decentred' subject. I shall therefore chart the gradual dissipation of historical energy in Kroetsch's poetry, implicit in his substitution of 'difference' for *différance*, through a sequential reading of *The Ledger*, *Seed Catalogue* and *The Sad Phoenician*, and a brief examination of his critical writings.

Kroetsch's concern with the textualisation of historical origins is reflected in the titles of the three poems I am about to consider. Thus *Seed Catalogue* employs the taxonomical procedures of horticultural classification in order to explore 'organicist' metaphors of place and identity, while *The Sad Phoenician* investigates the relationship between language and desire through a ludic examination of the structures of the Phoenician (and now Western) alphabet. Meanwhile, the title *The Ledger* refer simultaneously to a book of financial accounts kept by Kroetsch's grandfather during his residence in a small Ontario community in the middle of the last century and the larger historical record of the pioneer enterprise. It is a poem written about Canadian history that inspects the ways in which Canadian history has been written. By placing textual fragments of pioneer history into the economy of *différance*, Kroetsch challenges the process of historical and linguistic exclusion by which narratives of identity and place are constructed and legitimatised.

We can better explore the imbrication of the historical and the textual by means of a brief incursion into the history of the poem's publication. Thus the cover of the 1975 Applegarth's Follies edition of *The Ledger* reproduces a map of Bruce County, Ontario, where Kroetsch's family settled during the last century. This edition also incorporates a page of the ledger that detailed the family accounts upon their arrival in Ontario. The map of Bruce County is marked by a black circle that rings the notation

"Saw m." Next to it, a scrawled message proclaims "Yes, that's the *place*. RK." As Linda Hutcheon points out, "[t]his contextualizing and personalizing signing is omitted in the later reprinting, but its presence is a postmodern signal of the meeting of the past and the present."⁵³

Kroetsch's concern in *The Ledger* is to challenge the hermeneutic principles by which we record, structure, and represent historical experience. What, he asks, is carried over in the act of translation between the past and the present? Is it possible to reach back across such temporal distances and communicate the meaning of the original event, and, if so, what would the consequences of such a univocal History be? A few lines from the English Modernist poet Roy Fisher shed some light upon the principal themes of the poem:

 this backward image-trail
 projects farther
 on a straight alignment
 across what looked to be emptiness,
 checked as void

 and suddenly locates the dead,
 the utterly forgotten.⁵⁴

The "backward image-trail" of Kroetsch's poem follows the trajectory of Fisher's lines in exploring "what looked to be emptiness" and suddenly locating "the dead, / the utterly forgotten." In the scant details of the Bruce County ledger, he finds the traces of a number of unrepresented lives that have been effaced by the univocal narrative of Canadian history. In fact, 'trace' is an important term in any discussion of *The Ledger* because it provides a clue to the deconstructive strategies that Kroetsch pursues in his examination of a lost stratum of the pioneer experience.

In contrast to the positivist position which holds that a knowledge of the past can be obtained by direct reference to the given facts, Kroetsch insists that there is no way back through language to meaning that is not itself a product of *différance*. Above all, he refuses to avoid the question of the *historicity* of historical discourse: he knows that there is no extra-discursive domain called the 'real' where historical facts can be guaranteed; and that it is the lesson of *différance* that "no movement of experience can present itself except as *re*ference to what it is not, what differs from it."⁵⁵ In this space between event and representation, Kroetsch's poem undertakes its subversive

manoeuvres. Notably, he does not attempt to reassemble the fragments of the ledger's biographical details into a coherent and continuous narrative; rather, the lives of his forebears exist as a series of fractured voices that echo across the discontinuous space called history. 'History' has no meaning in *The Ledger* except as the reproduction of this discursive difference. Kroetsch's achievement here is to give *différance* a human context by drawing a comparison between the prior inscription of absence and lack in linguistic meaning (through the "langue" or system of absent lexical possibilities) and the effacement of the narratives of Theresia Tschirhart and Haag's son from the mercantilist discourse of Canadian history. In this emotionally charged correspondence, the process of difference and deferral by which identity is produced is reinterpreted in terms of human powerlessness and loss. Meanwhile, the paradox by which meaning must presume a presence which precedes writing but which in fact is constituted by writing is expressed by the collocation and interdependence of the text's various idioms, as they subvert the idea of history as an unconditional ontological category and dissolve it once again into the plurality of its various discourses.

Kroetsch's refusal to locate historical identity outside the differential locus of language, the medium of distantiation and deferral, has direct implications for the form that *The Ledger* takes. Kroetsch's poem, like the Bruce County ledger, is a "book / of / columns" (FN 23) built out of vertical and horizontal slats of language. In the same spirit as the postmodern poetics of John Ashbery and J. H. Prynne, Kroetsch impedes the sequential logic of reading by redistributing narrative units across the typographic space of the printed page. Our experience of time is displaced into an experience of space as we struggle to reconstruct a sense of the past from the poem's disjunctive columns of print. The dislocated and oppositional form of *The Ledger* enables Kroetsch to undermine our hopeless desire for an absolute understanding of history: although we must become effectively co-producers of the art-work, as we try to create correspondences between discrete textual fragments, the boundless possibilities opened up by Kroetsch's technique of juxtaposition and superimposition show that history is a field of reference whose meanings always exceed a unitary reading. Maud Ellmann has written of some lines of Pound ("And even I can remember / A day when historians left blanks in their writings / I mean for things they didn't know / but that time seems to be passing"⁵⁶) that *The Cantos* "try to bring the blanks back into history."⁵⁷ *The Ledger* is just such an open form: it offers a formalism (the formalism of the account-book with its columns of profits, losses and balances) that momentarily organises the welter of experience only to succumb to the disorder of language. In the radical dissociations of

Kroetsch's verse, postmodern knowledge deconstructs the book of history: he accentuates the division between experience and representation, multiplies the overlap of semiotic codes, and, in the ontological gap so produced, redefines our relation to the past. As images bleed into each other from different segments of the poem, history becomes fissured by lack and difference, invaded by the radical alterity of other discourses, opened to the movement of *différance*.

The Ledger begins by questioning our assumptions about the form that a historical record should assume. In place of the consecutive logic of a linear progression, Kroetsch explores the marginal spaces offered to him by the typographic page:

the	the ledger survived
ledger	
	because it was neither
itself	human nor useful (FN 23)

It is obvious from these brief lines that the spatial syntax of Kroetsch's style imposes no necessary order between vertical and horizontal modes of reading. Some sense may be made of this passage if we choose to read either down or across the page. The striking feature of these lines is the lingering attention they pay to the process of deferral by which meaning is reconstituted after the "infinitesimal and radical displacement"⁵⁸ of *différance*. Although the ledger may be thought "neither human nor useful" it "survived / itself" because it lends a degree of formal unity to the overwhelming experience of fragmentation that Kroetsch's poem expresses. The line-break between "survived" and "itself" is crucial because it opens the passage up to two different interpretations. Naturally, the ledger "survived" itself because it has, in a practical way, outlasted its immediate function; but it also survived "itself" because it offers ways of interpreting the acts of pioneer settlement that far exceed the narrow economic determination advanced in its own pages. Kroetsch's writing, with its abrupt shifts and punning associations, is fully alive to the play of mental events that his splintered form sets in train: the mind, repeatedly recovering moments of significance from a succession of images that have always moved on, is constantly in arrears as it tries to arrange fragments of text into an experience of continuous process. Hence the studied irony of Kroetsch's technique: it may *seem* that syntax will rescue order from randomness ("the / ledger / itself") but this order is immediately subverted by the poet's insistence that meaning is always posthumous, a product of the connections we choose to make (or ignore) between the pages of a textualised history.

The production of meaning by deferral and difference is the explicit theme of the poem's opening pages. Accordingly, a dictionary definition of "ledger" as a site of resolution and closure ("in bookkeeping, the book of final entry, in which a record of debits, credits, and all money transactions is kept") is instantly problematised by Kroetsch's representation of the ledger as "the / book / of / columns" which emphasises, by means of the curious isolation of the phrase on the wide white page, the importance of the margin, spacing, and difference to the relation between signs. The sense of incompleteness that this new definition of "ledger" leaves is then translated into economic terms. The ledger "doesn't balance": an unevenness (a sense of lack) appears in each column's reciprocal image of identity. There is, in the first moments of the poem, a continual oscillation between the figurative and the economic: the notion of economy as monetary exchange (the life-blood of a mercantile community) and the post-structural definition of economy as the circulation of signs (or those discourses by which a community comes to recognise and understand itself) are interlinked. At one point, Kroetsch advances a textual metaphor to describe his sense of the radical contingency of history:

some pages torn out (
by accident)
some pages remaining (
by accident)

(FN 24)

Later, however, the economic and the graphic are juxtaposed in a section that simultaneously presents the ledger as the repository of a concluded history and an artistic "search for the dead" that will never be completed because each moment of "finding" is invaded by distance and longing:

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

is a search

for some pages

remaining

(by accident)

the poet: finding

the column straight

in the torn ledger

the column broken

FINDING

everything you write
 my wife, my daughters, said
 is a search for the dead

*the book of final entry
 in which a record is kept
 (FN 25)*

Two of the ways in which Kroetsch's deconstructive emphasis upon *différance* achieves a political force are its refusal of any formal division between language and meta-language and its exposure of 'history' as a discourse created by the purposive totalisation of difference. *The Ledger* works against meta-language and the hierarchy of discourse that meta-languages impose by bringing different discursive registers together without any degree of narrative contextualisation. In the following extract, Kroetsch employs a series of narrative dissolves borrowed from the montage techniques of cinema to underline the latent rapacity of the pioneer enterprise. Thus an initial definition of "ledger" as timber for construction and shelter is quickly displaced by the authentic idiom of nineteenth-century mercantilism reflected in *The Canada Gazette*. Once this displacement has been effected, two sharply opposed versions of pioneer history are provided. One, Father Holzer's, invokes the optimistic platitudes that were used to sell the colonies to prospective settlers. Yet Holzer's idealising portrait of provincial Canadian life, which Kroetsch satires in the repeated phrase "A Pristine Forest," is contested on the other side of the page by a passage which ironically appropriates the antiphonal rhythm of the Christian litany to uncover the violence of the act of settlement:

- b. 'a horizontal piece of timber secured to the uprights supporting the putlogs in a scaffolding, or the like.'

The Canada Gazette, August 17, 1854:

"Notice is hereby given that the undermentioned lands . . . in the County of Bruce, U.C., will be open for sale to actual settlers . . . The price to be Ten shillings per acre . . . Actual occupation to be immediate and continuous . . ."

To raise a barn;

cut down a forest.

To raise oats and hay;

burn the soil.

To raise cattle and hogs;

Kill the bear
Kill the mink
Kill the marten
Kill the lynx
Kill the fisher
Kill the beaver
Kill the moose

'As to the climate of the district,
Father Holzer cannot praise it
enough. He declares that during
the first nine months of his resi-
dence here they had only one
funeral, and that was of a man
84 years old.'

A Pristine Forest

A Pristine Forest

(FN 26)

The *collagiste* tendency of *The Ledger*, by which it counterpoints different orders of discourse within a single moment of critical attention, lays lasting claim to our attention in the correspondence it creates between textual inscription and historical 'presence.' The poverty of the account-books details, which elide human and economic worth in its columns of credit and debit, represents, in symbolic form, a comment upon the impoverishment of those lives for which the book of history can provide no account. Paradoxically, Kroetsch's tactical preservation of the integrity of discrete narrative units reinforces our sense of the discursive hierarchy that underpins the dissemination of power. In the section where the discourse of mercantilism and the numbed response of the immigrant settler are brought together within the unforgiving ratchet of profit and loss, it is all to clear with which narrative the "balance" of social power rests:

' . . . a specimen of the self-made men who have made Canada what it is, and of which no section has brought forth more or better representatives than the County of Bruce. Mr Miller was never an office-seeker, but devoted himself strictly and energetically to the pursuit of his private business, and on his death was the owner of a very large and valuable property . . . '

Shaping the trees.
Pushing up daisies.

Have another glass, John.
Ja, ja. What the hell.

What's the matter, John?
My bones ache.

Take a day off, John.
No time. (FN 28)

Here, the monosyllables of John, the harried worker, suggest that those who are isolated by language are placed outside the perimeter of historical representation: effaced, occluded, unremembered. Kroetsch makes this point with a grim pun: John has "[n]o time"; the alien strain of his expression can find no place within historical narratives of provincial life. He extends this thought with a salutary reminder that if linguistic competence underpins both cultural identity and social authority, those denied their share of a common idiom are uniquely vulnerable. Consequently, Kroetsch's recollection that "Gottlieb Haag's only son / grew up to be the first man / hanged for murder / in the County of Bruce" (FN 31) plays on the lexical similarity of "Haag" and "hanged" to show that for people(s) left outside the confirmatory structures of language, etymology can become destiny and words can kill.

As *The Ledger* gradually unfolds its details, the process of historical erasure slowly becomes visceral. True to his sense of the "essential paradox" by which "[e]ven abandonment gives us memory,"⁵⁹ Kroetsch encounters the series of textual absences he detects in the "torn ledger" in all their mortal forms. The correlation he discovers between wordlessness and exclusion from the historical record is developed in one of the most moving sections of the poem: the census of deaths in Bruce County, 1860:

1 yr: croup
 blank: born dead
 5 months: fits
 blank: dysentery
 16 yrs: hurt
 by sawmill wheel
 38: 1 Deth
 Inflammation (FN 38)

The poignant minimalism of "blank: born dead" holds our attention. The precise "balance" of this cursory phrase gives an ironic twist to the phrase "DEATH PROHIBITED / ON THESE PREMISES" (FN 39) since to lack the "premises" of a common discourse (a name, a birthplace, a history) is to exist beyond the margins of the recording page.

The overwhelming impression left to Kroetsch by the Bruce County ledger is that the community's understandable desire to establish its own corporate identity in the new place demands the expulsion of cultural and historical alterity. Linguistic difference (such as Gottlieb Haag's reaction to the shores of the New World "*Das ist*

doch nicht möglich") is treated with suspicion and even hostility. Language is the medium by which social contact is established, but it also creates distinctions between people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The tension that language engenders between identity and difference emerges in Kroetsch's elegy for his great-grandmother, Theresia Tschirhart:

born in Alsace, she spoke
German with a French accent,
English with a German accent,

looked down on all Bavarians
for being the tree-chopping
beer drinkers they all were:

Married three Bavarians.
Buried three Bavarians.

it balances

What did most men feel
in her presence?

Terror.

What did they do about it?

Proposed.

(I can't
believe my eyes)
(FN 37)

Theresia is, in many respects, the personification of the difference that the townspeople seek to exclude. Born in Alsace and fluent in several languages, her presence disturbs the self-assurance of a community held together by its possession of a common idiom. Kroetsch catches something of the threat that Theresia's foreignness signifies in the half-rhyme between "married" and "buried." Confronted with the sign of alterity, the men's only response is to propose to Theresia and subordinate difference to the social compact of marriage. But Theresia's great-grandson, who understands the power that alterity possesses to challenge repressive discursive structures, insists that we must "[m]arry the [t]error" (FN 43) in a quite different spirit by reading against the grain of the official record. Not surprisingly, then, the passage ends with his paranthetical refusal to believe his eyes and endorse the connection between language and self-presence that his ancestors demanded.

The intensity with which Kroetsch applies himself to the deconstruction of provincial Ontario history is perhaps best understood as the discharging of a familial debt. The question "what do I owe you?" (FN 39) resonates through the final sections



of the poem as Kroetsch tries to write the silences and blanks of an unacknowledged experience back into the ledger of Canadian history. In the poem's last pages, the proud record of nineteenth-century mercantilist progress dissolves into a plurality of contending discourses that undermine the possibility of a unitary narrative of Canada's colonial history:

f. 'a book that lies permanently in some place.'

A man that lies permanently in some place.
 A woman that lies permanently in some place.
 A resident. *Obsolete.*
 The book of final entry.

The book
 of columns.
 The book that lies
 permanently.

The timber supporting the putlogs
 in a scaffolding:

e.g., the poem in the chaos

 in the dark night
 in the beautiful forest

'With no effort or pretension to literary merit, the object will be rather to present a plain statement of facts of general interest which bear upon the past growth and development of this wonderfully prosperous section of the Province, in such manner as to render future comparisons more easy, and offer to the rising generation an incentive to emulation in the examples of the pioneers, whose self-reliant industry and progressive enterprise have conquered the primeval forests, and left in their stead, as a heritage to posterity, a country teeming with substantial comforts and material wealth, and reflecting in its every feature the indomitable spirit and true manliness of a noble race, whose lives and deeds will shine while the communities they have founded shall continue to exist.'

Gottlieb Haag's only son
 (for the first murder
 in the County of Bruce)

(With no effort
 or pretension

Hanged.

to literary merit)
 (FN 41)

In this passage of sustained disjunctions, the closed "book of final entry" is transformed into "the book that lies permanently in some place." Typically, Kroetsch insists on both meanings of the word "lie": it connotes both permanent residence and semantic duplicity in the same moment. By enmeshing these two irreconcilable meanings in an unresolvable tension, he manages to articulate the permanent duplicity

of the historical data he has excavated. Encouraging us to "see / the confusion again / the chaos again" (FN 34) from which the discourse of 'history' emerges, Kroetsch asks what single narrative could reconcile the studied neutrality of a discourse that constructs an image of Canada "with no effort / or pretension / to literary merit" with the bleak fate reserved for Haag's unnamed son? At the last, his answer is to go "beyond the last turned page / beyond the last / entry" to the image of his great-grandmother, symbol of an irreducible otherness, whose final ironic gesture is to be buried beside the ledger that demanded a level of self-effacement she could never sustain.

By demonstrating that language both constructs and deconstructs cultural identity, *The Ledger* becomes a poetic exploration of what Dominick LaCapra has referred to as "a reconceptualisation of culture in terms of collective discourses."⁶⁰ In its refusal to separate historical value from the textual work in which it is inscribed, Kroetsch's poem insists that identity is historically determined by the discursive rules and prohibitions that regulate the act of enunciation. *The Ledger* concludes with an appeal to the reader to "[m]arry the [t]error" and begin a *transformational* reading of Canadian historical discourse which exploits the radical alterity of language to reinscribe the effaced presence of an unrepresented historical experience. Holding to the double register of deconstructive poetics, which simultaneously records and overturns the "metaphysical" conception of history as presence, Kroetsch's radical suggestion is that the "concealed other experience"⁶¹ within the Canadian word is the history of Canada itself. Only by rethinking identity and deconstructing hegemonic narratives of history can post-colonial culture move beyond the "authorized text" of colonialist representation and risk the "nightmare and the welcome dream of Babel"⁶² that displaces Canada from an historical "origin" it never really knew.⁶³

Against Totality: *Seed Catalogue* and the Critique of Cultural Holism.

In his essay "Disunity as Unity: A Canadian Strategy" Kroetsch identifies the plurality and disjunctiveness of Canadian cultural discourse(s) as the energising force behind the nation's postmodern openness to influence and change. His keen awareness of the "extreme intertextuality of Canadian culture"⁶⁴ leads him to develop an aesthetic, and a cultural politics, that privileges "traces, lies, misreadings, concealments, fragments"⁶⁵ over Northrop Frye's "unifying sense of what a mythic vision is."⁶⁶ Against the implicit teleology (the rags-to-riches narrative) of "The American Dream,"⁶⁷ with its nostalgic longing for "the story of the place and moment of origin,"⁶⁸ Kroetsch savours the historical ambiguity of "that old new place called Canada."⁶⁹ As he observes, "[a] great deal of Canadian writing centres on the small town or the isolated community - and I suspect this is revealing in the way it announces the hesitation we feel about our meta-narrative."⁷⁰ Because of this instinctive refusal to valorise a restricted and restrictive cluster of meta-narratives, Canadians "survive by working with a low level of self-definition and national definition." "We insist on staying multiple," Kroetsch reminds us, "and by that strategy we accommodate to our climate, our economic situation, and our neighbours."⁷¹

The Ledger reveals the influence that Kroetsch's cultural politics have had upon his textual strategies. By charting the movement of *différance* through the text of Canadian history, Kroetsch opens the past up to critical reinterpretation and manages to articulate the alterity of the colonial experience. In accordance with this deconstructive revision of history, Canadians must prepare to "uncreate themselves into existence"⁷² by deconstituting unitary versions of the Canadian story. Yet this radical opening becomes possible, Derrida notes, "only if *différance* is determined outside any teleological or eschatological horizon."⁷³

Kroetsch takes up the challenge of inscribing the alterity of the post-colonial experience outside a teleological or eschatological horizon by deconstructing organicist metaphors of identity and place. In *Seed Catalogue* he considers the way in which conceptions of history and subjectivity transplanted from the life-cycle of the vegetable organism have been used to underpin assimilative and teleological discourses of cultural identity. The significance of organicist thought to Kroetsch is that its emphasis upon

the reconciliation of oppositions and discordances within the natural totality of the vegetable model contradicts the post-colonial need to seek disunity in unity and identity within difference. His writing consequently explores the repressive influence that social and political discourses indebted to the germinative model of organic development (with their demand for unity, holism, and self-identity) have had upon the legitimate expression of cultural difference. The connection between organicism and the gradual elimination of heterogeneity is strengthened by the implicit teleology of the organic model, in which "any human product or institution is envisioned as germinating, without anyone's deliberate plan or intent, and as fulfilling its destiny through an inner urgency, feeding on the materials of its time and place in order to proliferate into its ultimate and living form."⁷⁴ It is therefore no coincidence that Kroetsch's ironic vision juxtaposes a playful examination of the closed 'organic' society of 1930's Heisler, Alberta, with the devastations wrought by the totalitarian cultural logic of Hitler's Germany.

In *Seed Catalogue* Kroetsch investigates the cultural and political consequences for a rural Canadian community of the homogenising discourse of organic unity. Perhaps the most influential exposition of the totalising character of the idea of the organic whole is to be found in Coleridge's description of the poetic faculty:

He [the poet] diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) *fuses*, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination. This power, first put in action by the will and understanding, and retained under their intermissive, though gentle and unnoticed controul (*laxis efferteur habenis*) reveals itself in the balance and reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgement ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonises the natural and artificial, *still subordinates art to nature* [emphasis added]; the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry.⁷⁵

The distance that Kroetsch must impose between the discourse of organic unity and his own cultural politics is evident from this passage. In stark contrast to the disjunctive and pluralistic ideal of "Disunity as Unity" Coleridge's organicist aesthetics seek to *reconcile* sameness and difference within a more general "balance and reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities." Coleridge's formulation also deliberately naturalises the movement of writing: the sign becomes a secondary effect of

"that synthetic and magical power" by which the imagination replicates the internal order of the vegetable organism. Writing is therefore transformed into the unfolding of a poetic unconscious, in which the mind achieves a mystical harmony with the rhythm of natural generation. As M. H. Abrams remarks:

[t]he momentous historical shift from the view that the making of a work of art is a supremely purposeful activity to the view that its coming-into-being is, basically, a spontaneous process independent of intention, precept, or even consciousness, was the natural concomitant of an organic aesthetics.⁷⁶

The full significance of Coleridge's borrowings from German Romantic Idealism can be seen in the poetry of Wordsworth. In Wordsworth's poetry we see that the "beauteous forms"⁷⁷ of organic nature have a direct effect upon the poet's moral sensibility. If we examine Wordsworthian moral consciousness more closely, we encounter a development important for later theories of political nationalism. "Tintern Abbey," which meditates upon the interrelationship of memory, nature, art, and consciousness, offers an excellent example of the strand of Romantic aesthetics that will come to concern us in *Seed Catalogue*. Through the transfiguring power of recollection Wordsworth re-experiences the triadic structure of Romantic moral consciousness, which we may schematise here as experience, self-abandonment, and, finally, a mature understanding of heightened individuality articulated through a mature bond with elemental nature. This form of the Wordsworthian dialectic is observable in the following passage:

For nature then
 (The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,
 And their glad animal movements all gone by)
 To me was all in all. - I cannot paint
 What then I was. The sounding cataract
 Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
 The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
 Their colours and their forms, were then to me
 An appetite; a feeling and a love,
*That had no need of a remoter charm,
 By thought supplied,* nor any interest
 Unborrowed from the eye. - That time is past,
 And all its aching joys are now no more,
 And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
 Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur; other gifts
 Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,
 Abundant recompense. For I have learned
 To look on nature, not as in the hour
 Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
 The still, sad music of humanity . . . [emphasis added]

If we focus our attention upon the italicised antithetical stage of this Wordsworthian dialectic, it becomes apparent that an abandonment of self is induced in the sensitive observer of the natural scene; overpowered by the force of natural plenitude the registering consciousness wilfully suspends its ratiocinative faculties. The temporary obliteration of personality prompted by the suspension of active being is caught in these lines from the "Ruined Cottage" section of *The Excursion*:

Far and wide the clouds were touched,
 And in their silent faces could he read
 Unutterable love. Sound needed none,
 Nor any voice of joy; his spirit drank
 The spectacle: sensation, soul, and form,
 All melted into him; they swallowed up
 His animal being; in them did he live,
 And by them did he live; they were his life.
 In such access of mind, in such high hour
 Of visitation from the living God,
*Thought was not: in enjoyment it expired.*⁷⁸
 [emphasis added]

In these lines we encounter a form of spiritual possession, a making-over of the self to a power greater than the self. The effect of intoxication produced by the profusion of paratactic clauses underlines this swoon of the spirit. An important feature of *Seed Catalogue* is Kroetsch's political radicalisation of this form of Romantic self-abandonment. Accordingly, the poem points out the connection between the bewitchment of the Romantic sensibility by the organic power of nature and the exploitation of a collective political unconscious by the advocates of an 'organic' national cultural holism. By highlighting the transition from the discourse of organicist aesthetics to the practice of closed political systems, Kroetsch is able to develop his ironical thesis in which the catastrophe of Nazi politics is seen to be a savage extension of the 'organic' community of Heisler, Alberta. The location of these societies as two widely divergent points within an ideological continuum is illustrated by the irony of Kenneth MacDonald's terrible return with "a cargo of bombs" (FN 65) to Cologne, the birthplace of his great-grandmother Anna Weller. Interestingly, however, *Seed Catalogue* argues that the dangers of the closed political society are not solely to be eradicated through the onslaught of MacDonald's cataclysmic homecoming, but must rather be resisted at the level of that discursive appropriation which would redefine culture, place, and identity in "terrible symmetry" (FN 65) with the organic ideal.⁷⁹

Seed Catalogue seeks then to call into question the role that organicist metaphors play in the construction of individual and collective identity. Kroetsch makes his intentions plain by ironically appropriating an organicist trope central to Romantic poetics and presenting his poem as an autobiographical account of the growth of a poet's mind. The complexity of Kroetsch's meditation upon both organicism and Romantic notions of subjectivity may be gleaned from the tone of the "Author's Note" that he appends to his *Completed Field Notes*:

I did not realise until I heard the dialogue of "Seed Catalogue" with "The Ledger" that I had in effect commenced a series of related poems that would in devious ways seek out the forms sufficient to the project (I leave it nameless) announced by Wordsworth and Whitman and rendered impossible by the history and thought and art of the twentieth century.⁸⁰

These words simultaneously introduce and problematise the Romantic project. The idea of a "dialogue" between *The Ledger* and *Seed Catalogue* is significant because the latter makes use of the deconstructive textual strategies of the former to put in question the discourse of organic holism. This "devious" breach or act of opening is necessary because the forcible closure of the organic body politic has had such murderous consequences in "the history and thought and art of the twentieth century."

The effect of organicist discourse upon a Canadian search for self-definition is ironically reflected in the poem's title, where "Seed Catalogue" refers simultaneously to a book of horticultural classification and a record of a poet's imaginative development. The idea of a "catalogue" or index of classification also carries with it an attention to origins that is particularly relevant to the poem's meaning. This becomes clear if we consider Paul de Man's description of Romantic visions of the natural object:

By calling them *natural* objects, we mean that their origin is determined by nothing but their own being. Their becoming coincides at all times with the mode of their origination: it is as flowers that their history is what it is, totally defined by their identity. There is no wavering in the status of their existence: existence and essence coincide in them at all times.⁸¹

In contrast to the coincidence of existence and essence that Romantic discourse presumes, Kroetsch insists that the idea of 'origin' has no meaning outside discourse. He therefore seeks to rupture the false immediacy of this permanent organic origin by showing language to be "a non-origin which is originary."⁸² To do so, however,

Seed Catalogue must undo the totalising metaphor of organic unity with which its narrative commences.

From the first moments of *Seed Catalogue* Kroetsch engages himself in the search for a language appropriate to "the home place" (FN 49). In an acute comment upon the poem Peter Thomas has observed that its "search for an adequate language" in which to explore post-colonial identity "is essentially the same as the quest for an authentic self, to be defined by words somehow drawn from the very ground of identity."⁸³ Yet Kroetsch, unlike Thomas, is unwilling to speak so unequivocally of a "ground of identity" since his deconstructive stance emphasises that this "ground" is simultaneously constituted and deconstituted by the play of language. Indeed, the opening lines of *Seed Catalogue* show how grounding discourses of identity and place often depend upon an *a priori* correspondence between human and vegetable models of development:

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

We took the storm windows / off
the south side of the house
and put them on the hotbed.
Then it was spring. Or, no:
then winter was ending.

'I wish to say that we had lovely success
this summer with the seed purchased
of you. We had the finest Sweet
Corn in the country, and Cabbage
were dandy.'
- W. W. Lyon, South Junction, Man.

My mother said:
Did you wash your ears?
You could grow cabbages
In those ears. (FN 47)

This passage systematically exploits the undecideability of reference between the human and non-human worlds in order to show the effect that organicist discourse has upon our modes of perception. The first hint of semantic transference between these two different worlds is given by Kroetsch's ambiguous employment of "flurry." As a term to describe a type of human reaction, the word seems curiously misplaced;

"excitement" would appear to be a more appropriate choice. But "flurry" suits Kroetsch's purpose admirably because it refers at once to a human and an elemental process. Similarly, Kroetsch's mother's complaint that "[y]ou could grow cabbages in those ears" and the hired man's urge to plant "the little bugger" in the ground and "see what grows" (FN 48) expose the implicit organicism of the Romantic image of the poet as a force of nature. Yet Kroetsch resists the unconscious introduction of organicist metaphors into our social and cultural discourse by continually stressing the *metaphoricity* of the comparison between natural and human processes. Thus the seed catalogue "bloomed / a winter proposition" (FN 48); while Hubbard Squash has a "*matchless variety of superlative flavour*" (FN 51). With "proposition" and "superlative" (terms which simultaneously facilitate statements about the world and advert to the linguistic process by which the world is represented to consciousness) Kroetsch disputes the possibility of a natural origin where existence and essence coincide. Instead, he resituates the doctrine of organic unity back within the differential exchange of language.

Peter Thomas has noted that the "closed structures of the agrarian mythos" impose themselves upon Kroetsch's poetic autobiography through a series of questions: "*How do you grow a gardener?*" "*But how do you grow a lover?*" "*How do you grow a prairie town?*" "*How do you grow a past . . . ?*" "*But how do you grow a poet?*" "*How / do you grow a garden?*"⁸⁴ However, Kroetsch resists the inscription of organicist teleology within the movement of subjectivity by locating these identificatory gestures within a system of difference. His refusal to subordinate his keen sense of alterity to the closed form of an imposed identity emerges with his recollection of adolescent sexual experimentation:

Adam and Eve got caught
playing dirty.

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

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

we had discovered, don't ask me
how, where - but when the priest said
playing dirty we knew - well -

he had named it he had named
 our world out of existence
 (the horse was standing still) (FN 52)

Kroetsch's use here of an artificial line-break enables him to re-emphasise the movement of *différance* in the form of the semiotic barrier between "like" and "one." The natural unity demanded by the verb "grow" in the organicist discourse that orders the text is therefore seen to be predicated upon a *metaphorics* of sameness. The image of Adam and Eve "playing dirty" is appropriate because it was the desire for unmediated knowledge of alterity that precipitated the banishment from the garden and the falling-away from presence into the sign-system of language.⁸⁵ By contrast, the priest names the lovers' world out of existence because he takes the sign as a transparent token of the divine Word rather than a node of hermeneutic struggle, and thereby denies the experience of difference that underpins any post-colonial discourse of self-identification.

In absolute contradistinction to the self-presence of the organic model, where essence and existence are identical to themselves, Kroetsch defines prairie identity as the product of a series of historical erasures and dislocations. "Everything in between" the past and the present has somehow been "lost"; the prairie town is founded upon this sense of historical "absence" (FN 53). In *Seed Catalogue* the gopher becomes the native model for this experience of discontinuity: it is momentarily tall upon the vast, open spaces; a flickering presence that vanishes suddenly into the anonymity of the land:

The gopher was the model.
 Stand up straight.
 telephone poles
 grain elevators
 church steeples.
 Vanish, suddenly: the
 gopher was the model. (FN 53)

Once the narrative discontinuity of the prairie experience has been established, the organic model of Canadian identity ("*How do you grow a past / to live in*") becomes ripe for appropriation by Kroetsch's deconstructive poetics. In Section Four of the poem, Heisler is "defined as a series of absences, the whole passage being a kind of antisong."⁸⁶ But absence is by this stage not simply the expression of loss but also a positive force for cultural renewal:

How do you grow a past
to live in

the absence of silkworms
the absence of clays and wattles (whatever the hell
they are)
the absence of Lord Nelson
the absence of kings and queens
the absence of a bottle opener, and me with a vicious
attack of the 26-ounce flu
the absence of both Sartre and Heidegger
the absence of pyramids
the absence of lions
the absence of lutes, violas and xylophones (FN 54)

Kroetsch doubtless injects a note of genuine regret into the absence from Heisler of "sailing ships," "ballet and opera" and "lutes, violas and xylophones." But the entry that registers "the absence of both Sartre and Heidegger" makes a direct reference to the criticisms of Western ontology that form the basis of Kroetsch's own deconstructive poetics and affirms a vision of post-colonial identity transfigured by the experience of alterity. It is therefore particularly fitting that this sequence of absences should conclude with "the absence of Aeneas" and the displacement of one of the founding mythologies of imperialist discourse.

Even at those moments where Kroetsch, overpowered by the endless series of absences that frame the pioneer experience, seeks solace in the continuities of organic process, his brief experience of plenitude is subverted by the paralogical play of language:

I planted some melons, just to see what would
happen. Gophers ate everything.

I applied to the Government.
I wanted to become a postman,
to deliver real words
to real people.

There was no one there to receive
my application.

I don't give a damn if I do die do die do die do die do die
do die do die do die do die do die do die do die do die do
die do die do die do die do die do die do die do die do die
do (FN 55)

The poet's first attempt to secure a ground from which to monitor the world around him is a comic disaster; gophers, the visible symbols of ellipsis and discontinuity, erase everything in sight. Next, he expresses his desire to establish an authentic self that might experience language as a simple reflection of consciousness by trying to deliver a message (and write a text) that can be totalised without leaving a supplement of signification. But Kroetsch's ambition to circulate "real words" to "real people" is frustrated by the absence of a reliable addressee. His playful admission that there was no one to receive his message introduces an important theme: How is identity produced and communicated across time? Kroetsch's implicit conclusion, namely that identity and meaning are always prevented from attaining absolute self-presence by their dependence upon the referrals, detours, and postponements of language, becomes explicit as his text disintegrates into a random exchange of phonemes. Language creates its own vectors and fields of meaning: the wail of a police siren detectable in "I don't care if I do die do die do die . . ." gently mocks Kroetsch's attempt to construct a rigid linguistic order. In one of *Seed Catalogue's* many ironies, the authentic self of the postman/poet is discovered, at the last, to be a random collection of letters.

The narrative forms appropriate to this suspension of established identificatory motifs are the tall-tale and the extended anecdote. Kroetsch has confessed that he is "still tempted by oral models where the story in the act of re-telling is always responsive to individuals, to the place, to invention."⁸⁷ The dependence of oral narratives upon embellishments, additions, and acts of re-telling make them particularly apposite forms through which to express the pervasive post-colonial sense of experiencing history at one remove. Authenticity remains a problematic term for post-colonial cultures because they are themselves the imaginative products of Western cultural discourse. The Canadian story is therefore always already textualised: "Once upon a time in the village of Heisler," Kroetsch begins, before he realises his first-order discourse is already second-hand, "Hey, wait a minute. That's a story" (FN 57). But if oral modes point out the prior mediation of Canadian experience, their dialogical and open-ended structures include a space from which the colonial "other" can speak. Like the eclectic narratives of Chaucerian fabliaux, prairie oral discourse works to reincorporate the "absent texts, all the stories we're promised and never given"⁸⁸ into the public domain. This expansive, inclusive, and inherently democratic tradition makes its ironic appearance in *Seed Catalogue* in the context of an organist metaphor that it effortlessly exceeds:

How do you grow a prairie town?

Rebuild the hotel when it burns down. Bigger. Fill it full of a lot of A-1 Hard Northern Bullshitters.

-You ever hear the one about the woman who buried her husband with his ass sticking out of the ground so that every time she happened to walk by she could give it a swift kick?

-Yeh, I heard it. (FN 55)

In his prose fiction, Kroetsch frequently returns to the fluidity and indeterminacy of oral art forms because their open narrative structures suggest "the absence of any final, unalterable text"⁸⁹ of colonial experience. The tension between oral and typographic culture in Kroetsch's work is the central theme of *What the Crow Said*, his sixth novel. In *Seed Catalogue*, the improvisatory character of western oral culture (particularly the vertiginous play in the tall-story between form and the collapse into formlessness) inspire him to develop a poetics of absence and displacement in which individual and cultural identity are inscribed in an economy of traces:

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

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

As for the poet himself
we can find no record
of his having traversed
the land/in either direction

no trace of his coming
or going/only a scarred
page, a spoor of wording
a reduction to mere black

and white/a pile of rabbit
turds that tell us
all spring long
where the track was (FN 58-59)

This sparse, beautiful lyric figures Canada as a palimpsest: a text in which the sign of an original presence is effaced by the continual rewriting of post-colonial

identity. Against the defective totality of the organicist metaphor, which naturalises the relationship between place, culture and subjectivity, Kroetsch argues that identity is never experienced in an originary moment, but is always constructed afterwards as an effect of language. The poet, like the land itself, is "a scarred page / a spoor of wording." Language supplements identity and brings it to presence, but it also introduces an idea of anteriority that renders meaningless the rhetoric of natural origins. The "trace" or logic of the supplement exposes presence to the mark of an emptiness; it consequently becomes an excellent metaphor for the ambivalent post-colonial response to origin:

It [the supplement] adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct. . . . As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness.⁹⁰

By developing a deconstructive poetics to inscribe absence within full presence, Kroetsch overturns and displaces the organicist connection between identity and place. Other attempts to write the vast Canadian spaces into history are more problematic. If we remain with Derrida for a moment, the potentially dangerous relationship between writing and representation becomes clear:

Writing is dangerous from the moment that representation there claims to be presence and the sign of the thing itself. And there is a fatal necessity, inscribed in the very functioning of the sign, that the substitute makes one forget the vicariousness of its own function and make itself pass for the plenitude of a speech whose deficiency and infirmity it nevertheless only *supplements*. . . . The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence. It cumulates and accumulates presence. It is thus that art, *techne*, image, representation, convention, etc., come as supplements to nature and are rich with this entire cumulating function.⁹¹

The danger of this textual plenitude from Kroetsch's perspective is that it reconstitutes difference as identity and negates alterity altogether. In *Seed Catalogue*, this form of writing is exemplified in the work of Rudy Wiebe, who is presented as the theorist of an overwhelming narrative totality:

Rudy Wiebe: 'You must lay great black steel lines of fiction, break up that space with huge design, and, like the fiction of the Russian steppes, build a giant artifact. No song can do that . . .'

February 14, 1976. Rudy, you
 took us there: to the Oldman River
 Lorna & Byrna, Ralph & Steve and me
 you showed us where
 the Bloods surprised the Crees
 in the next coulee/surprised
 them to death. And after
 you showed us Rilke's word
Lebensliedes.

Rudy: Nature thou art. (FN 59)

The contradiction inherent in Wiebe's project is that his desire to "break up that space with huge design" and create a monolithic discourse of Canadian history is ahistorical to the extent that it situates 'history' beyond the play of the signifier. His investigation of the political and ethical construction of narratives of Canadian nationhood is duplicitous because it assumes that that these discourses exist outside (and determine) writing itself.⁹² To underline the naturalisation of the sign and the occlusion of alterity in Wiebe's writing, Kroetsch's back-handed compliment "Rudy: Nature thou art" subtly resituates Wiebe's work within the discourse of organic holism that Kroetsch has spent the entire poem striving to escape.

Kroetsch devotes the climactic ninth section of the poem to a meditation upon the political consequences in "the history and thought and art of the twentieth century" of organicist discourses of culture, identity and place. In a passage significantly entitled "The danger of merely living," where the adverb "merely" indicates the subsumption of active moral invigilation by the overpowering experience of natural plenitude, he brings together the themes of Romantic self-abandonment, loss of ethical agency and the perilous negation of alterity:

The danger of merely living.

a shell/ exploding
 in the black sky: a
 strange planting

a bomb/ exploding
 in the earth: a
 strange

man/falling
 on the city.
 Killed him dead.

It was a strange
planting.

the absence of my cousin who was shot down while bombing
the city that was his maternal great-grandmother's
birthplace. He was the navigator. He guided himself
to that fatal occasion:

- a city he had
forgotten
- a woman he had
forgotten
(FN 64)

In this section, Kroetsch undertakes a deconstructive examination of the metaphor of organic process. He proceeds by exposing the closed organic model to the rival semantic associations of language. Thus the image of "a shell / exploding / in the black sky" combines in the first noun the antagonistic associations of the fecund and the munitionary, thereby suggesting the hidden costs incurred by the discourse of organic self-presence. This deconstructive reversal of a 'natural' process is continued by the record of MacDonald's "strange planting" of bombs on his great-grandmother's Cologne. The loss of critical distance that these lines impose between 'natural' and 'political' discourses of self-identity culminates in a perverse image of infanticide, in which the tragic muse of twentieth-century European history feeds her "far" colonial children back into the bloodsoaked soil of Hitler's Germany:

A strange muse: forgetfulness. Feeding her far children
to ancestral guns, blasting them out of the sky, smack/
into the earth. Oh, she was the mothering sort. Blood/
on her green thumb. (FN 65)

It is tempting to read MacDonald's untimely demise in the air over Anna Weller's birthplace as an irony that underlines the fate reserved for the post-colonial subject within totalising meta-narratives of political and cultural identity. Certainly, the memory of his first cousin's death before the "ancestral guns" of wartime Europe is sufficient for Kroetsch to fracture the formal logic of the politics of cultural totality:

He intended merely to release a cargo of bombs on a
target and depart. The exploding shell was:

- a) an intrusion on a design that was not his, or
- b) an occurrence which he had in fact, unintentionally

himself designed, or

c) it is essential that we understand this matter
because:

He was the first descendant of that family to return
to the Old Country. He took with him: a cargo of bombs.

Anna Weller: *Geboren* Cologne, 1849.
Kenneth MacDonald: *Died* Cologne, 1943.

A terrible symmetry. (FN 65)

Kroetsch's inability to understand the "design," "occurrence" or "matter" of MacDonald's death is, these lines suggest, the logical consequence of the effacement of alterity within totalitarian discourses of cultural order. In response, these disconnected and open-ended clauses mock our ability to order chance and randomness into a discourse of national or racial identity. True to the cultural critique advanced in "Disunity as Unity," Kroetsch's fragmented and dislocated textual structures seek to inscribe the mark of an emptiness within the "unified world view" of the "old stories"⁹³ of Western cultural discourse.

The disintegration of unity into disunity at the end of Section Nine is followed, at the beginning of Section Ten, by the inscription of *différance* within the teleology of natural process:

After the bomb/ blossoms
After the city/ falls
After the rider/ falls
(the horse
standing still)

*Poet, teach us
to love our dying.*

*West is a winter place.
The palimpsest of prairie*

*under the quick erasure
of snow, invites a flight.*
(FN 66)

In this passage the rhythm of natural renewal, which predicts the resurgence of "blossoms" after the "bomb" has fallen, is interrupted by a deconstructive discourse that conceptualises identity as the effect of *différance*. Against the coercive unity of the organicist metaphor, the Canadian poet discovers himself on the "palimpsest of prairie." The prairie becomes, in this image, an overdetermined textual space: a spatial metaphor for "the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience."⁹⁴ By placing the prairie "under erasure" Kroetsch invites us to flee the notions of

presence and origin that underwrite the closed politics of cultural totality. In a world where the old myths of culture and identity no longer hold ("*Adam and Eve got drowned - Who was left?*") the phrase "invites a flight" asks us to look beyond the rhetoric of the seed catalogue and recall that archetypal Canadian, Kenneth MacDonald, who hovered uncertainly between the Old and New World, and whose final "absence" inspires the text that records his fall.

Deconstruction and the Uncertain Ground of History

Speaking at The John Hopkins University in 1966, Derrida, in what is perhaps the inaugural moment of the post-structuralist challenge to the Western academy, outlines two different responses to the question of interpretation. One, which he characterises as the "saddened, *negative*, guilty, Rousseauistic, side of the thinking of play" is turned "toward the lost or impossible presence of the absent origin," while the other is the "Nietzchean *affirmation*, that is the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation." These two contrasted responses to play, interpretation, and origin are then brought together in a famous and much-contested passage:

There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth, or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology - in other words, throughout his entire history - has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play. . . . For my part, although these two interpretations must acknowledge and accentuate their difference and define their irreducibility, I do not believe that today there is any question of *choosing* - in the first place because here we are in a region (let us say provisionally, a region of historicity) where the category of choice seems particularly trivial; and in the second, because we must first try to conceive of the common ground, and the *différance* of this irreducible difference.⁹⁵

Although it has become a critical commonplace to identify the second of these positions - the Nietzchean affirmation of the play of the signifier over "an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign" - as the hermeneutic stance of deconstructive enquiry, it is clear from this counterpoised passage that the two modes of interpretation are irreducible.⁹⁶ If we follow Derrida's prompting and consider the *différance* of this irreducible difference, we recognise that the symbiotic relationship of origin and play is established by the structure of the sign itself. Thus the positivist assumption that the sign can somehow embody and represent the presence of meaning comes into inevitable conflict with the structural nature of signification, in which the sign is repeated in different contexts, takes on new meanings, stands at a semantic distance from its original manifestation. The point is that neither the idea of the sign as presence nor the emphasis upon its dissemination of play and difference can be isolated

as its primary cognitive mode; the differential and self-divided status of the sign supplements its claim to be the grounding presence of meaning. The axiom of non-closure that the play of differences introduces suggests the possibility of origin, truth, and presence at the same time as it prevents them coinciding absolutely with themselves. In the typically paradoxical Derridean formulation, "[d]fferance produces what it forbids, makes possible the very thing that it makes impossible."⁹⁷ However, the reciprocal and indissociable tension between play and origin is not only the condition for the possibility of meaning and interpretation; the refusal of simple identity at the origin and the displacement of presence into the process of difference and deferral makes possible the concept of history:

But I have never believed that there were *metaphysical* concepts *in and of themselves*. No concept is by itself, and consequently in and of itself, metaphysical, outside all the textual work in which it is inscribed. That explains why, although I have formulated many reservations about the "metaphysical" concept of history, I very *often* use the word "history" in order to reinscribe its force and in order to produce another concept or conceptual chain of "history": in effect a "monumental, stratified, contradictory" history; a history that also implies a new logic of *repetition* and the *trace*, for it is difficult to see how there could be history without it.⁹⁸

Derrida's reflection in these passages upon the constitutive tension between play and history, such as his assertion that the play of meaning is indissociably linked to the "play of the world" (or the endless series of "connections, correlations and contexts"⁹⁹ by which we seek to interpret our lives), sheds light on both the strengths and weaknesses of Kroetsch's most recent poetry. As *The Ledger* and *Seed Catalogue* demonstrate, Kroetsch's work achieves its maximum political force when it exploits the radical alterity of language to open up closed structures of historical representation. By deconstructing the official ledger of pioneer history or subverting the metaphors of organic totality Kroetsch shows that identity is produced by the reciprocal play between absence and presence. The textual logic of deconstructive poetics is well-suited to Kroetsch's artistic revision of post-colonial identity: deconstruction's remorseless undermining of binary structures, and its ability to overturn and displace concepts while retaining an impression of their force in the interim, provides a space from which the "other" can speak alongside an acknowledgement of the historico-political constraints placed upon the expression of alterity. The effect of deconstructive practice upon Kroetsch's cultural politics is evident in "Disunity as Unity," where an embattled, pluralistic vision of post-colonial identity is established by the deconstitution of Western meta-narratives of culture and place.

Despite the artistic success of *The Ledger* and *Seed Catalogue*, there is, however, a shift in Kroetsch's perceptions during the late 1970's that inaugurates a new phase of his work. Put simply, his poetic output after *Seed Catalogue* charts a movement away from a consideration of the historical inscription of post-colonial identity toward a concern with the constitution of subjectivity in general. This transition is marked in his critical writing by his belief that he has, by some unspecified act of theoretical transcendence, "come to the end of deconstruction."¹⁰⁰ In the remarks that follow I want to suggest that Kroetsch's poetry of the decentred subject is remarkable for its detachment of one aspect of the deconstructive process (the Derridean emphasis upon the play of the signifier) in isolation from its broader historical concerns. Kroetsch's work is based, in other words, upon a *choice* between play and history that Derrida's writing simply refuses.

Although this change in Kroetsch's artistic stance produces, in *The Sad Phoenician*, some of his finest poetry, it is predicated upon a confusion concerning the nature of deconstructive poetics that is particularly widespread today. By charting in some detail the contradictions in Kroetsch's recent statements on deconstruction, history, and textuality, I hope both to contribute towards an understanding of the latest phase of his work and recover the practical value of deconstructive thought for discussions of post-colonial identity. With these aims in mind, I intend to draw upon a series of interviews he gave to Shirley Neuman and Robert Wilson, which were published in 1982 under the title *Labyrinths of Voice*. Because of the improvisatory nature of the interview format, we should be wary of treating Kroetsch's conversational formulations as evidence of a set of final ideological positions. Given, however, the range and depth of these encounters (stretching from April to November 1981), as well as the fact of their subsequent publication, we are entitled to consider them as comprising at the very least a provisional history of Kroetsch's theoretical beliefs and commitments.

The text of these interviews is a remarkable document because of the clarity with which it presents the dissociation and disintegration of Kroetsch's deconstructive poetics. If *The Ledger* and *Seed Catalogue* explored the complex and necessary tension between origin and play, *Labyrinths of Voice* shows Kroetsch advocating grounded and groundless theories of interpretation at the same time. The two poles of

Kroetsch's thought have swung apart: on one hand he endeavours to establish the material conditions of signification; while on the other he asserts the ultimate indeterminacy of meaning. The effect of this bifurcation in Kroetsch's approach to language and literature has profound consequences for his 'postmodern' fiction, most notably *The Studhorse Man* and *Gone Indian*. In his recent poetry, however, it is marked by his increasingly defiant abandonment of historical context and his concomitant celebration of the boundless possibilities of linguistic play.

In retrospect, it becomes clear that sometime during the 1970's Kroetsch's work was invaded by a terrible doubt concerning the implication of *différance* for the discursive hegemony of the author. This doubt has its basis in the contradiction between the post-colonial writer's desire to question Western representations of history and the need to offer a new vision of post-colonial history and culture on the writer's own terms. The tension between Kroetsch's manifest distrust of 'history' and his urge to name his own new world is evident everywhere in *Labyrinths of Voice*. What are the consequences for the artist's sovereign control of his own imaginative world, he reflects, of a deconstructive practice that problematises univocal definitions of meaning? The more Kroetsch ponders this problem, the more intractable it appears: "Some kinds of criticism may in fact be calculated to beat the author," he complains, "I think my ultimate anxiety about deconstruction, or even structuralism, is its built-in objective of winning over the author."¹⁰¹ At first Kroetsch attempts to resolve the contradiction between authorial autonomy and the deconstructive subversion of closure by seeking a point of lasting compromise between deconstruction and positivism. "I guess I have the absurd hope that if I provide twenty names," he explains, "then somewhere I will reach a point where they all connect and become more realized or identifiable."¹⁰² But he is too subtle a critic not to be aware that the radical instability of the act of nomination is inscribed within the thinking of *différance*. Confronted with the schism between his attempt to retain a residual univocity of utterance and the "certain pure and infinite equivocality"¹⁰³ that characterises deconstructive logic, Kroetsch can only shore up his position by reintroducing the metaphysics of presence through the back door. It is Kroetsch's nostalgic longing to ground meaning in the self-presence of the authorial voice that lies behind his curious statement that "there is no difference finally between written text and spoken text."¹⁰⁴ The same need to regulate the dissemination of difference informs Kroetsch's most sweeping remark on the relationship between writing and interpretation: "I have a particular faith, still, in the occasion of speaking, and I have, maybe, more trust of that occasion than the writing that I engage in."¹⁰⁵

This is an extraordinary point for such an avowedly post-structuralist writer to make; it constitutes a reversion to the most uncritical logocentrism. As a statement of theoretical principle it utterly contradicts Kroetsch's actual textual practice, which foregrounds the tension between oral and graphic formations. Significantly, however, Kroetsch's acknowledgement that he is in fee to the notion of presence that he elsewhere challenges leads him to swing to the other extreme and repress the nominative function of language altogether. The first sign of this tendency of his work is perceptible in his admission that he is attracted to "deconstructionist critics like Derrida" because they "talk about violence and free play. The writer asserts his writerliness by doing violence."¹⁰⁶ Kroetsch's valorisation of "free play" is revealing because it suggests that "deconstruction" has become, by this stage of his career, primarily a way of transferring value to the order of the signifier. Unable to sustain the critical relationship between the repeated semantic displacements of his poetry and the hypothesised univocity of his own authorial position, his response is frequently to dissolve the historical scene of writing into the chain of its significations. The primacy that Kroetsch accords the 'textual' over the 'historical' leads him to make some of his most problematic remarks, such as "I might take the extreme position that there are no 'correct' accounts."¹⁰⁷

Appropriately enough, the uncertainty that Kroetsch displays over the establishment of a univocal ground for those discourses that he sets in play can be illustrated by his recourse to the term "ground" itself. As we read the transcript of his interviews with Neuman and Wilson, it becomes apparent that the signifier "ground" is placed under tremendous semantic pressure; it is not only used interchangeably as verb and noun, but often employed in both positions simultaneously. This process reaches its apotheosis in an exchange near the conclusion of *Labyrinths of Voice*:

I'm talking about what we call "serious" writers I guess: there's almost a sense of joking when they're being mimetic. . . . One of the things is that readers read novels for information . . . read a new book to find out what its *really* like in Washington or wherever . . . so now there is a kind of mockery in our sense of security in the mimetic. But I think there is also another *grounding* and for me it's very important to go back and test what I really call *ground*, using that word deliberately. Ground as something that precedes interpretation or categorization - or what I'm calling meaning.¹⁰⁸

In this passage "ground" is fulfilling two functions at once: it refers both to the primary ground of human experience and the general text of *différance* that precedes our conscious appropriation of the world. Eventually, then, Kroetsch's turn "toward the lost or impossible presence of the absent origin" and his simultaneous "affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin" forces him to declare both the primacy of difference before identity and the primacy of identity before difference.

The complex and shifting relation to different strands of post-structuralist thought outlined in Kroetsch's interviews and critical writings doubtless requires the scope of a separate study. It remains, though, to point out that his increasing neglect of the historical contingency of the deconstructive intervention precipitates an important change of direction in his poetic outlook. After the publication of *Seed Catalogue*, Kroetsch exchanges a broad historical canvas for a series of mediations upon the character of subjectivity. In particular, Kroetsch extends Derrida's strategic emphasis upon semantic indeterminacy to make a provocative connection between the historical displacement of the post-colonial subject and the primary alienation of the psychoanalytic subject divorced by language from an experience of originary plenitude. Consequently, the new phase of his work, which encompasses poems such as *The Sad Phoenician* and *The Silent Poet Sequence* and his most recent novel *Alibi*, becomes available to a Lacanian reading. In the last section of this chapter, I want to explore the possibilities of a discourse of the 'decentred' subject with a discussion of *The Sad Phoenician*. I will then conclude this reading with some remarks upon the political potential of a radical poetics of the subject for Kroetsch's broader cultural and historical concerns.

The Sad Phoenician: Towards a Poetic Economy of the Self

The trader invents a series of graphic signs which in its principle is no longer attached to a particular language. This writing may in principle inscribe all languages in general. It gains in universality, it favors trade and makes communication "with other people who [speak] other languages" easier. But it is perfectly enslaved to language in general the moment it liberates itself from all particular languages. It is, in its principle, a universal phonetic writing. Its neutral transparence allows each language its proper form and its liberty. Alphabetic writing concerns itself only with pure representers. It is a system of signifiers where the signifieds are signifiers: phonemes. The circulation of signs is infinitely facilitated.¹⁰⁹

With the publication of *The Sad Phoenician* in 1979, Kroetsch's poetic career enters a new and distinctive phase. In contrast to *The Ledger* and *Seed Catalogue*, which meditate powerfully upon the textualisation of historical origins, *The Sad Phoenician* records the attempt of the conscious mind to construct self and world from the shifting patterns of language. Kroetsch's concentrated emphasis here upon the relationship between language and subjectivity is noted by Robert Lecker when he writes "[t]hroughout the poem the Sad Phoenician reminds us that his quest is self-reflexive: his word-trading allows him to explore both the nature of poetic language and his nature as a being defined by language."¹¹⁰ Lecker's characterisation of the Phoenician as "a being defined by language" is well-judged, because Kroetsch's poem is marked by its refusal to believe that the world exists for us prior to language or that subjectivity is always already coherent, always already at the centre of things. Instead the Phoenician, with his hypersensitivity to the motion of writing and to the plurality of disconnected voices that make up the modern cultural sphere, personifies the dispersed subject of postmodernism, who is emancipated from the tyranny of the requirement to produce and exhibit a perfect identity with itself, but who must also construct an image of selfhood (and a politics) from the repeated dislocations of language.

The connections that Kroetsch makes in *The Sad Phoenician* between polyvocality, a release from the constraints of the coherent self, and a revision of cultural identity, emerge forcefully from his various critical remarks upon the poem. In an interview with his wife, Smaro Kamboureli, he comments that the work combines "the searching or longing for home, the looking for home again" with "the awareness that home is not a final place, not a fixed place."¹¹¹ Meanwhile, he states on the cover of the original Coach House Press edition of the poem that his interest in the figure of

the Phoenician was stimulated by the disordering effect that their peripatetic trading activities had upon established networks of social and cultural affiliation. Typically for Kroetsch, the idea of identity is inextricably linked with language as a model of representation and communication. The Phoenicians therefore become important because of their demystification of the sacred properties of the Word; in one of the strategic inversions of hierarchical order so vital to acts of cultural redefinition, they "moved writing from the temple, down to the wharf." By treating language as a simple medium of exchange, their desacralisation of writing worked against immanent or transcendental theories of value to free us from the "fixed image" of meaning into "the pattern and tumble of sound."¹¹²

The generic noun "Phoenician" in the poem's title works simultaneously at two levels: it ascribes an identity to the poet, the "Sad Phoenician of Love" (FN 88), whose refusal to place himself at the centre of his imagined world is reinforced by the continual displacements of his text; and it symbolises an historic rupture in the relationship between epistemology, subjectivity, and language. The Phoenician development of alphabetic writing introduces, in Derrida's words, a system of signifiers where the signifieds are themselves signifiers, infinitely facilitating the circulation of signs. The substitution of this universal trading language for local or regional modes of transcription significantly expands the global possibilities of communication at the same time as it introduces difference and deferral into the production of meaning. Both the freedom and the terror engendered by this endless displacement of the identifying relationship between self and world are experienced by the poet as he describes a life constructed and deconstructed by the materials of language. His fascination with the potential of typographic form is important because it offers him an escape from the order imposed by the organs of speech and vision. Idiom and dialect commit us to social identities; while sight places the speaker at the centre of the phenomenal world. But Kroetsch's poet withdraws into a private subjective space occupied only by memory and the letters of the alphabet. Here, the self no longer seeks coherence in the evidence of vision for that is constantly disturbed by the possibilities of memory, while the continuity of memory is itself broken by the radical disjunctions of language. Liberated from the imaginative limits set by the single voice, the Sad Phoenician's poetic autobiography produces a multiple syntax that enables a range of voices to flicker across the surface of the text. An aesthetics of discontinuity is thereby created which inscribes heterogeneity within the poet's primary act of self-registration.

Kroetsch's attention in *The Sad Phoenician* to the contingent, his insistence on the impossibility of unifying experience except at the cost of repression, and his refusal of a unitary voice pick up themes from his cultural criticism. Indeed, the Sad Phoenician's discovery that his life can only be written as the record of a continual displacement from self-identity echoes the conclusions of "Disunity as Unity," where the tensions of the "Canadian story" reveal a disunity "so radical that it physically splits the hero" but which paradoxically offers the "discovery of unity."¹¹³ Individual self-estrangement therefore becomes a metaphor for cultural dislocation and renewal. It is the purpose of this section to argue that the link Kroetsch seeks to establish between decentred subjectivity and cultural redefinition is problematic for a radical post-colonial cultural politics. Before this criticism is made, though, I want to suggest that the relationship between language, identity, and alterity that *The Sad Phoenician* proposes is most profitably considered within the discourse of Lacanian psychoanalysis. This thesis will explore the relevance of Lacanian thought to Kroetsch's work more extensively in Chapter Two and Chapter Eight; some brief remarks on the subject here, however, may serve to illustrate the difference between *The Sad Phoenician* and Kroetsch's previous poetry while prompting reservations concerning an examination of post-colonial alienation within a Lacanian economy of the subject.

Lacanian psychoanalytic theory offers an interesting context for Kroetsch's work because it shows how identity is constituted by the subject's entry into the differential exchange of language, and is therefore always already underscored by division and difference. Thus for Lacan, the primal stage of identity constituted by the mother-child dyad is fractured by the acquisition of language; at this point the subject differentiates not just between self and other but between self and an entire series of others. An alienation occurs because the subject's sense of self is constituted by something outside of it. The mark of this alienation is the distinction between the subject and the ego. As Fredric Jameson remarks, with the acquisition of language "the pronoun, the first person, the signifier, results in a division of the subject or *Spaltung* which drives the 'real subject' as it were underground, and leaves a 'representative' - the ego - in its place."¹¹⁴ The ego is therefore constituted by the symbolic order. It becomes the self that 'I' represent to myself; the 'subject' denotes the self that does the representing. The gap between the subject and the ego inscribes lack at the heart of subjectivity. As a subject, 'I' want to overcome my alienation from the other; to do so

entails a return to unity with the primordial mother. Since nothing can ever fulfil this function (short of death) 'I' seek this other through my engagement with all other subjects who become substitutes for my desire for primordial unity. A continual series of displacements begins in which the desire for identity unmediated by language slips over into a desire for others which fills the lack that characterises my subjectivity.

The move into the symbolic order of language therefore marks a transition beyond the absolute identity of the pre-linguistic stage. With the entry into the realm of signification, identity becomes intersubjective - an effect of the positions opened up for the subject by language. Following the subject's admission into a pre-existent symbolic order, moreover, its self-representations become inescapably mediated by language. From this moment on the subject takes up the path of the signifier: multiple, overdetermined, continually displaced from itself by the signifying chains of language. In the words of Malcolm Bowie,

Whereas the ego, first glimpsed at the mirror stage, is the reified product of successive imaginary identifications and is cherished as the stable or would-be stable seat of personal 'identity', the subject is no *thing* at all and can be grasped only as a set of tensions, or mutations, or dialectical upheavals within a continuous, intentional, future-directed process.¹¹⁵

The discovery that identity and meaning can be grasped only as a set of tensions, displacements, or mutations is the central theme of the poem's opening section:

but the woman in Montreal is not so evasive, not so given
 to outright lies, deceptions
 and when she gets the letter I wrote last night, she'll say
 but darling, I was following a fire truck
 and quite by accident found the divine, ha, flicker
 but if I don't even bother to mail the letter she'll learn
 what it feels like to be ignored . . . (FN 77)

These early lines are suggestive of Kroetsch's general poetic strategy in *The Sad Phoenician*, which is to refuse context in favour of text, familiar continuity in favour of fresh juxtapositions. It becomes clear, for instance, that meaning is not expressed here by a mimetic relationship between sign and referent but is produced by the semantic tension between individual words. Thus the line "and quite by accident found the divine, ha, flicker" opens itself through a complex series of puns to multiple

interpretation. Our attention is occupied at one level by the simple juxtaposition of "divine" and "found," which both inhabit the same semantic space. Yet if we return to the wider associations introduced by the complete line, we see that the collocation of "accident," "found," and "divine" usher in one of the contradictions that give the poem its meaning. By reversing the printed order of these words, we arrive at the sacred site of the "divine/found/accident" (the birth of Christ), the moment of incarnation where the sacred and profane worlds were brought into alignment to foreclose on difference in general. But Kroetsch's ludic refusal to privilege one mode of interpretation over another severs the connection between signifier and signified and displaces the reader from one context to the next. The priority Kroetsch accords to puns, ellipses, and juxtapositions draws attention to the fractures in the text and cautions us to read forwards, backwards and between the lines of the Phoenician's address. Meanwhile, the poem's ceaseless subversion of consecutive logic is emphasised by the bipolar structure of "and" and "but" which assert and then suspend judgement, leaving each poetic statement at the mercy of the following line.

Identity and value are then to be discovered through the poetic economy of language: they are contingent effects of the circulation, trade, and exchange of signs. The Phoenician composes his own history by "trading in language" (FN 79): he has no existence outside the 26 characters of the alphabet that divide each incomplete chapter of his life. It is significant that every one of the alphabetic characters that heads a segment of text is obscured, partly hidden, on the point of dissolution back into the virgin blankness of the page. In this way, Kroetsch reminds us that writing is a process invaded by a radical alterity; this gesture effacing the presence of a thing and yet keeping it legible alludes momentarily to the complete semiological system that defines each signifier as a product of difference. The sign, in the Phoenician's dislocated textual universe, is always already inhabited by another sign that never appears as such. His "nominal poetics of accretion, process and participation"¹¹⁶ therefore exploit language as an open field for the play of differences within the closed structure of the Western alphabet.

By placing presence under erasure, Kroetsch is able to show that the Phoenician's identity is an effect of his "astounding fall from innocence" (FN 78) into the discordant kingdom of language. It is no longer possible to speak of the Phoenician in terms of a coherent self, because he exists everywhere and nowhere, composed and

deconstituted by the restless sea of language. Consequently, his wry remark "I don't think a little frankness would kill any of us" (FN 78), with its punning emphasis upon "frank" as both a token of sincerity and an official guarantee of identity, is a calculated act of dissimulation. For the Phoenician's diffuse identity is in fact produced by the principle of non-identity inscribed in language as a structure of difference and deferment. He alludes to his dependence upon this linguistic double dealing when he admits that he lives "by a kind of resistance" (FN 90) in which "the poem must resist the poet" (FN 82). Similarly, the reader can only construct a fleeting image of the speaker by attending to the trading surplus amassed by individual signs within different contexts of exchange. In Section C, the Phoenician transforms our hermeneutic dilemma into his own axiom of artistic intention:

and virtue will out; I have my integrity; I know my own
 worth
 but I do have feelings, just because I'm a poet doesn't mean
 I have no feelings of my own, poets are human; I am, you
 might say, a kind of Phoenician, with reference, that is,
 to my trading in language, even in, to stretch a point,
 ha, my being at sea
 and the Phoenicians gave us the whole works (FN 79)

Two different orders of statement are evident in this passage. At the level of brute fact, the poetic 'I' is granted a minimal form of identity: he is a "poet," a "Phoenician," a wordsmith. However, the same words that vouchsafe these tenuous autobiographical details conceal the identity that they claim to uncover: unassuming and conversational, they are always surplus to requirements. The vertiginous gap between sign and referent is initially suggested by the abundance of qualifiers that constrain the Phoenician's testimony: the locutions "you might say," "with reference," "a kind of," "that is," "even in," "to stretch a point," and "ha" do not contribute to the impression of a simple revelation of self. Our sense of disorientation increases with the realisation that these words parody cartographical or fixed representations of identity, playfully aligning "reference" and "point" while pointing to the trade "in language" that exchanges presence for signs. The Phoenician's dissolution of presence into the associational patterns of language eventually becomes overt with his reference to his "being at sea" which asks us to see the connection between "sea" and "C", the title of this section of the poem.

The secret of the Phoenician's play between letter and concept is, as Lecker suggests, "to expand the metaphoric associations made with each letter of the alphabet while simultaneously denying the value of this expansion."¹¹⁷ Another example occurs in Section F, in which "foot" provokes a reflection on "the shoes I'm wearing this morning" and "the foot as we refer to foot in / the line of poetry" (FN 82). By charting the random associations of the signifier in this way, Kroetsch attempts to create a new language appropriate to the elisions, juxtapositions, and displacements of mental process. As a figure representing the lexical possibilities of the Phoenician alphabet, the speaker continually reminds us that he is constituted by the 26 scriptable characters that he disseminates. The ontological gap between experience and representation therefore has no meaning for him as he is endlessly remade by the protean flux of language:

and any port in a storm they say: the dreamer, himself:
lurching, leaping, flying; o to be mere gerund; no past,
no future: what do you do in life: I ing
but the door, cracked, opened; the lover who would, did; the
night knelt into morning
and is it not true that black is the absence of deceit . . .
(FN 80)

To exist at the level of what Seamus Heaney calls "pure verb"¹¹⁸ is to experience a form of absolute present that subordinates historical consciousness to the perpetual flow of becoming. Kroetsch's achievement in *The Sad Phoenician* is to show that the Phoenician's luxuriance in the signifying possibilities of language is the exercise of a treacherous freedom born out of an inevitable sense of incompleteness and loss. In the following extract the submerged pathos of the poem, engendered by the Phoenician's urge to reclaim a lost subjective unity that is always already inscribed with difference and lack, becomes an almost tangible event:

and the theory itself fails, the doctrine of, I forget what;
not the chain of being, Christ knows, I've tried that
one on
but I can love, even the black holes, even the gaited sun,
the galloping night, the earthworm riding the silver
grass
and the bursting guts of this old cinder
but I'm down today, I'm *don't*
and take it from me, I am dwarf to her needments, I lug
them, after, uphill
but every cloud has (FN 87)

On the surface this dense passage, with its breezy colloquialisms ("I've tried that one on"; "the bursting guts of this old cinder") and its strained archaisms ("even the gaited sun, / the galloping night"), appears merely one more rhetorical gambit to reconcile the Phoenician to the "black holes" at the core of his being. But if we pay close attention to the poem's delicate exchange of phrases, a rather different picture emerges. In the spatial juxtaposition and elision of the "silver" grass, the phrase "dwarf to her needments" and the broken sentence "but every cloud has" we gain a true measure of the speaker's desperation. Using the semantic pressure applied by "silver" and "cloud" upon the middle phrase, Kroetsch metamorphoses "needments" into those "needles" that underpin the adage "every cloud has a silver lining." By this most suave of phonetic associations, Kroetsch uncovers the yawning emptiness that pervades the Phoenician's text, personified by the spectral women who offer brief moments of emotional empathy, but are always already elsewhere, lost in his intricate web of words.

The Phoenician's response to his experience of alienation and lack is to take refuge in the multiple chains of the signifier and to challenge the positions assigned to the subject by language:

but I'll tell you something, I'll let you in on a secret
 and why the ladies haven't guessed my longing, that
 buffaloes me
 but here goes: throw salt over your left shoulder, avoid
 cracks, ha, walk away rather than toward, spell
 pig backwards
 and say funny
 but I mean: all things being equal, fight fire with fire
 and might not the flame be me, get it; he is a manifestation
 of I
 but haven't we met (FN 88)

A longing for wholeness and plenitude is transformed here into an acceptance of the intersubjective relation. The inextricable relationship between the subject and the "other" that reciprocally defines it emerges in the observation that "he is a manifestation / of I." The same impulse towards difference and equivocity characterises his remarks upon his own textual practice. Tired of being "galley slave to a penny's worth of / words" (FN 83) he sings the praises of "Miss Reading" (misreading) and the "woman in Nanaimo" (no name) who follows his trajectory from the single to the plural since "x marks the known, the spot where she was / but isn't " (FN 82).

In concluding my remarks upon *The Sad Phoenician* I want to suggest that Kroetsch's drift towards a Lacanian poetics of the subject is problematic for a postmodern revision of post-colonial identity. In making this statement, I am not alleging the illegitimacy of Lacanian psychoanalysis for a political critique of discursive formations: on the contrary, *Alibi*, which shares many features with *The Sad Phoenician*, is a provocative and largely successful account of the effect hegemonic discourses of cultural order have had upon the expression of post-colonial difference. Yet if we ponder the word "discourse" in the previous sentence we come, I believe, to the heart of the problem. Thus Kroetsch's novels, which are remarkable for their double plots, dual narratives, and mutually antagonistic narrators, incorporate the Phoenician's postmodern poetics of language and desire into a discursive form that *enacts* the struggle between contending interpretations of history, culture, and subjectivity within its basic structure of meaning. The fundamental tension in Kroetsch's work between identity and difference, and between singularity and diversity, is expressed, in texts such as *The Words of My Roaring*, *Gone Indian*, and *Badlands*, through powerful political meditations upon discourse, power, and the cost of historical and cultural dispossession. In contrast, the disembodied voice of *The Sad Phoenician* separates the play of the signifier from what Derrida calls "the play of the world." It therefore explores identity exclusively in terms of the multiple displacements of language in blithe disregard of the question of the subject's access to, or exclusion from, the order of discourse.

To put this another way, *The Sad Phoenician* is notable for its attempt to express the alienation of the individual subject without considering that alienation is a political and historical fact as well as a psychological experience. If we return to my earlier caveat about the word "discourse," it seems that what is lacking in Kroetsch's poem is some form of concentrated attention to the ways certain discourses of history and identity are privileged over others. Why, in other words, are some discursive positions unavailable to the alienated post-colonial subject? And what material forces preserve the contract between the logocentric denial of difference and the imperialist vision of history? As Edward Said has written:

What forces keeps all these ideas glued together? What forces get them into texts? How does one's thinking become infected, then taken over by those ideas? Are all these things matters of fortuitous coincidence, or is there in fact

some relevant connection to be made, and seen, between the instances of logocentrism and the agencies perpetuating it in time?¹¹⁹

If the dehistoricised world of *The Sad Phoenician* is reticent about the historical conditions that exist prior to certain experiences of alienation, Kroetsch's openness to the Lacanian economy of the subject merely compounds the problem. A difficulty arises because psychoanalytic discourse attempts to discover the grounds for subjectivity *in general*. By examining the experience of alienation solely in terms of the subject's divorce from primordial plenitude, Kroetsch loses the historical specificity of post-colonial displacement. In contrast to *The Ledger* and *Seed Catalogue*, which explore the interpenetration of historical and textual constructions of alterity, *The Sad Phoenician* suffers from what the Phoenician himself calls "the / prevalence of same" (FN 94). Ironically, then, a decade after Kroetsch began to re-examine the otherness of the post-colonial experience, his poetics of alterity speak only of the collective displacement of humanity from a moment of originary unity. If Kroetsch's archaeological poetics of origin foundered because of its misguided attempt to convert the "other" into the "same," the emphasis of *The Sad Phoenician* on the constitutive alienation of subjectivity demands that the "same" (human experience in general) be seen as the "other." If we are to find a way beyond this connundrum we must explore the textual strategies of Kroetsch's seven novels, which offer an exemplary meditation upon identity, alterity, and the politics of representation.

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- 1 Robert Kroetsch, "Unhiding the Hidden," *The Lovely Treachery of Words: Essays Selected and New* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1989) 58.
- 2 Robert Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," *The Lovely Treachery of Words* 24.
- 3 Robert Kroetsch, "The Moment of the Discovery of America Continues," *The Lovely Treachery of Words* 2.
- 4 Robert Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," 32.
- 5 Robert Kroetsch, "The Moment of the Discovery," 2.
- 6 Jacques Derrida, "Living On: Border Lines," *Deconstruction and Criticism*, Harold Bloom *et al.*, (London: Routledge, 1979) 84.
- 7 Shirley Neuman and Robert Wilson, *Labyrinths of Voice: Conversations with Robert Kroetsch*, Western Canadian Literary Documents Series, vol. 3 (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1982) 28.
- 8 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972) 137-38.
- 9 Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1956) 81.
- 10 Robert Kroetsch and John Marshall, "From *The Remembrance Day Tapes*," *Island* 7 (1980): 46.
- 11 T.E. Hulme, "Lecture on Modern Poetry," qtd. in Michael Roberts, *T.E. Hulme* (London: Faber and Faber, 1938) 226.
- 12 George Woodcock, *The Meeting of Time and Space: Regionalism in Canadian Literature* (Edmonton: NeWest Institute for Western Canadian Studies, 1981) 7.
- 13 Robert Kroetsch, "The Moment of the Discovery," 6.
- 14 Robert Lecker, *Robert Kroetsch* 129.
- 15 An interesting connection can perhaps be made here between Kroetsch's archaeological poetics of origin and Freud's use of the metaphor of archaeology to signify the making present of a previously lost past and the recovery of the secrets of the unconsciousness to the psychoanalytic gaze. As Malcolm Bowie writes, "Freud's archaeology is . . . a dream of unitary and unidirectional knowledge. The objects to be known may be intact or fragmentary, but in either state they offer the same sort of stimulus and the same sort of reward. If they are still intact they need only to be discovered for their meaning to be revealed, while in the less fortunate case, although informed guesswork and skilled reconstruction will be necessary, the direction in which meaning may best be pursued is still plain - back towards the lost wholeness of

each fragmentary thing." Malcolm Bowie, *Freud, Proust, and Lacan: Theory as Fiction* (1987; Cambridge: CUP, 1988) 25.

16 Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths of Voice* 8.

17 Wolfgang Walter Fuchs, *Phenomenology and the Metaphysics of Presence: An Essay in the Philosophy of Edmund Husserl* *Phenomenologica*. 69 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976) 10.

18 Fuchs 49.

19 Fuchs 50.

20 Fuchs, *Phenomenology and the Metaphysics of Presence* 51.

21 Fuchs 53.

22 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, translator's preface, *Of Grammatology*, by Jacques Derrida (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1976) liii.

23 Fuchs 13.

24 Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 139-40.

25 Robert Kroetsch, *Field Notes: The Collected Poetry of Robert Kroetsch* (Ontario: General Paperbacks, 1981) 13. Future references to this edition will be marked by the abbreviation "FN" and incorporated into the main body of the text.

26 Fuchs 51.

27 Lecker, *Robert Kroetsch* 128.

28 Fuchs 55.

29 Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (1981; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) 33.

30 Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths of Voice* 15.

31 Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Sussex: Harvester, 1982) 209.

32 Robert Lecker, *Robert Kroetsch* 125.

33 An analogy can perhaps be made here with the crisis that befell Imagist poetics, where a studious attempt to align sign and world foundered on the experience of the illimitable referential potential of language. An example would be John Cournos's "The Rose," in which the use of a rose as a concentrated image for emotional abandonment reinscribes the metaphoric history of "the rose" as a sign for the blooming of youth and its emotional attachments. As Frank Kermode remarks of the Imagist desire for the non-linguistic *conchetto*: "In varying degrees they all obscurely wish that poetry could be written with something other than words, but since its can't, that words may be made to have the same sort of physical presence 'as a piece of string.' The resistance to words in their Image is explained by the fact that words are the means of a

very different sort of communication; they are so used to being discursive that it is almost impossible to stop them discoursing." Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1986) 136.

34 Shirley Neuman, "Figuring the Reader, Figuring the Self in *Field Notes*: 'Double or Noting'," *Open Letter* 5th ser., 8-9 (1984): 183.

35 Robert Lecker, *Robert Kroetsch* 144.

36 Paul De Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1983) 31.

37 "Let us start . . . from the problematic of the sign and of writing. The sign is usually said to be put in the place of the thing itself, the present thing, "thing" here standing equally for meaning or referent. The sign represents the present in its absence. It takes the place of the present. When we cannot grasp or show the thing, state the present, the being-present, when the present cannot be presented, we signify, we go through the detour of the sign. We take or give signs. We signal. The sign, in this sense, is deferred presence." Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* 9.

38 Martin Heidegger, *What Is A Thing?* trans W. B. Barton, Jr. and Vera Deutsch (1967; Boston: University Press of America, 1985) 46.

39 Jacques Derrida, *Positions* 26.

40 Commenting upon Husserl's attempt to separate expression from communication in order to "grasp the expressive and logical purity of meaning as the possibility of Logos" Derrida writes: "This possibility is purely *de jure* and phenomenological. . . . Skipping over many mediations and inverting the apparent order, we would be tempted to say that this separation, which defines the very space of phenomenology, does not exist prior to the question of language, nor does it enter into it, so to speak, as into an already bounded domain or as one problem among others; it is discovered only in and through the possibility of language. And its *de jure* import, the right to a distinction between fact and intention, depends entirely on language and, in language, on the validity of a radical distinction between indication and expression." Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973) 20-21.

41 The logical moves that underpin Derrida's conception of an originary space between being and meaning are too detailed to reproduce here. An excellent summary of Derrida's position has been provided by the French philosopher Vincent Descombes: "If *from the origin onwards* (each time there is origin), from the 'first time' onwards, there were no *différance*, then the first time would not be the 'first time', for it would not be followed by a 'second time'; and if the 'first time' were the 'only time', it would

not be at the origin of anything at all. In a way which is perhaps a little dialectical, but not at all improper, it must be said that the first is not the first if there is not a second to follow it. Consequently, the second is not that which merely arrives, like a latecomer, *after* the first, but that which permits the first to be the first. The first cannot be the first unaided, by its own properties alone: the second, with all the force of its delay, must come to the assistance of the first. It is through the second that the first is the first. The 'second time' thus has priority of a kind over the 'first time': it is present from the first time onwards as the prerequisite of the first's priority without itself being a more primitive 'first time', of course; it follows that the 'first time' is in reality the 'third time.' Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy* (1980; Cambridge: CUP, 1982) 145.

42 Derrida's neologism *différance* conjoins the sense of to "differ" and "to defer". It refers to the constitutive difference of meaning, in the sense that the present can never fully coincide with itself, and also to the fact that an experienced present is always also a *deferred* present, where the wholly present present exists only as a futural projection. As Alan Bass remarks, as a noun it is suspended "between the two senses of *différent* - deferring, differing. We might say that it defers differing, and differs from deferring, in and of itself". Alan Bass, translator's footnote, *Margins of Philosophy*, by Jacques Derrida (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) 8.

43 Homi K. Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985): 151.

44 Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders," 153.

45 Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders," 147.

46 Derrida, *Positions* 56.

47 Derrida, *Positions* 58.

48 Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths of Voice* 133.

49 Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (1983; London: Routledge, 1985) 128.

50 "As soon as the question of the historicity of history is asked - and how can it be avoided if one is manipulating a plural or heterogeneous concept of history? - one is impelled to respond with a definition of essence, of quiddity, to reconstitute a system of essential predicates, and one is also led to refurbish the semantic ground of the philosophical tradition" Jacques Derrida, *Positions* 58.

51 Jacques Derrida, *Positions* 41.

52 Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* 11.

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- 53 Linda Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction* (Toronto and Oxford: OUP, 1988) 168.
- 54 Roy Fisher, "The Home Pianist's Companion," *Poems 1955-87* (Oxford: OUP, 1988) 169.
- 55 Marian Hobson, "History Traces," *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History*, ed. Derek Attridge, Geoff Bennington and Robert Young (Cambridge: CUP, 1987) 102.
- 56 Ezra Pound, *The Cantos* (1987; London: Faber and Faber, 1989) 60.
- 57 Maud Ellmann, "Ezra Pound: the Erasure of History," *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History* 247.
- 58 Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* 14.
- 59 Robert Kroetsch, "The Moment of the Discovery of America Continues," *The Lovely Treachery of Words* 2.
- 60 Dominick LaCapra, *History and Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985) 46.
- 61 Robert Kroetsch, "Unhiding the Hidden," *The Lovely Treachery of Words* 58.
- 62 Robert Kroetsch, "Beyond Nationalism: A Prologue," *The Lovely Treachery of Words* 71.
- 63 "One of the most important elements in meta-narratives is the story of the place and moment of origin. . . . In Canada we cannot for the world decide when we became a nation or what to call the day or days or, for that matter, years, that might have been the originary moments." Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," *The Lovely Treachery of Words* 27.
- 64 Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," *The Lovely Treachery of Words* 27.
- 65 Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," 26.
- 66 Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," 24.
- 67 Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," 21.
- 68 Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," 27.
- 69 Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," 27.
- 70 Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," 30.
- 71 Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," 28.
- 72 Kroetsch "Unhiding the Hidden," *The Lovely Treachery of Words* 63.
- 73 Jacques Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (1978; London: Routledge, 1985) 203.
- 74 M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953; Oxford: OUP, 1971) 218-19.

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- 75 S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Shawcross, vol. 2 (Oxford: OUP, 1973) 12.
- 76 M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* 187.
- 77 William Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey," *Wordsworth's Poetical Works*, ed. T. Hutchinson, revised E. De Selincourt, (Oxford: OUP, 1987) 164.
- 78 William Wordsworth, "The Excursion," *Wordsworth's Poetical Works* 593.
- 79 A clearer understanding of Kroetsch's reinscription of a tendency of Romantic poetics within the development of totalitarian thought can be gained by momentary consideration of the work of J. G. Herder, herald of modern biologism and proponent of ethnic theories of nationalities. Herder's work informs Romantic poetics in several ways. At one level he helps to develop the conceptual analogy between a plant organism and an individual mind; as Abrams remarks, for Herder "an individual genius may himself be envisioned as an unconsciously growing plant." [Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* 205.] But more importantly, we find in Herder an extreme political expression of the Romantic attachment to place embodied in his characterisation of the German *volk*, in which, as Louis Dumont remarks, "an aspect of general humanity is embodied in a unique and irreplaceable manner. This hypertrophy of the epiphanic mood in Romantic discourse for reasons of political *consolidation* is crucial to a discussion of *Seed Catalogue* since the poem traces the development of a longing for lost origins of organic unity from its beginnings in a mystification of Romantic empathy to its ultimate articulation in the terminal system of totalitarian politics. Louis Dumont, *Essays on Individualism: Modern Ideology in an Anthropological Perspective* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) 116.
- 80 Robert Kroetsch, *Completed Field Notes* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989) 269.
- 81 Paul de Man, "Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image," *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Norton, 1970) 67.
- 82 Jacques Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," *Writing and Difference* 203.
- 83 Peter Thomas, *Robert Kroetsch*, *Studies in Canadian Literature*, no. 13. (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1980) 17.
- 84 Thomas 24.
- 85 In a study that examines the connections between deconstructive philosophy and negative theology, Kevin Hart has remarked upon the relationship between the doctrine of the fall and our entry into the realm of linguistic mediation. Writing about Dante's meeting with Adam in the Eighth Heaven of Paradise, Hart comments upon Adam's redeemed knowledge of his own transgression: "In short, Adam offers us a model of

perfect understanding, one in which language can be mastered and in which intentions can easily be recovered, whether human or divine. How ironic then, that the ideal Adam represents is withheld from us precisely because of Adam's sin. For, as the Canto [xxvi] explains, although Adam's trespass was chiefly moral in character it was also a trespass of the linguistic sign - a desire for unmediated knowledge - and the sign of this disobedience is nothing other than the mutability of all signs." Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of The Sign* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989) 3.

86 Peter Thomas, *Robert Kroetsch* 25.

87 Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths of Voice* 13.

88 Neuman and Wilson 204.

89 Robert Lecker, *Robert Kroetsch* 14.

90 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 145.

91 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 144-45.

92 The critical distance that Kroetsch establishes between himself and Wiebe over the question of the truth-claims of signification re-surfaces in his exchanges with Neuman and Wilson. In response to Neuman's question whether resisting "the temptation of meaning" means "resisting the linguistic conception of the unity of the signifier and (conceptualised) signified in the sign" Kroetsch declares: "Yes. I think there's a real danger in our society of a simple belief in that connection, whether you're a journalist or whether you're Rudy Wiebe. . . . Rudy has a much stronger belief in that connection than I have, for instance." Neuman and Wilson 142-43.

93 Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," 32.

94 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, translator's preface, *Of Grammatology*, by Jacques Derrida (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976) xvii.

95 Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference* 292-93.

96 An example of this partial reading of the concept of play in Derrida can be found in Wayne C. Booth's assertion that "Jacques Derrida seeks a 'free play,' amounting to a 'methodical craziness,' to produce a 'dissemination' of texts that, endless and treacherous and terrifying, liberates to an *errance joyeuse*." Wayne C. Booth, *Critical Understanding: The Powers and Limits of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) 216.

97 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 143.

98 Jacques Derrida, *Positions* 57.

99 Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction* 134.

100 Robert Kroetsch, *The Crow Journals* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1980) 67.

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- 101 Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths of Voice* 60.
- 102 Neuman and Wilson 93.
- 103 Jacques Derrida, "Force and Signification," *Writing and Difference* 25.
- 104 Neuman and Wilson 39.
- 105 Neuman and Wilson 160.
- 106 Neuman and Wilson 42.
- 107 Geoff Hancock, "An Interview With Robert Kroetsch," *Canadian Fiction Magazine* 24-25 (1977): 44.
- 108 Neuman and Wilson 200-01.
- 109 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 299-300.
- 110 Robert Lecker, *Robert Kroetsch* 142.
- 111 Smaro Kamboureli, "A poem out of Love: An interview with Robert Kroetsch on *The Sad Phoenician*," *Open Letter* 5th ser., 8-9 (1984): 48.
- 112 For details, see the original cover of *The Sad Phoenician* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1979).
- 113 Robert Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," *The Lovely Treachery of Words* 32.
- 114 Fredric Jameson, "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism and the Problem of the Subject," *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading: Otherwise*, ed. Shoshana Felman (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982) 362-63.
- 115 Malcolm Bowie, "Jacques Lacan," *Structuralism and Since*, ed. John Sturrock (1979; Oxford: OUP, 1984) 131.
- 116 Louis K. MacKendrick, "The Gaited Sun, the Galloping Night: On Kroetsch," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 26 (1983): 100.
- 117 Robert Lecker, *Robert Kroetsch* 142.
- 118 Seamus Heaney, "Oysters," *Field Work* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979) 11.
- 119 Edward Said, "Criticism Between Culture and System," *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983; London: Faber and Faber, 1984) 211.

Chapter Two

The Problem With Mirrors:

But We Are Exiles and the Limits of Mimesis

The question of identity is not exactly the Canadian question. That is an interpretive matter for people who already have their story. We ask, rather, what is the narrative of us? We continue to have a crisis about our own story. The very ability to see ourselves is based on the narrative mode: the I telling a story of I, of we, of the they who mirror us. We name, from the world's story-body, the recurrences and obsessions and strategies that become, in turn, the naming of a culture called Canada.¹

My readings of Kroetsch's poetry in the preceding section of this thesis have attempted to show that his examination of cultural history and identity may be most profitably understood as a problematisation of the relationship between language, history and subjectivity. Following Kroetsch's evolution from the broadly phenomenological stance of "Stone Hammer Poem" to the deconstructive and psychoanalytic discourses of the subject that characterise his later poetry, I have argued that the conceptual development within Kroetsch's poetics has coincided with a deepening awareness of the ideological content of historical and cultural discourse. We might best sum up his position by stating that what began as the desire to create an unmediated discourse of historical origins metamorphosed into the need to *decreate* the official record of Canadian history. We should note that in this second "deconstructive" position the meaning of the term "post-colonial" has broadened from a concern for the immediate political status of a cultural environment to an exploration of the signifying process by which that environment is represented. Consequently, Kroetsch's poetry searches for a form of expression in which to describe a culture alienated from historical 'origin' by the nature of the language that it uses. In his best work this process culminates in the discovery of startling metaphors for the experience of cultural displacement, seen either as the originary non-origin of writing or the alienation of the psychoanalytic subject from the wholeness of primal plenitude.

The dialectic in Kroetsch's work between the desire to create a new language of place and the experience of cultural displacement is symptomatic of a more general tension within post-colonial writing. It arises from the paradoxical situation in which the post-colonial subject is compelled to articulate its experience within the constraints of a "mandarin language."² Within Kroetsch's critical lexicon, this term refers

specifically to those European and American discourses of value that project their own cultural codes onto the "uninscribed" territory of the Canadian "other." By this process, the difference that the "other" signifies can be recuperated within the systemic codes of the colonising culture. In the imperial context, post-colonial difference is interpreted as an aberration that can only be corrected by the liberal application of 'truth,' 'order' and 'reason.' Through this strategic transposition of values, the problematic of cultural difference is removed and a hierarchical structure of power perpetuated. The alienating effects produced by the superimposition of imperial codes onto post-colonial culture is described by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin:

The most widely shared discursive practice within which this alienation can be identified is the construction of 'place.' The gap which opens between the experience of place and the language available to describe it forms a classic and all-pervasive feature of post-colonial texts. This gap occurs for those whose language seems inadequate to describe a new place, for those whose language is systematically destroyed by enslavement, and for those whose language has been rendered unprivileged by the imposition of the language of a colonizing power. Some admixture of one or other of these models can describe the situation of all post-colonial societies.³

The same critics have noted that "[t]he alienation of vision and the crisis in self-image which this displacement produces is as frequently found in the accounts of Canadian 'free settlers' as of Australian convicts, Fijian-Indian or Trinidadian-Indian indentured labourers, West Indian slaves, or forcibly colonized Nigerians or Bengalis."⁴ The seven novels that Kroetsch has published during the last three decades respond to this predicament by investigating the relationship between images of Canadian cultural identity and the sites from which discourses of Canadian history are produced. In particular, these texts are remarkable for their sustained effort to hold within a common imaginative space both those dominant discourses of identity and value that exclude the heterogeneous from the domain of utterance and images of Canadian "difference" that resist such discursive enclosure. Behind this strategy of contestation lies a profound unease regarding the efficacy of mimesis as a means of recovering the quiddity of Canadian experience. As I will shortly show, mimesis is of dubious value for a radical post-colonial poetics because its claim to provide unmediated access to a 'reality' behind and prior to the text in question reproduces the colonising gesture of imperialist discourse which reassimilates post-colonial "difference" within an already-given matrix of identification and value. What is denounced in mimesis from the heterological stance of post-colonial culture is that moment of recuperation which Fredric Jameson describes in another context as

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a system of allegorical interpretation in which the data of one narrative line are radically impoverished by their rewriting according to the paradigm of another narrative, which is taken as the former's master code or Ur-narrative and proposed as the ultimate hidden or unconscious *meaning* of the first one.⁵

Against the subordination of indigenous narratives of Canadian experience to the "master code" of European and American cultural discourse, Kroetsch's fiction develops from the 'limited' or 'troubled' realism of his first two novels towards a parodic and deconstructive form that considers the way discursive practices construct the objects that they explicate. The difficulty of the subversive allegories of power that Kroetsch presents in his mature 'postmodern' writing arises because they *recreate* as well as *examine* the strategies of domination that concern them. By demanding that the reader struggle for a version of the truth between the antagonistic narratives of figures such as Mark Madham and Jeremy Sadness, Kroetsch inscribes the post-colonial tension between different discursive structures into his own texts. Crucially, his novels resolutely refuse to resolve this discursive difference into a single field of meaning; instead, these texts strive to create an "antitranscendent hermeneutic model"⁶ for the experience of cultural displacement. By forestalling the move into an order of meaning 'behind' or 'outside' the signifying process, Kroetsch inhibits the construction of a meta-narrative for Canadian experience and links the question of identity to those orders of discourse that demarcate Canada as "other" to their own cultural traditions.

Kroetsch's texts map out a cultural topography where binaries meet and come into conflict. His novels register the fateful encounter of east and west, male and female, oral culture and post-Gutenberg print-consciousness, the transgressive play of desire and the closed structures of tradition. These conflicts, as well as the transmutations that define them, are expressed in the metaphor of the border that defines, fragments, and reconstitutes the world of Kroetsch's fiction. In his first two novels, the structure of binary oppositions that dominates his artistic vision is calculated to reflect the contradictory position of a people which has historically received a representation of its experience in the discourse of another culture. By exploiting the intrinsic binarism of the structuralist semiotic paradigm, Kroetsch reveals in these texts the internal division of the post-colonial subject trapped between the opposed cultural codes of New and Old World discourse. But as I shall argue in Chapter Four, the dependence of a structuralist poetics upon the opposition of differences without positive terms leaves Kroetsch locked within a closed synchronic system that generates meaning solely through the internal relation between the twin elements of the dyad. Such a

system is perfectly able to reflect the paralysis of a life lived according to the "equally matched opposites"⁷ of Canadian cultural discourse; but it is quite unable to show that binary structures are historically constituted forms whose appearance of equivalence merely disguises a hierarchical relation of domination between the two opposed terms. On one hand, the refusal of structuralist analysis to discuss *one* term without reference to an *other* that reciprocally defines its meaning lends Kroetsch an ideal framework in which to examine the identification of Canada as an "other" within European and American cultural discourse; but on the other hand, the atemporal conceptual doublings of structuralist poetics denies him a position from which to consider the historical and political forces that introduce the question of alterity into discussions of post-colonial cultural identity.

If we pursue this criticism, we can see that Kroetsch's difficulty with the unaccented differences of the structuralist paradigm is that they do not consider the effects of *violence* and *contamination* by which the "other" of dominant cultural discourse is constructed, established, and perpetuated. His transition from a realistic 'reflection' of the stasis produced by the collision of opposed cultural codes in *The Words of my Roaring* to a 'postmodernist' investigation of the construction of discourses of the subject in his mature fiction is provoked by his recognition that there is no position from which the "other" can speak simply as "other" without recourse to the violent system of totalisation that produces the notion of alterity itself. Kroetsch's response must therefore be to deconstruct Western constructions of colonial subjectivity. The necessity of this shift towards a deconstructive poetics can be illustrated by brief reference to Derrida's critique of the thought of Emmanuel Levinas and Michel Foucault. Levinas's philosophical project is characterised by the desire to achieve an experience of the "other" *as* "other" in a moment of pure revelation. This identification of the "other" is *non-violent* because Levinas wants to experience alterity as a "positive infinity," as everything that exceeds the boundaries of conceptuality which in turn subordinate the notion of alterity to the demand for self-identity. But for Derrida, the non-violent revelation of the "other" outside the totalising logic of Western philosophical discourse is an impossible dream. As he remarks of Levinas's project, "the nudity of the face of the other - this epiphany of a certain non-light before which all violence is to be quieted and disarmed - will still have to be exposed to a certain enlightenment."⁸ Here Derrida's ironic emphasis on the idea of "enlightenment" insists that any attempt to escape the violence of metaphysics is doomed because it will always be forced to speak from *within* metaphysics itself. Consequently the "other" can

never be experienced as radically "other" but to be discussed must first be reassimilated within the sphere of conceptuality (thought, writing, speech, iterability in general) which defines it as "other." Alterity can therefore never be experienced as a pure term: it must be negatively defined against sameness. As such, the non-violent gesture towards otherness is instantly reincorporated within the violent process of absence, exclusion, and totalisation by which meaning is produced from an infinity of signifying possibilities. The violence of conceptualisation and representation cannot even be alleviated by an escape into the self-presence of speech. For as Derrida points out, "[t]he limit between violence and nonviolence is perhaps not between speech and writing but within each of them."⁹

Derrida's rejection of the idea of a pure revelatory experience of the "other" outside the determination of Western metaphysics and his emphasis on the implicit violence of the signifying process are central to a discussion of Kroetsch's work. All of Kroetsch's writing explores the problem of inscribing post-colonial identity in a language rich with the alluvia of its colonial inheritance. His gradual acceptance of the proposition that it is impossible to speak from the position of the "other" within the confines of a "mandarin language" leads him to develop a series of double plots in which the transcendent dream of identity as pure alterity is confronted with the impossibility of defining identity outside Western discourses of the subject. The experience of Jeremy Sadness, Anna Dawe, and William Dorfendorf are graphic illustrations of this process. Discussions of post-colonial identity, in other words, are always already contaminated by the discourse of colonialism. To show more clearly what is meant by the term "contamination" we need look no further than Derrida's devastating critique of Foucault's desire to articulate the discourse of madness in *Madness and Civilisation*. Derrida's drift in this essay is that Foucault's claim to have recovered the original language of madness by placing on one side the apparatus of enlightenment logic is fatally flawed. It is flawed because as soon as Foucault commits himself to writing a history of madness, he is forced to acknowledge the implicit division between reason and madness on which enlightenment thought is based, thereby perpetrating violence on madness once again. Derrida describes the contamination of Foucault's history of madness by enlightenment discourse in his discussion of Foucault's claim to have rewritten the former as an archaeology of silence:

But, first of all, is there a history of silence? Further, is not an archaeology, even of silence, a logic, that is, an organized language, a project, an order, a

sentence, a syntax, a work. Would not the archaeology of silence be the most efficacious and subtle restoration, the *repetition*, in the most irreducibly ambiguous meaning of the word, of the act perpetrated against madness - and be so at the very moment when this act is denounced? Without taking into account that all the signs which allegedly serve as indices of the origin of this silence and of this stifled speech, and as indices of everything that has made madness an interrupted and forbidden, that is, arrested, discourse - all these signs and documents are borrowed, without exception, from the juridical province of interdiction.¹⁰

The idea of a history of silence in which madness articulates its own dispossession depends upon the same logic of division by which madness is defined as "other" to reason. As Derrida concludes, in a memorable jibe against Foucault's failure to see the inevitable contamination between these two terms, one would have to be mad to think otherwise.

Kroetsch's development of a deconstructive poetics is therefore a response to the task of exploring the question of alterity in a (Western) discourse that depends upon the division between imperial identity and colonial difference as its basic strategy of meaning. His abandonment of literary realism is in turn a consequence of his unhappiness with the relationship that mimetic discourse evinces between experience and representation. The mimetic notion of language as a neutral nomenclature whose function it is to reflect the presence of an already constituted reality is contradicted by Saussure's emphasis upon the implication of the linguistic sign within a system of differences. If, as Saussure argues, meaning is produced by the systematic ordering of a series of internally related signs, the claim of mimesis to represent a world 'out there' at an ontological remove from the linguistic sign becomes untenable. Instead, as Catherine Belsey points out:

If discourses articulate concepts through a system of signs which signify by means of their relationship to each other rather than to entities in the world, and if literature is a signifying practice, all it can reflect is the order inscribed in particular discourses, not the nature of the world. Thus, what is intelligible as realism is the conventional and therefore familiar, 'recognisable' articulation and distribution of concepts. It is intelligible as 'realistic' precisely because it reproduces what we already seem to know.¹¹

The discovery that language produces and transforms the world that it describes is of profound importance to a discussion of post-colonial textual politics. As Kroetsch demonstrates in *The Studhorse Man* and *Gone Indian*, imperialist discourse insistently naturalises the divisions and distortions that it projects onto colonised landscapes. By

denying the role of discursive formations in differentiating between different orders of experience, mimesis colludes with the naturalising strategies of colonialist politics. In this way the simple division between European 'civilisation' and the 'primitivism' of other cultures appears as an existential fact when it is really the external manifestation of a concealed premise within the discourse of colonialism. In an important theoretical essay Homi Bhabha has noted the incompatibility between the mimetic claim to provide unmediated access to a given pre-constituted reality and the fate of the colonial subject imprisoned within a discourse that circumscribes and mediates its experience. Observing that "[t]he unmediated reality that an authentic literary tradition must ideally reveal . . . can hardly be written in a language and literature of colonial imposition,"¹² Bhabha identifies the danger to the colonial subject of the naturalising strategies of mimesis:

To represent the colonial subject is to conceive of the subject of difference, of an-other history and an-other culture. This requires a notion of literary representation that does not conceive of the problem of representation as the presentation of *different* images of the colonial, some more progressive than others. It requires an end to the collusion of historicism and realism by unseating the Transcendental subject, the *origin* of writing as linear time consciousness. It denies its teleology, the natural and necessary unfolding of meaning and consciousness, by conceiving of writing as a signifying practice. That is to say a process which conceives of meaning as a systemic process within determinate institutions and systems of representation - ideological, historical, aesthetic, political. It is crucial for our purposes that this does not permit meaning to be recuperable through a direct reference to the 'origins' of mimetic reflection or authorial intention. . . . [This revisionary process] demands a theoretical self-consciousness of those critical practices which in claiming to restore the 'natural' and 'reasonable' meanings of texts, are in fact engaged in strategies of naturalization and cultural assimilation which make our readings unwillingly collusive and profoundly uncritical.¹³

The problem with a hermeneutic process that seeks to establish meaning "through a direct reference to the 'origins' of mimetic reflection or authorial intention" is that it takes no account of the extent to which subjectivity is itself a discursive construct. An additional difficulty, as I argued in Chapter One, is that the entire notion of 'origin' is deeply problematic for a culture whose formative acts of self-identification acknowledge a tension between the "home place" and the trace of the European colonising presence. The most pressing task for the post-colonial writer therefore becomes the need to discover a language capable of inscribing this experience of difference within its nominative gestures. Kroetsch's transition from a realist to a deconstructive poetics is, in one sense, the logical culmination of his search for a discursive mode that would reintroduce the divisions within the surface of representation effaced by mimetic 'reflection.' As such, this development in his

approach answers Bhabha's call for an "other view" which might represent the colonial subject as the product of difference:

There is, however, another way of raising the issue of the representation of the colonial subject which questions the collusion between historicism and realism. It proposes that the category of literature, as of its history, is necessary and thoroughly [sic] mediated: that its reality is not given but produced; its meanings transformative, historical and relational rather than revelatory; its continuity and coherence underscored by division and difference. This other view demands quite another notion of the historical inscription of literature and entails a critique of representation as simply given.¹⁴

The role of mimetic art in expelling "division" and "difference" from its mode of representation make it an unlikely form in which to inscribe the history of the alienated post-colonial subject. Indeed, Kroetsch's desire to examine post-colonial subjectivity as the product of cultural "difference" quickly come into conflict with the discursive organisation of classic realist fiction. Such conflict is inevitable because one of the defining features of the classic realist form is the establishment of an unspoken meta-narrative that prevents semantic spillage by providing a series of interpretations for the narrative it offers. In other words, classic realism eliminates difference by naturalising the process of representation itself. As Colin MacCabe observes, the classic realist text relies upon an unacknowledged division between its various object-languages and the meta-language that surrounds them and orders them into a "specific hierarchy"¹⁵ for critical interpretation. He continues his analysis in terms which render unavoidable a comparison between the meta-narrative of realist discourse and the naturalising strategies of imperialism:

The meta-language within such a text refuses to acknowledge its own status as writing - as marks of material difference distributed through time and space. The text outside the area of inverted commas claims to be the product of no articulation, it claims to be unwritten. This unwritten text can then attempt to staunch the haemorrhage of interpretations threatened by the material of language. Whereas other discourses within the text are considered as materials which are open to reinterpretation, the narrative discourse functions simply as a window on reality. This relationship between discourses can be taken as the defining feature of the *classic realist text*.¹⁶

By establishing a hierarchy of discourses in a text without admitting the materiality of its own discursive function, the meta-language of realism reproduces a dominant trait of the discourse of colonialism. As MacCabe remarks, the meta-language of realism "regards its object discourses as material but itself as transparent."¹⁷ In his own critical writing, Kroetsch has drawn a parallel between the

meta-language of realism and the function of European cultural discourse in privileging its own interests over the expression of the "particularly Canadian experience." While discussing Timothy Findley's *The Wars*, he argues that any escape from subjection within the discourse of colonialism is inextricably linked to the deconstruction of "the traditional authority of the novel":

Timothy Findley in his novel *The Wars* gives an account of the particularly Canadian experience. His protagonist, Robert Ross, in the course of being destroyed by and in a marginal way surviving the First World War, acts out for the colonial society the destruction and the loss of its European centres, cultural, political, economic. For Findley, form and content speak each others plight in *The Wars* as the traditional authority of the novel itself begins to falter. He resorts to an archival approach, using letters, photographs, interviews, family history, to recover the story, allowing the reader in turn to wonder how the fictional narrative centre relates to the writer writing. A doubt about our ability to know invades the narrative. What we witness is the collapse, for North American eyes, of the meta-narrative that once went by the name Europe.¹⁸

Here the urge to break free of "the meta-narrative that once went by the name Europe" and to "recover the story" of the Canadian past necessitates the development of an archival and archaeological approach to the fragments of Canadian history. Against the meta-linguistic function of European colonialist discourse, which orders and explains the relation of the discourse of Canadian history to the world, Kroetsch posits a discourse of history that operates at the level of the fragment itself, dissolving meta-language into the play of signification. As he writes in another context, "[t]o uninvent the world. To unconceal. To make visible again. That invisible country, Canada. Our invisible selves."¹⁹

The difficulty for the post-colonial writer in recounting the colonial experience of marginalisation in a mode which provides an internal constraint upon the expression of division and difference is evident in Kroetsch's work from its earliest moments. It is customary to consider the primary phase of Kroetsch's writing in the context of mimetic art; Russell M. Brown's canonical comment in *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* that *But We Are Exiles* is "written largely in the realistic tradition"²⁰ is a typical response of this kind. In fact, Kroetsch's writing is characterised from the outset by a powerful discursive ambivalence: its detailed exploration of the Canadian experience of alienation is accompanied by an assault upon the naturalising strategies of realism. To illustrate this point, it is instructive to consider an example of Kroetsch's pre-novelistic fiction such as "That Yellow Prairie Sky," a short story he published in *Macleans* magazine in 1955. At first glance, this story

appears to fit neatly into the conventions of realistic narrative that dominated small-magazine fiction in the first half of this century: its workaday plot, describing a courting, a wedding and a minor domestic tragedy does little to disturb this initial conviction. The story is remarkable, however, for its self-conscious ironisation of the traditional paradigms of prairie fiction. In particular, its narrative is divided between a realistic account of the prairie experience and an unattributed discourse which parodies the way that this experience is customarily narrated.

The space that Kroetsch identifies between experience and representation declares itself in the opening sentence of the story:

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.²¹

This concentrated image juxtaposes a powerful sensation of disorientation and placelessness with a mass-circulation representation of history and place. The speaker's sudden experience of inauthenticity is linked directly to his reflection upon "that scene of somewhere on the prairies" offered by the commercial dollar bill. It is only by "looking right through" this image that he is able to find his way "back out west." Kroetsch also underscores the contradiction between image and reality in the phrase "and I wasn't in Toronto at all anymore," which, by introducing a reference to the emotional dislocation of the heroine of *The Wizard of Oz*, makes a comic reference to the role fictions play in ordering our experience of the world. In just four lines, Kroetsch's protagonist progresses from identity into alienation as he returns to a west that has still to find a way of articulating its own story.

Kroetsch's dissent from the mimetic presupposition that the real can be displayed in a perfectly transparent language takes hold at a structural as well as a symbolic level. If "That Yellow Prairie Sky" is read as a problematisation of the mimetic signifying process, the meaning of its rather baffling juxtaposition of styles becomes evident. For the textual surface of Kroetsch's story is riven between a quotidian first-person narrative and a sentimental re-creation of prairie life. The latter is set apart from the main body of the text by its appearance in italicised script:

We didn't have all the fancy courting facilities that folks here in the east have, but we had lots of space and lots of sky. And we didn't miss much on a frosty night, the old buffalo robe doing whatever was necessary to keep warm. . . .

*the northern lights in the winter sky were a silent symphony: flickering white, fading red and green, growing and bursting and dying in swirls and echoes of swirls, in wavering angel-shadows, in shimmering music. And on one edge of the wide white prairie shone a solitary light, and toward it moved a sleigh with the jingle of harness, the clop of hoofs, the squeak of runners on the snow; and the jingling, clopping, squeaking rose up like the horses' frozen breath to the silent music in the sky.*²²

If we return to MacCabe's analysis of the realist text, we can gain a valuable insight into the vertiginous experience of Kroetsch's story. As MacCabe observes, classic realism naturalises the meta-language that orders and interprets the products of discourse. However, if the materiality of the meta-language is exposed, it is forced, like any other discourse, to enter the differential exchange of language and can therefore no longer guarantee the reader's place within the production of meaning. In this context, we can see that the disorientating effect of Kroetsch's juxtaposition of narrative codes is caused by his violation of the norms of realist discourse. By refusing textual privilege to the ordering mechanism of a meta-language, Kroetsch creates a situation in which the italicised passages slip their moorings and float across the surface of the text bereft of an interpretative context for the images they produce. Kroetsch's decision to abandon the notion of an internal hierarchy of discourse removes the interpretative rules by which his story may be read. It is simply impossible to detach a single meaning from a piece of writing that elides a colloquial idiom which speaks of "fancy courting facilities" with a self-regarding "poetic" language that identifies the northern lights as "wavering angel-shadows" and a "silent symphony." Unconstrained by a dominant discourse within the text, the italicised passages disrupt the spatial and temporal continuities of realist fiction and prevent the reader from making the correspondence between word and world on which mimesis depends. Denied what MacCabe calls "a point of insertion for our own discourses within an agreed hierarchy of dominance,"²³ readers of "That Yellow Prairie Sky" are compelled to become producers, rather than consumers, of meaning. By declining to subordinate the meanings of his text to the meta-language of realism Kroetsch thus not only focuses attention on the way language forms and deforms reality; he also asks his audience to question the stereotypical representations of Canadian experience that they habitually receive.

A connection can be made between Kroetsch's violation of the internal order of realist discourse and the influence upon him of the work of Joseph Conrad. The significance of Conrad's writing for a reading of Kroetsch's fiction is that it combines a fascinating exploration of the colonial enterprise with a modernist assault upon the

narrative conventions of the realist novel. For Conrad's description of the moral corruption that the desire for absolute order brings is accompanied by a systematic disordering of the discursive organisation of mimetic art. Far from offering a simple 'reflection' of the colonial struggle in the Third World, his texts present a complex meditation upon the discourse of colonialism itself. Sixteen years after the publication of his first novel, Kroetsch underlined the importance to his work of Conrad's experimentation with the narrative order of the realist novel:

Now Conrad *was* an influence. When I was in Grade Four I accidentally read *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* and I knew then, as a kid, that something had happened. When I was a graduate student reading Conrad and I came to that book, it was like opening a grave, or an archaeological dig. "There is another way to tell a story" is what *The Nigger* said when I read it. I could remember entire phrases from the book which I don't ordinarily do. It has been a great influence.²⁴

Three features of Conrad's work are of central importance to Kroetsch's attempt to tell the story of the post-colonial search for cultural identity. Conrad's use of both frame-narrative and the figure of the *doppelgänger* are aspects of his writing that become of permanent structural value to Kroetsch's fiction. Meanwhile his deeply ambivalent attitude to the civilising mission of colonialism and his ironic presentation of colonialism as a discourse of enlightenment form the background to Kroetsch's examination of the thematics of imperialism in *The Studhorse Man* and *Gone Indian*.

In Conrad's fiction both frame-narrative and the figure of the *doppelgänger* are devices which expose the rapacity and violence that underpin a stringent discourse of order. Both these devices can be seen clearly at work in Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness*. Here Marlow's account of his journey into the African interior and his mortal struggle with Kurtz is mediated by an unspecified listener on the deck of the *Nellie*. The effect of this mediation of Marlow's narrative is to establish an ironic space in which Marlow's claims, protestations, and explanations are made available to a variety of interpretations. In contrast to the omniscient authority of the narrator of the realist novel, Marlow's statements are revealed to be partial judgements issued from a particular point-of-view. Conrad's subversion of the disinterested integrity of Marlow's position continues his problematisation of third-person narrative begun in *The Nigger of The 'Narcissus'*. Here, the narrator of the tale introduces the collective pronoun "we"²⁵ into an impersonal record of the misfortunes of the *Narcissus* in order to juxtapose a symbolic reading of the crew's fate with a powerful autobiographical

account of the hardships of nautical life. In *Heart of Darkness*, the juxtaposition of Marlow's narrative with the description of him provided by the first narrator establishes a connection between the imposition of Marlow's discourse onto the African experience and the horror of the events that he recounts. Thus Marlow's belief that the violence of colonialism can be redeemed by its embodiment of an idea that "you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to"²⁶ is undercut by an earlier image of him as an "idol" with "sunken cheeks," a "yellow complexion" and an "ascetic aspect" (HD 6). Similarly, Marlow's assertion that he "hate[s], detest[s] and can't bear a lie" because of the "taint of death" and the "flavour of mortality" (HD 38) that lies represent is parodied by Conrad in the final scene between Marlow and Kurtz's Intended, where Marlow lies in order to give the woman "something-to-to live with" (HD 110). With this exchange the novella describes a full circle, since Marlow's eventual recognition that fictions impose their own order on history is foreshadowed by the first narrator, who characterises Marlow's tale as merely one more of his "inconclusive experiences" (HD 10).

By employing the device of frame-narrative to expose the principles of selection and exclusion that underpin Marlow's story, Conrad makes a connection between violence and representation that is of considerable significance for Kroetsch's work. Thus in the 'postmodern' phase of Kroetsch's fiction that commences with *The Studhorse Man*, he demonstrates that discourse is not a neutral reflection of experience but rather a material event which imposes order on disparate phenomena by a *primary* act of violence. Conrad's denaturalisation of Marlow's meta-narrative, which works by progressively revealing the power of constraint his narrator exercises over the historical material open to him, provides an ironic method for Kroetsch's assault upon those meta-narratives that circumscribe Canadian discourses of self-identification. Conrad also records Marlow's fall from omniscience into ambivalence by his strategic deployment of the figure of the *doppelgänger*. The appalling irony at the centre of *Heart of Darkness* is that Marlow's journey toward self-knowledge leads him to encounter, in Kurtz, a dark manifestation of his own personality. Both Marlow, as narrator, and Kurtz, in his final burst of eloquence, are defined by the "voice" (HD 69) that discourses through the African darkness; both men are complex products of the idea of "Europe" (HD 71) that lies behind the colonialist endeavour; while the early image of Marlow as an idol foreshadows Kurtz's terrible appearance as a pagan god to the native African population. Accepting the "unforeseen partnership" that lies between them, Marlow remembers that after Kurtz's death he was also "numbered with the

dead" (HD 97). Marlow's struggle with Kurtz is important for Kroetsch's work because it demonstrates the dependence of the enlightenment ethic upon the very forms of unreason that it attempts to eradicate.

In his depiction of the conflicts between Demeter Proudfoot and Hazard Lepage, and Mark Madham and Jeremy Sadness, Kroetsch examines in his own work the effect of contamination between discourses of enlightenment and the forces of anarchy. Conrad's short story "The Secret Sharer" also describes the blow dealt the subject by an encounter with an "other" version of the self. Here the unnamed narrator's rescue of the fugitive Leggatt from the sea begins a complex process of symbiosis through which the two men come to share one personality and a single destiny. In this vein, Conrad introduces us to the sight of a "double captain busy talking in whispers with his other self."²⁷ Meanwhile Leggatt's sense of outrage at a hypocritical moral order where "an old fellow in a wig and twelve respectable tradesman"²⁸ would decide his fate creates a schism between the narrator's unexamined social values and the ethical imperatives of natural justice. In this tightly focused use of the *doppelgänger* theme, the motif of the divided self offers Kroetsch a powerful image with which to express the contradictory position of the post-colonial subject caught in an uncertain position between Old and New world cultural discourse. We should note that *But We Are Exiles* borrows heavily from the narrative structure of both *Heart of Darkness* and "The Secret Sharer." Like Conrad's story, Kroetsch's dramatic exploration of the antagonism between Peter Guy and Michael Hornyak in the context of their mutual attraction to Kettle Frazer makes use of a binary opposition within a larger ternary relationship. In so doing, it reproduces the discursive organisation of *Heart of Darkness*, which introduces Kurtz's "intended" into the binary struggle between Kurtz and Marlow, and "The Secret Sharer," where the relationship between the narrator and Leggatt is given definition by the threatening presence of the skipper of the *Sephora*.

A third aspect of Conrad's influence upon Kroetsch relevant to our purposes is his ambivalent attitude to the colonial process. Throughout his work, Conrad couples an intense rage to order with an instinctive awareness of the corruption that such absolute order brings. This ambivalent stance is crucial to the meaning of *Heart of Darkness*. In his most penetrating exploration of the colonialist imagination, Conrad simultaneously sanctions Marlow's metaphoric use of light to stand for the act of

enlightenment while revealing the darkness and disorder implicit in the imposition of imperial order. Marlow's rhetorical distinction between the 'light' of the civilising process and the 'darkness' of the African interior is made at the beginning of the text. In Marlow's account, London is a "luminous space" (HD 5) resting under a sky that reflects a "benign immensity of unstained light" (HD 6). Meditating on the role of the Thames in the act of imperial expansion, he declares that "[l]ight came out of this river" (HD 8) and characterises the merchant ships that sailed to India and America as "bearers of a spark from the sacred fire" (HD 7). Turning his attention to the political discourse that legitimated intervention in the affairs of other nations, he confides that the imperial agent was envisaged as an "emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle" (HD 18). Not surprisingly, then, Marlow is aware that his departure for the Belgian Congo sanctified his existence and threw "a kind of light on everything about me" (HD 11).

However, Marlow's experience of the imperial process problematises his rhetorical alignment of colonialism and enlightenment. His impending disillusionment is signalled by the first narrator, who follows Marlow's peroration concerning "[t]he dreams of men, the seeds of commonwealth, the germs of empire" with the ironic observation that "[t]he sun set" (HD 7). The first hint Marlow receives of the dark character of the imperial ideal occurs when he arrives in the "whited sepulchre" (HD 14) of Brussels to find two old women guarding the "door of [d]arkness" (HD 16) concealing the entrance of the trading company. As he "penetrate[s] deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness" (HD 50) Marlow is transported into the "lightless region of subtle horrors" that Kurtz has created; an environment in which "pure uncomplicated savagery was a positive relief, being something that had a right to exist - obviously - in the sunshine" (HD 83-84). In Marlow's climactic struggle with the dying Kurtz, he is forced to fight his way through an "impenetrable darkness" (HD 99) as the light of colonialist beneficence drains away: "I looked at him," he remarks of Kurtz, "as you peer down at a man who is lying at the bottom of a precipice where the sun never shines" (HD 99). This image of Kurtz outside the light is a cruel echo of Marlow's first encounter with the African natives, whose dying bodies lie "half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair" (HD 24). By the end of his African voyage, Marlow had "no particular desire to enlighten" anyone (HD 102). His final scene with Kurtz's "intended" offers a fine symbolic demonstration of the corrosion of the Western enlightenment mission. During this meeting the woman's "pale visage" and "pure brow" (HD 106) are slowly eclipsed by the deepening

darkness of the night outside. And so, within the text's economy of light and darkness, the dream of empire is corrupted by the malevolence at its core. It is left to Marlow to find an appropriately racist image for this loss of imperial innocence, as he transposes the body of the martial native woman onto the white body of the European lady:

'She put out her arms as if after a retreating figure, stretching them back and with clasped pale hands across the fading and narrow sheen of the window. Never see him! I saw him clearly enough then. I shall see this eloquent phantom as long as I live, and I shall see her, too, a tragic and familiar Shade, resembling in this gesture another one, tragic also, and bedecked with powerless charms, stretching bare brown arms over the glitter of the infernal stream, the stream of darkness.²⁹

Conrad's subversion and parody of Marlow's attitudes provides an instructive lesson in the rhetoric of colonialism. But another, more subtle, aspect of his art was to leave a more lasting effect on Kroetsch's textual practice: his emphasis upon the implicit violence of the act of representation itself. This point may be illustrated with reference to the tension that exists between two consecutive paragraphs early in the novella:

'Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, When I grow up I will go there. The North Pole was one of these places, I remember. Well, I haven't been there yet, and shall not try now. The glamour's off. Other places were scattered about the Equator, and in every sort of latitude all over the two hemispheres. I have been in some of them, and . . . well, we won't talk about that. But there was one yet - the biggest, the most blank, so to speak - that I had a hankering after.

"True, by this time it was not a blank space any more. It had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names. It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery - a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness.³⁰

In the first paragraph we are upon familiar historical terrain. Marlow's adolescent passion for exploration demands a hubristic act of self-assertion that reflects in microcosm the colonialist mission. The fundamental quality of his response is the urge to inscribe his own personality onto the "blank space" of an alien environment - a blankness that would come as some surprise to the native inhabitants of the area. But if we continue to peruse this passage, we find that the moral value of the term "blankness" shifts with the arrival of the European presence. Thus the second

paragraph dwells on an African interior rewritten by colonialist discourse, which, as Marlow remarks, has been "filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names." Yet it is at precisely the moment when Africa is inscribed with European values and ceases to be an empty playground for the Western imagination that it becomes a "place of darkness." In this often unnoticed transition from "blank space" to "place of darkness" Marlow unwittingly identifies a crucial tension within the discourse of colonialism. On one hand, colonialism is logically dependent on the chaos that it orders; its ability to depict "blankness" as "chaos" or "barbarism" enables it to present itself as a "noble cause" (HD 13). But on the other hand, colonialist discourse must provide a space for colonial "difference" to be articulated in order to reinforce the impression of its own cultural superiority and justify the constraints it imposes upon another people. Conrad's illumination of this contradiction within colonialist discourse is of crucial importance to Kroetsch because his art revolves around the problem of discovering a position from which the post-colonial "other" can speak. His calculated response to the "darkness" that descends following the repression and marginalisation of colonial difference is to develop a deconstructive poetics that increasingly locates the question of difference *within the process of signification itself*. By means of the techniques of literary pastiche, postmodern parody, and the textual ploys of the carnivalesque, Kroetsch sets himself the task of deconstructing the oppositions on which hegemonic Western representations of Canada are predicated. It is therefore richly ironic that in *Gone Indian*, a text which more than any other of Kroetsch's works dramatises the discursive constraints placed upon the expression of Canadian experience, Madham's insertion into Sadness's narrative of the passage from *Heart of Darkness* quoted above exposes the violent imperialism of the Professor's project.

But We Are Exiles, Kroetsch's first novel, offers eloquent testimony to the influence of Conrad's work on Kroetsch's imagination. In particular, it makes exemplary use of the Conradian themes of estrangement, self-division, and the dangerous journey through an encounter with "darkness" and mortality toward a deeper understanding of the self. *Exiles* explores the relationship between Peter Guy, pilot of the towboat *Nahanni Jane*, Michael Hornyak, and Kettle Frazer. The novel begins with Guy and the crew of the *Nahanni Jane* dragging the Mackenzie river for the scorched body of Hornyak. Hornyak had arrived earlier that day after buying the *Nahanni Jane* in order to convert it from a towboat into what Guy caustically terms a "goddamned fish bin."³¹ Within hours of his appearance Hornyak is dead, consumed in a ball of flame that erupts after he lights a lamp in a barge full of diesel fumes. Guy,

who "led Hornyak into the engine-room and had silently let him pick up a lamp that didn't have a shield over the bulb" (E 27), can only watch as Hornyak hurls himself to his death in the Mackenzie. The significance of Guy's ambiguous implication in Hornyak's death is that his position as pilot of the *Nahanni Jane* is a form of self-imposed exile provoked by Hornyak's seduction of his fiancée, Kettle Frazer, six years earlier. The reappearance of first Hornyak and then Kettle, his widow, on the deck of the *Nahanni Jane* forces Guy to confront his own refusal to come to terms with the dislocations of the past and his subsequent withdrawal from the world around him. The pressure that the past exerts upon Guy's "concluded but garrisoned self"³² is emphasised by Kroetsch's tactic of intercutting narrative accounts of the events of six years ago into the story of the *Nahanni Jane's* perilous journey into the Canadian northwest. The interdependence of the present and the past is also underlined by Kroetsch's use of the *doppelgänger* motif to suggest that Hornyak represents a malevolent aspect of Guy's personality which Guy must overcome in order to break out of his isolation and re-establish an emotional relationship with others.

Exiles broods powerfully upon relationships that can never be recovered in their original innocence. But Guy's exile from his former life is merely an individual symptom of a collective historical crisis. For Kroetsch uses the passage of the *Nahanni Jane* from a familiar landscape into a treacherous environment where established practices and values are no longer appropriate as a metaphor for the post-colonial divorce from a sense of historical 'origin.' When the phrase "But we are exiles" is relocated within the context from which it is originally taken, the idea of an historical and cultural displacement becomes more clear. The full couplet from the "Canadian boat-song" reads "Fair these broad meads - these hoary woods are grand / But we are exiles from our father's land." The idea of exile presented here is a consequence of a banishment from "our father's land," which, in Kroetsch's appropriation of the phrase, refers to the privileged codes of the imperial centre. In these terms, Guy's exile from family, community, and history becomes emblematic of a wider crisis of cultural identity. As Robert Lecker observes, "[i]n metaphoric terms Guy becomes Kroetsch's Canadian Everyman searching for a new future in a wilderness divorced from historical association."³³ Kroetsch also reinforces the symbolic power of his novel by establishing an allegorical connection between the *Nahanni Jane* and the Canadian body politic. The social structure of nautical existence lends itself easily to metaphorical appropriation by other forms of cultural environment: its hierarchy of ranks, decks, and functions offers a microcosmic vision of collectivity in splendid

isolation. Conrad's influence here is again apparent: his *Narcissus* is presented as "a small planet" and "a fragment detached from the earth"³⁴; while its captain appears as "the ruler of that minute world" beneath whom "common mortals led their busy and insignificant lives."³⁵ Kroetsch develops the correspondence between ship and society by populating the *Nahanni Jane* with a representative cross-section of Canadian society. Commenting upon the toponymic dimension of Kroetsch's fiction, W. F. H. Nicolaisen has shown how the "named crew" function as as "anthroponymic microcosm of symbols for a country's human ingredients":

Take the names of the crew of the M. V. *Nahanni Jane*, for example, with whom Peter Guy, the third person narrator - the guy - used to disguise first-person experience, in *But We Are Exiles*, has to face the shared hazards of the Mackenzie River in the approaching winter: Captain McAlpine; Bill Arnafson, the engineer; Jonas Bird, the first pilot; Jeremiah Pottle, the red-headed Newfoundland Mate; Angi Boyle, the boat's cook; Jimmie Kartuk, the eskimo; Billy Abraham, a squat and fat-faced half-breed; Johnny Louttit and Mud whose "nickname reflected his ability to look dirty from head to foot even when he hadn't been on land for a week" and who ironically is "the white deckhand" on the boat. It could be argued that any of these names might be found in any boat crew on the Mackenzie. It might also be said that each individual name, through its linguistic and ethnic associations, conjures up successfully stereotyped characteristics for each name bearer. It is, however, only when perceived as a set of names, as an anthroponymic "field," that the cumulative effect becomes clear and in him informs each individual name. What we have here is a cross-section of Canada's heterogeneous society - McAlpine, the Scot; Arnafson, the Icelander; Bird, the Indian; Boyle, the Irishwoman; Pottle, the Newfoundlander; Kartuk, the Eskimo; Abraham, the half-breed; Louttit, the Frenchman - destined to work together as a crew with a definite objective in mind, in face of the same dangers both defying and relying on the same river, Almost helpless individually but strong in co-operation, without demanding assimilation into ethnic anonymity - the named crew as anthroponymic microcosm of symbols for a country's human ingredients.³⁶

If *Exiles* is concerned at one level with the meaning of post-colonial cultural displacement, it considers at another level the question of how that experience should be narrated. As "That Yellow Prairie Sky" suggests, Kroetsch's interest in the politics of representation is linked at this stage of his career to a problematisation of the mimetic signifying process. In this context, it is surely significant that the two images that dominate *Exiles* are the mirror and the lamp. It will be remembered that it is by means of a development from the first to the second of these two figures that M. H. Abrams defines the transition in romantic poetics from a mimetic to an expressive aesthetic theory:

To put the matter schematically: for the representative eighteenth-century critic, the perceiving mind was a reflector of the external world; the inventive process consisted in a reassembly of 'ideas' which were literally images or replicas of

sensations; and the resulting art work was itself comparable to a mirror presenting a selected and ordered image of life. By substituting a projective and creative mind and, consonantly, an expressive and creative theory of art, various romantic critics reversed the basic orientation of all aesthetic philosophy. Consider now the the further innovative possibilities in Coleridge's archetypal plant. Through this perspective, Coleridge saw the mind as growing into its percepts, conceived of the activity of the poetic imagination as differing from this vital, self-determining, assimilative process in degree rather than kind, and thus was able to envision the product of artistic genius as exhibiting the mode of development and the internal relations of an organic whole.³⁷

The tension that Abrams outlines here between reflective and expressive modes of perception is certainly present in *Exiles*. In a world dominated by mirrors and the reflective surfaces of water, where McAlpine stares at "the unbroken mirror of water surrounding the bow" (E 30) and a "willow-covered island awash in its own reflection" (E 31), the explosive force of the lamp that kills Hornyak utterly transforms the crew's relationship with past and present alike. But before following Lecker in asserting that that "the lamp (and Hornyak) represents everything the mirror is not: freedom from verisimilitude; an emphasis on subjectivity; and an ability to create significance, rather than to receive it"³⁸ we should note that although the lamp injects a necessary degree of disorder into the sterile lives of the ship's crew, it provokes a disturbance *within* the mode of mimesis. This point is supported by the fact that the text's sustained meditation on identity, alienation, and difference is carried out solely in terms of its economy of specular images. The mirror, as I shall shortly show, is a complex image in Kroetsch's novel: it stands, at different moments, for both the urge for absolute self-identity and the fundamental alienation from self that are the defining moments of the myth of Narcissus. It is in this schism between *two different forms* of the narcissistic relation to identity and alterity that the real significance of the struggle between Guy and Hornyak emerges. For it is in these characters' very different attempts to deal with the claims of the past that Kroetsch outlines the political options open to a culture which retains the mark of its difference from 'origin' in its most fundamental gestures of self-identification.

To explore the tension between Guy and Hornyak, it is interesting to begin with an examination of the ending of the novel. This unusual strategy is rewarding because *Exiles* moves towards its conclusion with a prolonged flash-back to the events that precipitated Guy's exile on the Mackenzie. In this narrative sequence, Guy, who is travelling west to take up holiday employment and keep a rendezvous with Kettle

Frazer, meets Hornyak for the first time and enters a relationship that will end in Hornyak's death and his own emotional isolation. In the first moments of their encounter, Hornyak's behaviour is already marked by an extreme voluntarism. Wheeling his car around from east to west to accommodate Guy's travel plans, he introduces himself with the remark "Christ, Hornyak can turn this jalopy around" (E 134). The elision of these two proper names in Hornyak's mind will become significant as the novel proceeds. Hornyak has been described by commentators as embodying a principle of creative disorder that challenges Canada's filiation to the bankrupt past of "our father's land." In these readings he becomes a figure whose anarchic activities distinguish him as "in many respects the Kroetschian equivalent of the modern-day romantic in that he defies received meaning and transforms his environment according to his own internal and impassioned codes."³⁹ But in fact Hornyak may be shown to assert his own unyielding principle of order and exclusion. This aspect of Hornyak's behaviour appears in the following description of his progress through the prairie landscape:

West on Highway One they went, west on One, through the hard-rock cuts, a straight road but up and down, like the roll of waves; a straight-through road, but instead of a park they found a burnt-off country; miles of tree-trunks - black, gaunt, crooked - the ground strewn with boulders and rock. And the sun blazing down and all the time, out there ahead, the prairies. 'Chaos,' Mike said. 'We've got some chaos to contend with. . . . Chaos, boy. Stay young and hang loose.' And Mike fed more gas to the wild horses under the hood of that black Rolls.

And the flat country then. Dusty and dry. Dry and dusty and hot. Wheat country. And the first elevator. There at Dufresne, alone and reaching, like a great damned phallus, like one perpetual hard-on, Mike said, trying to make eternity. (E 135)

This passage provides an excellent introduction to Hornyak's personality. In particular, it firmly establishes the *phallic narcissism* of his response to the post-colonial experience of displacement and marginalisation. Earlier in the novel, Kettle describes Hornyak's complete rejection of history: "You know something. In all those six years. He didn't tell me where his home was. No relations phoned to say they were passing though town. No mail came. Nothing" (E 52). In Kroetsch's description of Hornyak's journey through the prairie it becomes apparent that Hornyak's desire to transcend the material fact of post-colonial alienation from the imperial father is linked to his projection of images of phallic power onto the Canadian landscape. The only way that he can "contend" with the "chaos" he perceives in the process of historical change is by establishing the universal presence of masculine identity in the external world. In his bizarre acts of transference even a grain elevator is

transformed into "a great damned phallus, like a perpetual hard-on . . . trying to make eternity." By investing the prairie landscape with an unambiguous phallic identity, Hornyak clearly embodies the imperatives of the phallogocentric self which Luce Irigaray defines in terms of

the process of production, reproduction, mastery, and profitability, of meaning, dominated by the phallus - that *master signifier* whose law of functioning erases, rejects, denies the surging up, the resurgence, the recall of a *heterogeneity* capable of reworking the principle of its authority.⁴⁰

If Hornyak's behaviour is judged within the context of this analysis of phallogocentric discourse, the meaning of his voluntarism and desire for a particular form of male transcendence becomes clear. For Hornyak's actions are impelled by precisely this urge to prevent the "recall of a heterogeneity" capable of questioning the principle of his own (phallic) authority. He denies the constitutive post-colonial experiences of difference and displacement in favour of a pure statement of self. "My problem," he tells Guy six later on the Mackenzie river, "is I know my own mind. And that's a terrible thing" (E 9). Far from representing what Lecker calls an "open-ended, deconstructive embrace of antiform,"⁴¹ Hornyak's extreme phallic narcissism subordinates world to self by positing an original core of personality prior to the effects of discourse and temporality. Indeed, his refusal to accept the 'deconstructive' position that subjectivity is an effect of difference is perfectly encapsulated in his wish to prevent "damned signs" (E 141) intruding upon his consciousness. Kroetsch underlines Hornyak's belief in subjectivity as pure presence by describing his behaviour in a manner that invites a scriptural interpretation. Thus Hornyak's odyssey through the western plains is presented as a quest for the security of source and origin suggested by "the first mountain stream and the first lake" (E 142). Similarly, both his demand to know the location of the "eternal fountain" (E 138) and his injunction to the attendant at the Hot Springs that "[y]ou can't pay . . . to be reborn" (E 144) aspire to provide a religious solution to the theme of alienation that dominates the novel. Hornyak's appeal to the transcendent unity of redemption is later remarked upon by Guy, who portrays him as "some great bloody redeemer" (E 35), and Pottle, who suggests that Hornyak's corpse would "rise of its own accord after three days" (E 16). The tension between Hornyak's desire for everlasting life and Guy's need to come to terms with the narrative of Canadian cultural dispossession is expressed in an exchange that counterpoints the former's insatiable appetites with the latter's familial memories:

'You've got to keep young,' Hornyak said, half as a joke, half desperate. 'That's the whole secret, boy.'

And remembering an old brick house in Ontario and china in the windows. A story for every cup. A fence out back; a stone fence older than the house; as old as a farm that was older than the town. Apple trees and oak trees gone crooked with age. The stories his mother told, of apple trees and fences; of the spring-time of the dead.

Mike looked at all the licence plates as he whipped by. The colours and numbers and slogans and signs. A little bison. 'Wheat Province.' A potato. 'Tradition,' Mike said. 'It's an old tradition of mine to have breakfast at noon. Let's stop somewhere and start my old tradition.' (E 137)

This dialogue between desire and memory is the fulcrum upon which the plot of *Exiles* turns. Hornyak's claim that he can simply "stop somewhere and start my old tradition" offers a concise illustration of his need to define identity outside the restrictions imposed by historical discourses of the subject. The associations of community, progress, and continuity signified by the word "tradition" are introduced merely to justify the satisfaction of a momentary fancy. Conversely, Guy's response to his implication in Hornyak's picaresque adventures is to remember the "stories his mother told" of the "spring-time of the dead." This last phrase captures perfectly the renewing force of the imagination as it communicates experience across the generations and acts as a valuable corrective to the permanent present enforced by Hornyak's narcissistic self-regard. However, Guy is forced by Hornyak to endure in his own life the conflict between the demand for pure self-identity and the need for a mature understanding of past experience. Following their arrival at the Banff Springs Hotel, Guy returns from a meeting with his employer to find Hornyak in bed with Kettle Frazer. In an image which is replayed throughout the novel, he sees the "image of two raging bodies" (E 145) reflected in a mirror. The impact that this encounter has upon him fractures his personality and alienates him from his former life. In his moment of betrayal Guy is divided between the self who observes and the self who experiences: "He fled and went on searching and could not see himself. Stay out, the voice said. Peter? the voice said." Guy's flight from Banff, which leads him to spend six years traversing the northern stretches of the Mackenzie river, is accompanied by his perception of himself "caught there, trapped, doomed in th[e] long mahogany frame" of the bedroom mirror. In this single image Kroetsch expresses Guy's agonised self-estrangement and opens the text up to a reading of narcissism as an experience of *alienation* that is firmly opposed to Hornyak's phallic repudiation of alterity.

It has been necessary to outline the genesis of the relationship between Guy and Hornyak at some length because it demonstrates that there are in fact two types of

narcissism at work in the novel. It will be my purpose here to show that both Hornyak's phallic expulsion of alterity and Guy's experience of alienation within the act of self-recognition correspond to particular moments within the myth of Narcissus. Furthermore, my reading of *Exiles* will argue that Kroetsch exploits the tension in the Narcissus narrative between identity and alienation to explore the relationship between the nostalgic longing for a lost image of Canadian historical 'origin' and a vision of post-colonial identity erected upon the experience of difference from imperial culture. Finally, I want to suggest that the novel's preoccupation with the reflection and division of the narcissistic image calls into question the ability of realist poetics to express the profound linguistic alienation enforced upon the post-colonial subject by the "transportation of language from its place of origin and its imposed and imposing relationship on and with the new environment."⁴²

Kroetsch's concern in *Exiles* with the reflection and division of the narcissistic image is emphasised by the epigraph to the first edition of the novel, which is taken from Golding's version of *The Metamorphoses*:

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

The story of Narcissus attracts Kroetsch because it offers an ironic metaphor for the difficult and dangerous journey towards self-knowledge. More importantly, the myth insists upon the irreducible tension between the subject's demand for absolute self-identity and the division that the act of representation imposes between the subject and its own experience. The paradox of Narcissus's position is that his desire to eradicate the space between subject and image by joining with his own reflection is frustrated by the difference that his reflection inscribes between experience and representation. His death at the altar of his own image is therefore the direct consequence of his inability to accept the importance of alterity to the act of self-definition. In a subtle modulation of the myth, Kroetsch reworks the story of Narcissus by cleaving it between two opposed characters. Thus Hornyak dies because, like Narcissus, he forecloses on difference by presenting himself as the embodiment of will. In allegorical terms, Hornyak's death is inevitable because he denies the originary difference that underwrites post-colonial existence. Conversely Guy survives his entanglement with Hornyak and the perils of the trip down the Mackenzie River because he comes to understand that the narcissistic

alienation from a unified self also describes the dislocation of the Canadian historical experience. Alone of all his companions he is able to renounce the seductive allure of the past as a lost origin of meaning and accept the principle of alterity symbolised by his Echo (Kettle Frazer).

The relationship between identity, alienation and identity can again be illuminated by brief recourse to the work of Jacques Lacan. His work is relevant to our concerns because of its identification of the "mirror stage" as a formative period in the process of human development. According to Lacan the child's recognition of its specular image between the ages of six and eight months offers it its first independent confirmation of its identity. From this moment the child experiences itself as a "coherent and self-governing entity."⁴³ As Lacan points out:

This jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the *infans* stage, still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursling dependence, would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject.⁴⁴

However, this "jubilant" moment of self-recognition is purchased at a high price because the production of an image of the child which establishes a space between the subject and its representation compromises any sense of complete or self-sufficient identity. In Anika Lemaire's words, the mirror stage "realises the conquest of the totality of one's own body, but it does so by way of a narcissistic identification with the image of the self and with others."⁴⁵ Consequently an *alienation* is inscribed within the act of specular identification:

But the important point is that this form situates the agency of the ego, before its social identification, in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone, or rather, which will only rejoin the coming-into-being of the subject asymptotically, whatever the success of the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve as I his discordance with his own reality.⁴⁶

An understanding of the "irreducible" or "asymptotic" distance between subject and representation is useful to a reading of *Exiles*. Guy's narcissistic experience of his own image compares closely with the child's perception of its specular representation, which "symbolises the mental permanence of the I, at the same time as it prefigures its

alienating destination."⁴⁷ His task in the novel is therefore to come to terms with the "assumption of the armour of an alienating identity"⁴⁸ by learning that post-colonial subjectivity is defined by its reciprocal relation with alterity. Guy's narcissistic identification with an image of the self as "other" is shown at the very beginning of the text when he encounters his own reflection below him in the Mackenzie river:

He glanced up at the breath-tripping hush; at the broad river, mirror-smooth in the afternoon sun; at the old riverboat where she lay tied up beside her two black steel barges. No one had seen the canoe stop. The lifting bow bobbed gently. He looked down again at the water and this time saw his own face watching him; the prematurely balding blond head, the full lips and squinting deep-set eyes suggesting a moodiness that didn't belong with his tall and hard body. He studied the reflection as if not sure whom he might see.

The image mimicked his hesitation, mocked his doubt by repeating it. The deep-set eyes worried against the slant of light. The mouth, pursed and offering a kiss, in its subtle retreat, threatened now to open and drown. Peter shook his head to be certain it was himself he saw. A drop of water from the rising line scarred the face, exploded its frail composure. (E 2)

In this passage Guy identifies simultaneously with two different versions of the self. Kroetsch has remarked that "[i]n *But We Are Exiles* you have the literal surface of the water as your dividing point; you're above and you're below."⁴⁹ This fracturing of the subjective position is repeated as Guy "studie[s] the reflection as if not sure whom he he might see." His experience of self-division is represented by Kroetsch as an encounter with an other self: Guy's reflection "mimicked his hesitation, mocked his doubt by repeating it." Yet the disintegration of the primordial unity of the subject is also perceived as the gratification of a repressed desire. The relationship between Eros and Thanatos emerges most clearly in the sentence "[t]he mouth, pursed and offering a kiss, in its subtle retreat, threatened now to open and drown." Indifferently positioned between two opposed subjective positions, Guy has no option but to enter the "dialectic of identification"⁵⁰ between self and "other" that constitutes alienated subjectivity and which compensates the individual for the loss of its original illusion of autonomy. The shock that this engagement with alterity produces is revealed as Guy shakes his head "to be certain it was himself he saw." But the "frail composure" of the unified self has disappeared, to be replaced by the perception of identity as a temporal construct defined by its intersubjective relationship with others.

In contrast to Hornyak's voluntarist assertion of personality, then, Guy is to learn that identity is an intersubjective effect produced by reflexive play across the

categories of "self" and "other." Peter Thomas has observed that the narcissistic self must "resist the self-in-time" because it cannot yield to "the aggregate of otherness which is the past."⁵¹ This is only true of the narcissist who denies the alienating effect of the split between subject and image; we will see that *Exiles* concludes with an explicit reference to Guy's rebirth. However, Guy's initial response to the crisis of identity that engulfs him after Hornyak's seduction of Kettle is to erect a barrier between himself and the world. In a grotesque parody of Hornyak's repudiation of alterity, he breaks all ties with the past and defines himself as a man outside time:

But he didn't go east again. He went into the north. He might have gone east to his sister's graduation from university, if he hadn't got so drunk in Fort Smith that the stewardess wouldn't let him board the plane. He might have gone home to his mother's funeral, but word got to him in Yellowknife three weeks after the burial. A month later in the mail he received a shoe-box full of old family photographs and one hundred shares in a railway that had gone bankrupt. He tried three times to write his father an explanation; then he threw his legacy into the river. (E 10-11)

From the moment that he leaves Kettle's hotel bedroom, Guy's existence is dominated by the need to recover the subjective unity that is shattered by his alienating narcissistic identification with his specular image. The only solution that he finds to his chronic self-division is to deny his own personality altogether by redefining himself in terms of his nautical function:

A man at the wheel and a man in the engine-room. Joined by an indicator hand and the jingle of bells. Here the pilot's eyes and hands were in isolated yet absolute command. Pure. He wanted to shout the word. This is mine. Storm, ice, wind, rock - those can challenge me. But here a man is defined free from the terrors of human relationships. A man's function is so clear that each is simply called chief, skipper, second, pilot. And in a few minutes they'll be settled down again: the deckhands sleeping and standing watch and scrubbing and painting and waking the next shift and sleeping again; the skipper and the first pilot asleep in the lazy afternoon, the cook up from the galley to take a short nap before supper, the second in the din of the engine-room reading a frayed and greasy magazine he has read twice before, the mate dawdling over a cup of coffee in the galley, his only worry a fresh cake the cook thinks is hidden, and should or shouldn't he dare cut himself a piece. Six on and six off neatly portioning the day, the absolute responsibility of the wheel and the fine irresponsibility of a private cabin, with a few books to read, clothes to wash, sleep to be got in preparation for the next watch. No confusion about who is to do what and who did what. From bunk to galley to the wheelhouse again, six hours on, six hours off, and always out beyond the wheelhouse the thin band of shoreline and trees, separating water and sky. An order maintained as precariously as that maintained by the hands on the wheel. The chaos held in check . . . (E 19)

"Running" the *Nahanni Jane* up and down the Mackenzie river becomes the "essence" of Guy's life because it allows him to leave "that tiny blotch of civilization and the shore people and Kettle Frazer behind" (E 18). Only by this continual act of departure can the "chaos" in Guy's life be "held in check."

The irony of Guy's attempt to ward off the chaos of history by establishing an inflexible personal order is that his new identity is simply a mirror-image of Hornyak, the figure who torments him. Kroetsch underscores this point by employing the motif of the *doppelgänger* to suggest that Hornyak represents an atavistic side of Guy's personality. Speaking of *Exiles*, he has remarked that "[t]he hero's almost split in that book, with two possibilities existing side by side."⁵² Thus Guy's acknowledgement that he is the "goddamn saviour type" (E 75) associates him with Hornyak's messianic zeal while his initial surprise at finding Kettle on board the *Nahanni Jane* makes him start back "as if he had nearly stepped overboard" (E 32) in an unsettling reference to Hornyak's deathly trajectory. The diminution of identificatory space between the two men is eventually accepted by the crew who "had somehow come to assume that the body [of Hornyak] was Peter's" (E 100). More generally, Guy embodies the same "drunk, stumbling rage to make his terrifying isolation an absolute" (E 52) that infects Kettle's father Gordon Frazer. Indeed, Frazer's emphatic injunction "[y]ou mustn't make strange" (E 53) captures perfectly Guy's steadfast refusal to confront his own self-estrangement. Ironically, however, it is Frazer who, in a key exchange with Guy, widens the text's discussion of the question of alienation to include an account of the devastating effects of colonialism:

Frazer lowered his voice as if to confide a secret. But his voice came loudly hoarse. 'And I killed her mother. In my own fool way. Can't you guess that, Guy? She wanted to be in Scotland with her hundreds of damned relatives. And I brought her into this goddamned godforsaken country because the Hudson's Bay could buy young Scots cheap to do their adding and subtracting. And it killed her.'

Peter offered him the little rum remaining in the bottle and he shook his head.

'The only decent thing I ever did in my life was saving enough money to get that child out of this place.' (E 46)

Hornyak's death announces the beginning of the end of Guy's exile from the past. With the disappearance of Hornyak's principle of pure presence, Guy finds that his life has been given "another meaning" (E 19). The fact of Hornyak's mortality flatly contradicts his "own belief" that "he was indestructible" (E 11) and inscribes

lack, or the "idea of the lived drama of an irreversible incompleteness,"⁵³ at the heart of subjectivity. Hornyak's fall from the *Nahanni Jane* also constitutes a symbolic fall for Guy because it propels the self *back into time*. His narcotic passage up and down the Mackenzie can no longer disguise the dependence of the self upon a reciprocal relationship with alterity. Kroetsch conveys Guy's slow awakening from his absolute self-enclosure and his recognition of his need for others through the text's economy of specular images. Robert Lecker has written that Guy associates these images with "safety" and draws a parallel between the novel's "ever-present mirrors" and "the mimetic notion of 'truth.'"⁵⁴ Conversely, I believe that by introducing flash-backs to the split in Guy's personality that accompanied his alienating identification with his own reflected image, Kroetsch's use of specular images reinforces our awareness of Guy's self-estrangement. Thus a description of Hornyak's last moments is juxtaposed with an emotionally charged account of the violent effect his seduction of Kettle has had upon Guy's life:

He had led Hornyak into the engine-room and had silently let him pick up a lamp that didn't have a shield over the bulb. *And 'Forget it' he told Hornyak as they stood in the doorway of the engine-room, when Mike thanked him for finding the equipment. And the soft irony of Mike's own 'I never forget' for an instant sent hate into his hands. For he had not forgotten either, had not been able to forget that night in the mountains when he opened the door of the room where Kettle was supposedly resting, sleeping after their hike up the glacier, when he saw the image of Kettle, of the two of them, caught in a mirror; and remembering that moment, that moment that had become six years, he could have killed Hornyak . . . (E 27)*

Later in the text, however, the episode in the hotel bedroom is introduced in terms that foreshadow Guy's reunion with Kettle by linking the experience of alienation to the impulse of desire:

Time came back into this room, into this bed of a child, and it was not time present for Peter but the slow, seeping time of another place and another occasion; and he looked into a hotel room, started to walk in and saw them, this woman and what he thought was his best if very new friend; and in the slightly archaic splendour of that carpeted and marbled and faded room he believed he did not want to believe what he saw, the eloquence of flesh and desire caught dispassionately in the glass mirror inside the door . . . (E 48)

The phrase "the eloquence of flesh and desire" is interesting because its reference to the interdependence of sexuality and language implicates the object of desire in the chain of substitutions that govern the movement of the signifier. In Lacanian terms,

every object of alienating identification will reveal itself to be necessarily ephemeral and destined to be supplanted because it is incapable of stopping up the lack inscribed in the subject from the start by the very fact of his being eclipsed in the signifier.⁵⁵

Following his reunion with Kettle on the *Nahanni Jane* Guy's narcissistic experience of lack and division becomes the basis on which his relationships with others are formed. The denial of the self-presence of the subjective position is shown as Guy once again registers Kettle's movements in a bedroom mirror. He does not "turn towards her but watch[es] in the mirror" as she moves about the room, attracted to the "mirrored darkness" (E 77) of her body. But his need for intersubjective contact is shown when, in attempting to avoid the reflection of his own face, he flips his shaving mirror only to find "Kettle's image dropp[ing] down from above and crowd[ing] against his shrunken face" (E 75). Kettle's reappearance as the desired "other" reinforces his sense of lack and incompleteness: "He was afraid he could not endure the isolation for another day, for another hour even" (E 56). The prospect of living free of the terror of human relationships no longer consoles him, but instead conjures up the image of Hornyak "wheeling bird-free through the dry prairies" (E 64). Guy realises that he could "live like that for a season, for a year, seeking, free and seeking . . . and nothing would be enough to kill the isolation. Nothing. Nothing to kill the nothing." Instead of seeking to kill the nothing that his life has become, he finally accepts the decentred subjectivity of the narcissistic condition. After depositing Kettle with her father at Aklavik, he experiences an epiphany that holds the ideas of life, alienation, and rebirth in permanent tension:

The thought [of leaving Kettle] was nearly unbearable, for it meant he would extend and fix this day's pain and make it into his future. Unless Kettle joined him. It was he who had burst back to life. And the birth was a throbbing awareness of his isolation. (E 57)

It should be evident by this point that in *But We Are Exiles* Kroetsch uses the myth of Narcissus as a metaphor for the difficult choices that confront a post-colonial culture exiled from the predatory embrace of the imperial father. The myth is appropriate to Kroetsch's purposes because Narcissus's crisis of self-recognition dramatises both the experience and the expulsion of alterity. In the figure of Peter Guy, Kroetsch seeks to demonstrate that the experience of alienation implicit within the narcissistic act of identification is in fact a liberation for the post-colonial subject whose history is routinely subsumed within the meta-language of Western cultural discourse.

Paradoxically, Guy's shattering experience of self-division reveals to him for the first time that his identity inheres in the fact of alienation itself. Given Guy's transindividual status as the Canadian Everyman, Kroetsch implies that it is only by means of the defamiliarisation of established images of colonial subjectivity that the Canadian subject will be able to articulate its difference from the imperial centre. Meanwhile in the character of Michael Hornyak he outlines the consequences of a paralysing infatuation with the illusion of absolute self-identity which denies difference and attempts to eradicate the hermeneutic space between experience and representation. Both Narcissus and Hornyak are driven by their self-love to repudiate the existence of alterity: both men die agonising deaths-by-water. The allegorical meaning of Hornyak's tragedy is clear: by denying the originary experience of alienation by which post-colonial identity is constituted, the Canadian subject denies itself an enunciative position from which to speak. But if *Exiles* dramatises two different allegorical responses to the Narcissus narrative, it also offers two contradictory reactions to Hornyak's voluntarist example. For Guy's liberating experience of estrangement from a moribund past in the wake of Hornyak's demise must be contrasted with the quite different conclusions drawn by the crew of the *Nahanni Jane*.

For McAlpine's crew, Hornyak's body becomes a locus of lost presence that they must recover in order to restore their former sense of security. The commercial purpose of their journey is quickly eclipsed by their obsessive need to redeem Hornyak's corpse from the frozen waters. If we recall the allegorical designation of the *Nahanni Jane* as the Canadian body politic, and add to that the fact that Hornyak, like the imperial centre, projects himself as a node of absolute self-presence uncontaminated by difference, the crew of the *Nahanni Jane* are embarked on a search for a moment of originary unity that the ruptures of colonial history deny. In fact, the dismal end that meets their collective effort to reverse time and restore their loss suggests a close affinity between Hornyak and Coleridge's albatross. The connection between the quest for Hornyak's body and the crew's need for an unmediated signifying relationship between self and place is highlighted by Kroetsch's decision to begin the novel *in media res*. In the uncertain seconds after Hornyak's accident the men are already locked into the search for an explanation for the hole that Hornyak's absence has punched into their lives. The dominant figure in this opening phase is McAlpine who remains "not a little proud of the integrity and persistence of his inquest" (E 6) into Hornyak's death. But as Guy quickly realises, it was Hornyak who "was there driving them, insidiously" (E 16). McAlpine's psychological surrender to the dead man is

conveyed in the ironic comment that he has become "a man of purpose; or a man of Hornyak's purpose" (E 17). The destination of the *Nahanni Jane* upriver against the flow of history towards an imagined reconciliation with an unapproachable past leads it into a strange uncharted region where the co-ordinates of time and place become indistinct. Even observers of the boat's progress from the shore fail to raise a hand in greeting "as if to wave would be to confess a belief in the boat's presence that was not warranted by common sense" (E 29).

The disorder produced by the crew's perverse refusal to find a reason for their present dispossession in anything but the fall from an idealised past is repeated in the natural world, where "[i]llusion and reality were confounded in a softly shining landscape, the sky upset into its own reflection" (E 30). Their joy at finding Hornyak's mangled corpse is unconfined: "An intense thrill of release was on them; they had recovered the body" (E 87). But as Arnafson realises, the body by this stage means nothing: the crew's struggle against time, change, and the process of decay has become a value in its own right. "You want to run away," he tells them, acknowledging their utterly ambiguous response to Hornyak's bodily presence, "but you won't let go of that bloody damned ghost stretched out back there on the stern of the boat" (E 89). In scenes that approach black comedy, the crew are both "deathly afraid" (E 110) of the corpse and deathly afraid of letting it go. But the impossibility of any escape from the dislocations of colonial history is grimly underlined when the barge that bears Hornyak's body rears up before them on the troubled waters and then splinters away, leaving the men to head alone into the storm towards an uncertain destiny.

Guy's response to the misconceived nostalgia for an idealised past is altogether different. Instead of discovering in Hornyak's recovered corpse a moment of reunion with a lost history of meaning, he detects in Hornyak's absence an insight into the history of Canadian alienation from origin. His experience of alienation and concomitant loss of self-presence is not, he realises, a temporary consequence of Hornyak's disappearance: it is the historical corollary of the Canadian's ambivalent position between Old and New World discourses of the subject. In a key exchange with Kettle during their brief interlude on Lobstick Island, Guy opposes his narcissistic experience of alienation and division to her prelapsarian faith in a brand new world:

'But I'm leaving. I'm starting over brand new. My house is brand new. The trees are brand new. The fence is brand new. Even the lawn - it arrived one day while we were eating lunch.' Kettle gestured out at the stunted spruce and the moss. 'You should drop by, Peter. Just to see my brand new world. People come by to see it all the time.'

'But I'd track in the old world,' Peter said. 'I'd mess it up. I'd bring in Yellowknife, and the Old Town part with its bums and the jumble of shacks on the rock. Logs and tarpaper and false fronts and unpainted boards. And water waiting. There you'd be, raising your kids to be civilized, and in I'd come reeking of whisky or vanilla extract, and I'd say stake me one more time and I'll make you a fortune. I know where there's gold.'

'And would you find me gold, Peter?'

'I'd find you tons of gold. No, I'd find you champagne. I'd go to the bush and rocks and come back with champagne. Cases and cases. Just to make you happy. And we'd sit on your new lawn under a new tree and we'd drink champagne and be happy. If we had just one glass now we could start. We could call one of these a new tree. We'd drink and be happy.'

Kettle raised in her hand an imaginary glass. 'To drink and be happy.'

'To your new world.'

'To my new world, Peter.'

Peter started to drink. 'Don't spill it,' he said. 'Be careful.'

She turned and buried her face in his parka.

'You spilled it,' he said. 'It's all spilled.'

She lay on his parka. 'We'll have champagne,' she said. 'Won't we, Peter? We'll have champagne.'

'It makes the old world new,' he said. 'We have to have champagne.' He brushed imaginary drops of champagne off his parka and let his fingers touch her hair.

She shook his hand away, crying. 'No, Peter. Break the mirror for me. Break it, break it please, smash it, Peter. Listen to me, smash it.'

He put down his imaginary glass. He sat looking out beneath the trees at the distant water. (E 123-24)

The importance of this scene is that it juxtaposes Kettle's edenic desire for a return to the origin of man before the fall into language and difference with Guy's melancholy acceptance that the "new world" is itself an effect of the historical rupture from an "old world" that can never be completely erased. Indeed, Guy's remark that his presence in Kettle's imaginary province would merely "track in the old world" with its "bums and the jumble of shacks on the rock" recalls Prospero's resigned response to Miranda's fantasy of a "brave new world" that "[t]is new to thee."⁵⁶ Kroetsch gently deflates the edenic resonance of her remarks by making an ironic reference to the two lovers as the first parents as they "joined hands and walked on and stopped again and walked on" (E 121), which gains from comparison with the closing lines of *Paradise Lost*:

The world was all before them, where to choose
 Their place of rest, and providence their guide:
 They hand in hand with wandering steps and slow,
 Through Eden took their solitary way.⁵⁷

In contrast to Kettle's creation of a new Eden, Guy's remarks are informed by a refusal to take the transcendent step outside the historical and subjective conditions of his alienation. Writing on the Lobstick Island episode, Robert Lecker claims to discern "those antimimetic motifs that prompt Peter to heed Kettle's suggestion to 'break the mirror. . . . [b]reak it, break it please, smash it.' And the mirrors do break."⁵⁸ However, close attention to the passage in question reveals that Guy resolutely refuses to "smash the mirror" that reflects his historical status as the subject of difference. At the end of his exchange with Kettle he "put[s] down his imaginary glass" and gazes out beneath the trees "at the distant water." It is by virtue of this scrupulous refusal to accept the false immediacy of identity as presence that he is able to avoid both the lifeless unities of Kettle's paradise and McAlpine's ship of death.

Exiles returns at the end to the fundamental dialectic between identity and difference with which it began. Alone on a windswept barge with Hornyak's corpse, Guy confronts the rotting symbol of an impossible union with an idealised past:

And the strength born of his heard laughter: the body toppled stiff from the canoe; hit the water; was lost in the snarl and riot of waves. He did not lock the door, and wrapped in the quilt and tarpaulin he lay in the small canoe. Curled in the quilt and tarpaulin he heard the slamming door, hour after hour. And as the huge door opened he saw the grey light of the blizzard, saw the glare and the snow and heard the plunge of wind and water, and as it closed he was slammed back into darkness again, the silence again, and the soft delirium of his impassioned motion. (E 145)

This scene has been interpreted as a description of an "overlap"⁵⁹ between the personalities of Guy and Hornyak and as a moment that reflects "a symbolic frozen embrace of identity"⁶⁰ between the two men. But as Guy's physical expulsion of Hornyak's body makes clear, it represents the displacement of one discourse of history and subjectivity by another. Hornyak's anarchic progress through the Canadian west deliberately wipes out the question of alterity by resolutely turning the "other" into the "same." He invests everything outside himself with a unitary phallic identity that he then reinterprets as justification for his basic will-to-power. But as Kroetsch's reference to Guy's "heard laughter" makes clear, Guy's acceptance of the irreducible difference between subject and image allows him to resist Hornyak's deathly example and the fate of McAlpine's crew, who are paralysed by their fascination with an image of the past.

As an allegorical exploration of the dialectic between place and displacement that is such a major concern of post-colonial cultural discourse, *Exiles* offers several interesting clues to the direction that Kroetsch's fiction subsequently takes. In particular, its identification of an alienation within the mimetic experience of verisimilitude provides an early indication of Kroetsch's desire to highlight the tension that exists between the old language and the new place. Equally, his use of the image of the split or divided subject to introduce the struggle in post-colonial culture between the experiences of identity and alterity will later be developed into a semiotic analysis of the binary contradictions that inhabit Canadian cultural discourse. *Exiles* unquestionably exhibits some of the customary weaknesses of a first novel: it is flawed by a certain over-fidelity to the Conradian motif of a journey into the heart of darkness, and also by a slightly schematic use of conceptual dualisms. It was no doubt the occasional crudity of Kroetsch's portrait of Guy as Narcissus that persuaded him to expunge the epigraph from Ovid from later editions of the novel. More pressing, perhaps, is the thought that Kroetsch's success in describing the deracination of the Canadian Everyman leaves him with both a problem and a challenge. For if the thematic resolution of *Exiles* turns upon the identification of an alienation within the mimetic relation, how is Kroetsch to explore the issue of post-colonial alterity in a realistic paradigm that, in MacCabe's terms, effaces the question of otherness itself? And if his exploration of the tension between Old and New World discourse is conducted successfully in allegorical terms, what relationship can his fiction forge with the historical record of Canadian experience? In order to investigate more fully these questions of textual form and historical context, we must turn to *The Words of My Roaring*, Kroetsch's second novel, and attend to the voluminous voice of John Judas Backstrom, candidate for public office in the election of 1935.

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 - 2 Kroetsch, "The Canadian Writer and the American Literary Tradition," *The Lovely Treachery of Words* 53.
 - 3 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* 9-10.
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 - 5 Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981; London: Methuen, 1983) 22.
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 - 11 Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (1980; London: Methuen, 1985) 46-47.
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 - 13 Bhabha 98-99.
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 - 15 Colin MacCabe, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word* (1979; London: Macmillan, 1981) 16.
 - 16 MacCabe 15.
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 - 18 Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," *The Lovely Treachery of Words* 23.
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 - 22 Kroetsch, "That Yellow Prairie Sky," 437.
 - 23 MacCabe, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word* 28.

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- 24 Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths of Voice* 29.
- 25 Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger Of The 'Narcissus,'* ed. Cedric Watts (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988) 26.
- 26 Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1973; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980) 10. Future references to this edition will be marked by the abbreviation "HD" and incorporated into the main body of the text.
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- 29 Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* 109-110.
- 30 Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* 11-12.
- 31 Robert Kroetsch, *But We Are Exiles*, Laurentian Library 45 (1965; Toronto: Macmillan, 1977) 22. Future references to this edition will be marked by the abbreviation "E" and incorporated into the main body of the text.
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- 33 Lecker, *Robert Kroetsch* 27.
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- 52 Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths of Voice* 178.
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- 57 John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, trans. Alastair Fowler (1971; London: Longman, 1989) 642.
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Chapter Three
The Double Hook:
Narrative and the Divided Subject in *The Words of My Roaring*

Our relations with each other are now only occasionally and fragmentarily based upon global experience, the concrete "apprehension" of one person by another. They are largely the result of a process of indirect reconstruction, through written documents. We are no longer linked to our past by an oral tradition which implies direct contact with others (storytellers, priests, wise men, or elders), but by books amassed in libraries, books from which we endeavor - with extreme difficulty - to form a picture of their authors. And we communicate with the immense majority of our contemporaries by all kinds of intermediaries - written documents or administrative machinery - which undoubtedly vastly extend our contacts but at the same time make those contacts somewhat "unauthentic." This has become typical of the relationship between the citizen and the public authorities.¹

With the publication of *The Words of My Roaring* in 1966 Kroetsch begins a series of interrelated novels, continued in *The Studhorse Man* and culminating in *Gone Indian*, which examine the discourses that constitute and delimit the modern Canadian experience of cultural identity. The common emphasis of each of the novels that make up Kroetsch's "Out West" triptych is upon the alienation of the post-colonial subject from a narrative of Canadian history that purports to represent and give meaning to his experience. In these texts, Kroetsch explores the tension between identity and alienation by presenting the struggle between a pair of opposed characters for hermeneutic control over the Canadian past. This basic structural pattern is clearly evident in *The Studhorse Man* and *Gone Indian* where Hazard Lepage and Jeremy Sadness are compelled to articulate their dissent from partisan and reductive representations of their lives by their respective antagonists Demeter Proudfoot and Mark Madham. The fact that Demeter and Madham both present their contextualising narratives as the embodiment of a discourse of cultural enlightenment enables us to recognise in their words the implicit division between civilisation and barbarism that underpins imperialist rhetoric. Meanwhile, the metafictional and self-reflexive nature of both novels allows Kroetsch to consider the way in which history is produced by the violent imposition of specific discourses of culture, knowledge, and power.

As the first panel of the triptych, *Words* differs from its successors in several important respects. First, it records the story of a man involuntarily imprisoned in his own rhetoric. Although Johnnie Backstrom is engaged, like Hazard and Sadness, in a

bitter fight for control of his own destiny, he at least retains the power to marshal and present the evidence of his own struggle. For it is Backstrom who bequeaths to us a first-person account of his electoral battle with Doc Murdoch on the western Canadian prairie during the starvation summer of 1935. Backstrom's independent history of his own comic fall from grace isolates another difference between *Words* and the two subsequent novels. If *The Studhorse Man* and *Gone Indian* are primarily concerned with the ambivalent position of the Canadian subject between Old and New World discourses of culture and history, Backstrom's schismatic and contradictory narrative reveals the effect that this discursive ambivalence has had upon Canadian discourses of self-identification. To illustrate this point properly, it will be necessary to interpret Backstrom's narrative in the context of Kroetsch's semiotic analysis of Canadian literature, which suggests that the contradictions of the post-colonial condition bring the individual codes of Canadian cultural discourse into paralysing juxtaposition.

The concatenation of Backstrom, literature, and post-colonialism is significant because the undertaker's difficulty in finding a name for his experience represents a more general dilemma for the Canadian artist. The ostensible irony of Backstrom's story is that a man obsessed with the idea of self-definition, and who envelops the Albertan landscape in the resplendent sound of his own voice, comes ultimately to be silenced by the contradictions that he embodies. But if Backstrom's strange reversal is read as a comic illustration of Kroetsch's structural theory of the Canadian imagination, his eclipse becomes a consequence of his search for a redemptive vision of self and community uncontaminated by the tension between binary values that inhabits the Canadian structure of vision. Backstrom's final silence therefore provides a stark reminder of the difficulties facing the artist examining the question of identity within a culture that has internalised the binomial logic of imperialist discourse. It also brings to a conclusion Kroetsch's interest in a realist poetics: from this moment on, he begins to explore how images of reality are constructed through the relationship between systemic codes; and the way these codes are imposed by different discursive practices. This modulation from the perception of post-colonial subjectivity as a residual effect of difference to one that envisages it as a product of discourse is perhaps the single most important development in Kroetsch's work; and it is consistent with his transition towards a metafictional critique of Canadian history in *The Studhorse Man*.

Kroetsch's use of the term "triptych" to describe the structural relation between *The Words of My Roaring*, *The Studhorse Man* and *Gone Indian* requires comment. In Chapter One I documented the correspondence in Kroetsch's work between a distrust of hegemonic discourses of Canadian history and the deconstitution of 'closed' or traditional textual forms. Similarly, he resists the classification of his novels as a "trilogy" because this declares an overarching unity and internal integration within his presentation of modern Canadian history where none in fact exists. Far more appropriate to his purposes is the internal pattern of resemblance and difference implicit in the structural organisation of a triptych:

You see I'm writing . . . I really call it a triptych, though I find the word rather pretentious. But I don't like to call it a trilogy because its connections are not narrative ones, they are of another sort: juxtaposition, repetition, contrast. The first volume is set in the '30's, the depression, the second volume is set at the end of the war, and the third will be contemporary.²

The "Out West" triptych re-interprets modern Canadian history while insistently posing the question of representation itself. It insists upon a radical act of defamiliarisation that reveals history to be a particular narrative event, complete with its own syntax, principles of development, and rules of transformation. For Kroetsch, history is not simply a nightmare from which he is trying to escape: it is rather a supremely purposive structuring discourse that identifies beginnings, endings, and phases of transition within the protean flux of human experience. Kroetsch's abandonment of conventional narrative connections that presuppose a transparent "one-to-one" relationship between language and a reality to which it refers, in favour of a disjunctive approach defined by "juxtaposition, repetition, contrast" signals an acknowledgement that "history" has no independent ontological existence outside the textual work in which it is inscribed. By employing a series of extremely unreliable narrators to impose order upon the changes of the last fifty years, Kroetsch paradoxically asserts that the real drama of Canadian history is to be found in the interstices of a totalising narrative. In this sense, Backstrom, Demeter Proudfoot, and Mark Madham enact the imperial struggle for mastery within their own texts: their attempt to confer privilege upon a single meta-narrative of history is at odds with the post-colonial experience which celebrates the "abundance that is diversity and difference"³ following the collapse of the homogenising discourse of Western imperial expansion. Backstrom's chronic self-division, Demeter's insanity, and the disintegration of Madham's pose of studied neutrality are therefore the various indices of Kroetsch's desire to foresake the unitary voice for a postmodern discursive

heterogeneity that recovers "[t]he margin, the periphery, the edge"⁴ where the Canadian experience is preserved.

Kroetsch's intention in the triptych to recover a stratum of Canadian experience excluded from "traditional versions of history"⁵ also explains his preoccupation with the landscape of his native Canadian west. Each of his seven novels is suffused with the idiom, customs, and history of the the Albertan prairies. For Kroetsch, however, the "west" functions as metaphor as well as geographical description of place. To travel to Kroetsch's west is to enter an imaginative region where sound and silence meet and familiar notions of identity dissolve into the endless play of language. In this environment the closed structure of written form is supplanted by the open-ended possibilities of oral culture: history is communicated down the generations not in textbooks, but in the communal narratives of folk-lore, collective memory, and the tall-tale. Throughout the nightly rituals of the beer-parlour, the bullshit artist is king. Yet as a self-consciously post-colonial writer, Kroetsch's imagination is structured by the play between oppositions in a state of constant and unremitting tension. The creative and regenerative formlessness of the western landscape is therefore counter-balanced by the political, commercial, and social power-structure of the Canadian east. In Kroetsch's artistic vision, the "east" denotes a region dominated by stasis, order, and concluded speech, where narrative is finished and history already written. This impression of historical enclosure is reinforced by Kroetsch's identification of the east with the myths of the Old World. For the westerner the east embodies a new Eden that seduces and then repels him, throwing him back upon his uncreated history. As Kroetsch is aware, the originary innocence of the prelapsarian state refuses to recognise the alterity of the post-colonial condition. Stung by this rejection from the garden, the westerner commits himself to uninvent established narratives of history by inscribing in the written word the loneliness and the emptiness of the wide western spaces. Within this new deconstructive stance the unitary narrative of the eastern establishment is exposed to the polyphony and discordance of western oral culture. It is this incessant urge to write the history of western alienation back into the documents of an east increasingly associated by Kroetsch with the colonial presence that is indicated by the west's "longing for a mythical resolution" to the problems of a divided culture:

The Canadian establishment has created, and is creating, our history. I think that our history in the past has been created by the Eastern establishment. Even the kind of religious activities in the West are symptomatic of a longing for a mythic resolution rather than a historical resolution. Social Credit with its quasi-religious basis was prophetic and did try to speak mythically. Curiously,

even today with a fundamental reversal of economic power, the West refuses to see itself in a dominant position. It maintains the fiction of its inferiority and isolation and thus clings to its mythic view of itself.⁶

The relative freedom from definition that Kroetsch accords the west permits him to create a mythological Albertan province, centred upon the town of Notikeewin, where the principles of order and disorder come into creative conflict. The quasi-mythological status of Notikeewin is important to Kroetsch because the entire notion of the "mythic" allows him to highlight the distinction between lived experience and those discourses that attempt to order our imaginative encounter with the world. Disclosing that "myth has a couple of functions for me" insofar as it "orders exterior reality" and "sometimes it orders interior reality," Kroetsch argues that "myth is related to the problem of perception, to the way you perceive the landscape."⁷ The disjunction here between imaginative order and lived experience that goes under the rubric of "perception" creates a space that Kroetsch occupies to launch his assault upon outmoded representations of post-colonial identity. He is assisted in this endeavour by the move from the impersonal third-person narrative of *Exiles* to the exuberant comic voice of Johnnie Backstrom. Comedy is a particularly suitable form in which to explore the tension between identity and alienation because of its simultaneous identification with and disengagement from existing social order. Responding to an interviewer's enquiry whether Backstrom is a dualistic character, Kroetsch is drawn in reply into a more general comment on the fundamental ambivalence of comedy as a mode of address:

Sure. Because I think the processes of creation and destruction operate simultaneously. I think that again is part of the comic vision, a recognition of the totality of that relationship. You know there's that Indian deity Shiva, who is both god of creation and of destruction. This too is very much part of the comic vision.⁸

It may well appear in retrospect that the deconstructive irony of Kroetsch's later fiction has its genesis in the comic ambivalence of *Words*. In the present context, the significance of the irrepressible ambivalence of the comic voice arises from its secret acknowledgement that it is necessary to destroy in order to create offers Kroetsch a way out of the appalling stasis of Canadian cultural discourse. To appreciate more fully the importance to Kroetsch's work of the juxtaposition of stasis and ambivalence, we must turn our attention for a moment to his critical writing. In a series of major critical utterances, Kroetsch has developed a theory of post-colonial cultural development that is heavily indebted to the comparativist character of structuralist poetics. This mode of

analysis has enabled him to differentiate at one level between the "Freudian" struggles of American life and the "Jungian" balance of the Canadian cultural environment:

In the United States, the Freudian metaphor has swept the boards, the superego versus the id kind of thing. The id is the good guy trying to free himself, and the superego takes many forms, the government or the military-industrial complex or, in recent history, the universities. The good guy is the youth or the frontiersman, the man in the ten-gallon hat. I see in Canada much less excitement about that particular Freudian metaphor. I suspect we're more Jungian in some way. We see opposites in necessary balance all the time . . .⁹

Despite the residual feeling of security vouchsafed by the promise of less excitement, Kroetsch proceeds to point out that the predilection of the Canadian imagination for the resolution of opposing impulses threatens to erase the constitutive post-colonial experience of difference:

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

Coyote	:	God
Self	:	Community
Energy	:	Stasis

The balance, whatever the specifics, is always so equal that one wonders how paradigm can possibly issue into story.¹⁰

In this semiotic grid Kroetsch provides a hermeneutic model for the essential Canadian "ambiguity" that is indispensable to an understanding of his work. He begins from his primary conviction that each attempt by the Canadian imagination to lend form and structure to its cultural environment breaks down into the "pattern of equally matched opposites" or individual binary structures that are inscribed within post-colonial cultural discourse. Behind the creative vision of the individual imagination lies a series of deep cultural divisions that resolutely resists totalisation. So entrenched have these oppositions become that any effort to progress beyond this basic "paradigm" into "story" or a new perception of self inevitably disintegrates into the series of discrete tensions from which it arises. The interlinked structural terms "paradigm" and "story" are elements of a theoretical vocabulary that allows Kroetsch "to say that in our normal binaries the sides are so evenly drawn that there is a danger of stasis."¹¹ In a perceptive passage Rosemary Sullivan has written that the structure of vision that perceives the world in terms of equally matched opposites "lays itself open to the ironic threat of stasis and silence; rather than creative tension, the risk is mutual cancellation,

or equally unfortunate, endless repetition."¹² In his later fiction Kroetsch is able to find a way beyond the paralysing stasis of binary oppositions by embracing the separate but connected ideas of "contamination" and "deconstruction" which show that relationships of power and domination are inscribed within the binary dyad itself. Before this development, however, he constructs in *Words* a comic fable that records precisely the dissolution of story into paradigm and the debilitating reassertion of the stultifying "balance" of the Canadian imaginative matrix.

In *Words* Kroetsch devises an ironic fable of political emancipation that records the subordination of heterogeneity to the latent dualities of Canadian cultural discourse. He maps this triumph of structure over story through the ebullient first-person narrative of Johnnie Backstrom, who provides an idiosyncratic account of his struggle for election in the contest of 1935. At first glance, Backstrom's narrative might seem an unlikely place in which to discover stasis, balance, and paradigm. After all, it is the relentless energy of Backstrom's voice which propels his dissident campaign for a new and independent cultural and political identity for the west during the grinding misery of the Depression years. The words that he roars into the devastated western spaces describe with intimate and loving detail a culture whose identity is created and reaffirmed in the communal retreats of beer-parlours, sports halls, and Sunday morning at-homes. He speaks, moreover, on behalf of a region deserted by providence and the visible signs of divine justice; the psalmic cry of isolation that gives the novel its title describes not only Backstrom's personal alienation but also the collective cultural marginalisation of a people forgotten by the "grabbers from the East" and the "high-muckie-muck gougers from Ontario."¹³ As his campaign proceeds, he makes himself the hero of the unrepresented by promising his rural constituency the one thing - rain - that can save them from financial ruin. Indeed, Backstrom's transformation into a saviour and folk-hero shows, in Kenneth Graham's words, that his alienation "is the people's alienation, an alienation that arises from the inexplicable workings of economics and nature."¹⁴

However, if Backstrom is defined throughout the novel by voice, presence, and energy, he is simultaneously driven in the opposite direction towards silence and speechlessness. The more that his narrative tries to articulate the common agony of dispossession, the more he is forced into a sullen and isolated wordlessness. Because Backstrom's first-person point-of-view is "a subtle vehicle for revealing [his] divided

self"¹⁵ we watch from a position of privileged proximity as his narrative collapses into the set of contradictions at its core. Cast as a communal saviour who will establish a new vision of the western self, he is at the same time the dynamic and self-interested trickster of western mythology who subordinates the common good to the tug of his own appetites. His capacious personality occupies, in other words, each of the denotative positions that Kroetsch outlines in his semiotic analysis of the Canadian imaginative landscape. Although he is committed to a new vision of Canadian origins, Backstrom's voice is eventually submerged beneath the structure of oppositions that order the ambivalent Canadian identificatory paradigm. To gain an understanding of the rigour of Kroetsch's irony, and the wider implications of Backstrom's self-division, we will be compelled to consider the meaning that Backstrom's mythic projection of himself as rainmaker and redeemer has for a community suspended between anonymity and complete obliteration.

It should be clear from this brief account of *Words* that the novel is enduringly hostile to simplistic interpretations. Even heavily qualified pronouncements, such as Graham's remark that Backstrom's story is "mysteriously providential"¹⁶ come to seem problematic upon closer inspection. If Backstrom's injunction that he is "a great one for paradox" (WMR 53) is kept firmly in mind, Lecker's observation that the undertaker's struggle between words and wordlessness "describes a necessary tension between creation and decreation and . . . a necessary reluctance to embrace either genesis or apocalypse, either sound or silence, either history or myth"¹⁷ seems more responsive to the contours of Backstrom's narrative. Kroetsch's ironic vision demands that we retain a powerful impression of the paradoxes that inhabit Backstrom's discourse because he exploits Backstrom's testimony to illustrate the inevitable end that awaits any attempt to transcend the dichotomous structure of Canadian perception through the messianic assertion of self. His satiric intentions are apparent in the play on "election" that runs throughout the novel, where it connotes both the political contest between Backstrom and Murdoch and the narrator's latent desire for spiritual rebirth with its escape from mortality and decay. The paradox of Backstrom's position is that his urge to transcend the western experience of marginalisation and division through the mythic projection of himself as the "One Honest Man" (WMR 180) who can restore the original prelapsarian language of truth and justice denies the fact that the Canadian is the quintessential subject of difference produced by the historic breach between opposed discourses of culture and society. His transcendent leap beyond difference into pure presence merely internalises this cultural division within the single space of

his own personality without examining it as the specific entailment of contending discourses of power. However, his own experience - particularly his Oedipal relationship with Murdoch, his eastern surrogate father - demonstrates that post-colonial subjectivity necessarily retains a core of ambivalence that can never be erased. By reversing cause and effect and insisting that alienation is an existential fact rather than the cultural consequence of a clash of discourses, Backstrom's self-conscious mythologising of his own experience simply reinforces the culturally constructed binaries that underlie his narrative. Paradoxically, however, it is because his narrative *is* mythic, and therefore a field of discourse open to a range of different interpretations, that we are able to read against the grain of his account and identify his self-division as an individual manifestation of a collective cultural crisis.

The idea of myth as a structure that mediates or reconciles cultural contradictions is clarified by momentary recourse to the work of Claude Levi-Strauss. Levi-Strauss's anthropological research suggests that myth is a tool for the symbolic resolution of unresolved oppositions in the cultural practices of a community. As he writes, "mythical thought always progresses from the awareness of oppositions toward their resolution."¹⁸ To grasp the direct relevance of Levi-Strauss's thought to Kroetsch's work, we need to recall the concept of "structure" that underpins Kroetsch's analysis of Canadian cultural discourse. Levi-Strauss's investigations demonstrate that myths (and cultural systems generally) produce meaning through the differential tension between their constituent elements. In this they are analogous to the phonemic structure of a language. As Terence Hawkes explains, individual signifying systems such as kinship, food, and marriage ritual form "a *partial* expression of the total culture, conceived ultimately as a single gigantic *language*."¹⁹ If culture is a language that incorporates a plethora of discrete semiotic systems, then myth is the mediating structure that allows the mind to establish homologies between different conceptual planes. Furthermore, because mythic thought permits migration across the structures common to several spheres, an understanding of myth gives us "the right to conclude that we have reached a significant knowledge of the unconscious attitude of the society or societies under consideration."²⁰

Levi-Strauss's identification of a connection between the phonemic structure of mythic thought, the contrastive relationship between different semiotic systems, and the unconscious beliefs of a particular culture offers a useful hermeneutic framework for

Words. By considering Backstrom's narrative as an eccentric attempt to create a myth of western unity out of the unresolved contradictions of prairie experience, we are able to make the interpretative connection between Backstrom's *parole* (individual utterance) and the *langue* (underlying system of codes) of the culture that he comes to represent. Ironically, Backstrom is representative of the west not in his passage from alienation to messianic self-presence, but because his vacillation and self-division personify the internal tensions within the cultural body politic. There is thus a curious sense in which, to adopt one of the key terms of Roland Barthes's work, Backstrom's narrative is intransitive: it gestures towards the referent of the external world, but always returns back to the collision of systemic codes within Backstrom's own discourse.²¹ His roaring therefore reveals the pattern of equally matched opposites that preoccupy Kroetsch in his critical writing. The intransitive nature of Backstrom's narrative helps to explain the extreme repetitiousness of his mode of address; as Levi-Strauss points out, "[t]he function of repetition is to render the structure of the myth apparent."²² Despite his emotional isolation, Backstrom is engaged in a desperate search for "the organizational categories and forms through which the mind is able to experience the world, or to organize a meaning in what is essentially in itself meaningless."²³ His attempt to provide a narrative form in which to articulate the fragmentation of Albertan society therefore lends considerable emotional power to Kroetsch's exploration of the unconscious attitudes of western Canadian culture.

Kroetsch takes great care to emphasise the correspondence between Backstrom's individual status as an alienated and bifurcated speaking subject and the more general divisions of post-colonial culture. Consequently, the schism in Backstrom between the need to roar his way to a new identity and his lack of a language in which to describe his experience is replicated by splits and tensions in the outside world. His narrative is set in the dreadful Depression years when the collapse of world financial markets, loss of international business confidence, and the failure of home crops left the west in a catastrophic condition. Added to this, the resentment felt by the west at the perceived indifference of the relatively prosperous east gave rise to a mood of helplessness tinged with sullen defiance. *Words* therefore presents a nation in economic crisis engulfed by a manichaen politics. John A. Irving, whose magisterial study *The Social Credit Movement in Alberta* has influenced Kroetsch's thought,²⁴ describes rural Canada in the 1930's:

Social movements tend to appear during periods of widespread social unrest, when profound dissatisfaction with the existing social order arises. No

conditions could have been more favourable for the development of such unrest than those which existed in Alberta in the autumn of 1932. The farmers of the province had experienced every possible agricultural ordeal; they had been made the playthings of the high tariff manipulators; they had built up markets in the United States only to have them ruthlessly cut off; they had suffered drought and every agricultural pestilence from root-rot to grasshoppers; they had seen prices drop to such incredibly low levels that sometimes it did not pay to haul their produce to market. Under such circumstances, they found it well-nigh impossible to keep up the payments on their heavily mortgaged farms. The discouraged farmers, looking for some tangible cause for all their miseries, focused their resentment and hate upon the banks and loan companies. In the cities, towns, and villages the masses of the people were no better off. Unemployment was general: thousands were living on relief; still other thousands came close to lacking adequate food, clothing, and shelter. Thousands of people were socially perplexed, frustrated, and angry. They were caught in a steel web from which there seemed no escape. Their social environment, their feeling for the process of life, their hope for the future, all became meaningless.²⁵

The vacuum produced by the absence of normal political and social order was filled by the arrival of Social Credit. Social Credit embodies and reveals a crisis of historical development; it represents an extreme response to the economic malaise precipitated by the Great Crash of 1929. As an economic programme it is historically associated with the name of C. H. Douglas. Douglas claimed to have identified a fundamental disjunction between the forces of production and the demands of consumption caused by the excessive cost of production in relation to the purchasing power of the consumer. This observation is the basis of Douglas's famous "A plus B Theorem."²⁶ To rectify this lacuna within modern capitalist production Douglas's mechanistic imagination proposed to stimulate economic demand by introducing, among other measures, new forms of control over the monetary system, a national dividend (the celebrated "social credit") payable to each citizen according to the real wealth of the nation, and a "just price" for goods in order to combat monetary inflation. The moral basis of this minor economic revolution was provided by Douglas's appeal to the national cultural heritage since the application of his proposals would, he believed, liberate the citizen from economic drudgery and facilitate his or her social and cultural self-realisation.

In Alberta the unlikely figure of William Aberhart came to the fore, pioneering an obscure hybrid form of Social Credit economics and biblical fundamentalism. As Irving observes, "Social Credit ideas, Aberhart insisted from the beginning, offered a fulfilment of fundamentalist and prophetic Christianity."²⁷ In Aberhart's revisionary schema the economic justification for Social Credit is based upon its appeal to moral

health. Equally, its prophetic or mythic values demanded a communal return to the unity of the organic whole:

With the exception of his addresses on basic dividends, no aspect of Aberhart's exposition of Social Credit aroused more public interest than his definition of the flow of credit as the bloodstream of the state. Just as the blood flows to every part of the body, feeding, clothing, and sheltering every cell, so, he argued, must credit flow to every individual and every productive enterprise of the state for the same purpose. . . . Unless the amount of purchasing power distributed during any period equates the total production available during that period, a surplus of goods will pile up, production and purchasing power will both be reduced, and pernicious anaemia of its bloodstream will make the state sick unto death.²⁸

Aberhart's adaptation of Douglas's theory transforms the latter's ideal correspondence between production and consumption into an emotional appeal for economic, political, and cultural holism. The consequences of such an exclusivist position are obvious: Aberhart's programme bred isolationism and cultural separatism. On August 22, 1935, to the astonishment of the watching world, Alberta elected the first Social Credit government in history.

The rise of Aberhart and his Social Credit government forms the backdrop to the opening pages of *Words*. By recreating so faithfully the hopes and disappointments of this crucial phase of western cultural development, Kroetsch provides a concrete historical context for his allegorical vision of identity, alienation, and memory in *Exiles*. Backstrom's narrative commences, appropriately enough, in a community hall where he watches his rival Doc Murdoch make a campaign speech to an enthusiastic audience:

Old Murdoch was up on the fancy platform with all the flags and the bankers, promising relief and better prices. Promising new markets. Up there looking like a million dollars, showing his gold teeth and nodding his flat pink face as if drought and hard times and mortgages were just something those three hundred people had dreamt about last night. Promising we could all be as rosy and rich as he was, if we'd just smile when he smiled - and make our X's on the appropriate line.

Old Murdoch up there on the stage, he saw me sneak in and he bowed and said, "My worthy opponent."

That brought the place down. By God, the Union Jacks stood straight out in the gales of laughter. That old community hall just wheezed. The windows rattled their putty loose. The streamers overhead, red, white and blue, curled and uncurled in the raucous air.

Old Murdoch had packed them in and he was laying them out. "My worthy opponent," he said, "has come to bury us not to praise us." (WMR 3-4)

At first glance, this scene appears merely to offer a conventional portrait of the lone political outsider in hopeless opposition to the established hegemony of the local party machine. But if we turn our attention from the transitive (what is narrated) to the intransitive (the way in which it is narrated), we discover that Backstrom's opening speech introduces a number of the binary oppositions that will later impel his story towards silence. Thus Murdoch is depicted as an "old" and wealthy man, who looks "like a million dollars" with his "gold teeth" because he is backed by "the plutocrat bank managers" (WMR 5), and whose high public reputation is symbolised by his position on the raised dais of the platform. Meanwhile, young Johnnie Backstrom is closely identified with the drought, hard times, and crippling mortgages of which he speaks, and symbolically associated by his occupation as an undertaker with the "low" and unesteemed facts of dust, decay, and death. Murdoch's speech in this first scene neatly marks this division between Backstrom and himself when he jokes that the undertaker will be "buried . . . in a landslide of votes" (WMR 4). Behind this series of oppositions lies a further tension between authentic western experience and an east in thrall to the "Union Jacks" of the former imperial presence that Backstrom will exploit shamelessly as the election contest proceeds. In order to clarify the binary structure of Backstrom's discourse, John Clement Ball has organised a number of these oppositions into a compact tabular form:

Johnnie	:	Doc
holes in sleeves	:	"looks like a million"
parched throat	:	more water than he needs
perfect teeth	:	gold teeth
son (first born)	:	father
death-manager (endings)	:	birth-manager (beginnings)
clown	:	hero
butt of jokes	:	maker of jokes
big	:	small
destroyer (Jonah, later)	:	healer
heavy drinker	:	light drinker
no money	:	lots of money
not talking (speechless)	:	talking ²⁹

The dichotomous structure of Backstrom's narrative therefore reveals his internalisation of the binary divisions that afflict Canadian cultural discourse. To illustrate this point, we might note that the separation Backstrom describes between Murdoch's historical understanding of "the long and painful past" (WMR 5) and his own intuitive and poetic response to western needs is present within his own personality. Thus in a number of marvellous passages Backstrom gives expression to the pervasive western experience of isolation within the unbounded prairie spaces in a

language careful, measured, and precise enough to satisfy even Murdoch's *rigorous* verbal restraint:

I was born out here in a farmhouse, remember. The first thing you hear is the wind. And going upstairs, at the turn of the stairs in that first house; a window looked west; and westward in the summer you could see the green of a wind-break, elm and maple and Russian poplar and caragana. Things that don't grow here by nature but have to be planted and tended. And then in the fall you could see through the bare branches out across a mile of wheat stubble; a gradual rise to the horizon, a clump of poplars, a line of telephone poles along a road a mile away, and another farm finally, the closest neighbor. An old man whose wife went out of her mind and had to be put away. (WMR 54)

Elsewhere, however, the connection between the sensitive mind and the west's wide distances is broken by Backstrom's self-conscious projection of himself as a mythic figure beyond the constraints of history and acculturation:

I could find absolutely no place to sit down. What empty seats there were were smack up front. I didn't simply stand at the back of that hall, I loomed. My name, let me say once and for all, is Johnnie Backstrom, and I am six-four in my stocking feet, or nearly so, a man consumed by high ambitions, pretty well hung, and famed as a heller with women. Or at least I was, until the eldest unmarried daughter of the Burkhardt clan proved marvelously fertile on the strength of an awkward and hurried trial. (WMR 4)

Here we find Backstrom insisting upon his status as a primal source of energy and a totem of male virility. He does not simply stand, he "loom[s]"; he is "consumed" by high ambitions; and he is, of course, "pretty well hung" and "famed as a heller with women." The contradiction in Backstrom's idiom between a delicate individual responsiveness to the western landscape and the exaggerated bombast of his mythological song of himself pushes his narrative towards the mock-heroic: Elaine becomes "the eldest unmarried daughter of the Burkhardt clan" and her pregnancy proves her to be "marvellously fertile on the strength of one awkward and hurried trial." Mock-heroic form is traditionally employed to introduce a discrepancy between a language and the environment that it describes; in Backstrom's case, the discrepancy in his position between the historical and mythopoeic imagination eventually calls into question his ability to find any voice at all with which to articulate his vision.

The ambivalence that Backstrom manifests between existential fact and the mythopoeic imagination characterises his response to the political crisis engendered by the Depression. This first becomes evident in the opening scene where, pressed by Murdoch's supporters for his own solution to what Kroetsch calls "the desperate

situation of a people looking for an ideology and a politics that would help them out of their wretchedness,"³⁰ he makes the unfathomable gesture of promising rain to the drought-stricken farmers. It is noticeable that Backstrom himself never wholly comes to terms with his own action and spends the rest of the novel retreating from its implications. Immediately after he introduces the idea of "rain" to the assembly he begins to qualify the sense in which the noun should be understood. "No, sir . . . [t]hat's not what I said" (WMR 8), he replies to a farmer who asks if the advent of rain is contingent upon Backstrom's political victory; later he feels compelled to explain to the reader "I was joking when I said that about the rain. I had to give old Murdoch a smart answer. Why in hell couldn't people forget something?" (WMR 13). But if Backstrom is unable to understand his own curious behaviour, the incident appears less opaque to the reader familiar with Kroetsch's critical writing. For Kroetsch exploits Backstrom's misadventure to point out the poverty of a politics that oscillates between the nostalgic longing for a providential narrative that would identify subjectivity with historical source and primal unity ("rain" operating here as both gift from heaven and water of life) and the perverse luxury of absolute self-abandonment. The inadequacy of Backstrom's solution emerges with the realisation that whether he follows Hornyak and embarks upon a quest for the redemptive waters and absolute self-identity, or apes Peter Guy's initial decision to safeguard himself from history and the terrors of human relationships, he is unable to come to terms with the historical factors behind the ambivalence of the post-colonial condition. Neither Holy Water nor the harsh politics of exclusion are sufficient to explain Backstrom's unaccountable need to encounter the east symbolised by his ten years in Toronto, his relationship with Murdoch, and his attraction to Murdoch's daughter Helen. Because the politics of redemption and narcissism both actively refute the notion of 'difference,' it also becomes easier to understand how a figure so prominently associated with voice is so frequently forced into silence. "I was speechless" (WMR 50) he tells us after an encounter with Helen Murdoch, and later he grants this personal experience almost metaphysical status: "Speechless we come into this world; speechless we go out. What a hell of a state, to be speechless in between" (WMR 56). But as Backstrom's story shows us, this metaphysical loss of voice is in fact the historical consequence of his failure to escape the "double hook" of the specifically Canadian dualities that underpin his entire narrative.

Once the intuitive and paradoxical character of Backstrom's conduct has been established, it becomes possible to discern a larger symbolic significance in his

dramatic appeal for rain. For Backstrom's role as a collective focus for hope (a fertility figure offering water to the parched land) identifies him as a modern shaman who provides a vision of reconciliation and renewal to the stricken community. With the eclectic impulse that informs his approach to narrative styles, literary genres, and mythological patterns, Kroetsch in fact models Backstrom upon three independent but interlinked cultural figures: the picaro, shaman, and trickster. The emphasis of picaresque literature upon a society on the brink of collapse where structures of identification and belief are in abeyance possesses an obvious relevance to Kroetsch's description of the prairie crisis. Equally, the episodic and mock-autobiographical form of picaresque fiction is evident both in the psalmic tone of Backstrom's confession, and the inexorable passage of time shown by the division of his narrative into daily segments, which increases dramatic tension and introduces a form of determinism that his "roaring" attempts to escape. The association of Backstrom with the picaro also suits Kroetsch's ironic intentions. As Alexander Blackburn has noted, the informing idea of the myth of the picaro is "that it has the power to identify and to reverse modern man's alienation from himself, from humanity, and from the universe."³¹ Backstrom's ultimate achievement in supplying the Notikeewin people with an illusion that leads them into a moral wilderness "reverses" modern alienation at a formidable cost to reason and their collective sense of humanity.

Kroetsch's use of the picaro figure to refine and concentrate his ironic vision also helps to account for his thematic use of the shamanistic process. In one sense the structuring theme of shamanism, namely the symbolic death and resurrection of the shaman who undergoes a mortal crisis and then is reborn as a consequence of the vision that he offers to the community, is particularly apt for the story of an undertaker who spends his working life presiding over the edge of man's mortal experience. Also, the fact that shamanistic ritual insists upon a division between the priest, who is the focal point of an established network of social and cultural relations, and the shaman who, in Joseph Campbell's words, gains "a certain power of his own" as "a consequence of a personal psychological crisis"³² sheds light upon the dichotomy Backstrom creates between the "high" hieratic position of Murdoch and his own dissident struggle. However, other aspects of Backstrom's narrative demonstrate Kroetsch's ironic use of shamanistic transfiguration. To begin with, the importance to shamanistic ritual of the individual fast becomes farcical in a land ravaged by hunger. Furthermore, while a vision is disclosed to the shaman that is concealed from others, Backstrom invents a premonition of rain for political gain. And although, as Levi-

Strauss observes, the role of a shaman is to provide a language that makes it possible for a community "to undergo in an ordered and intelligible form a real experience that would otherwise be chaotic and inexpressible,"³³ Backstrom's narrow appeal to a new, exclusive conception of western identity mystifies the historical factors behind the fragmentation of the prairie sense of self. The collective and cathartic shamanistic function expresses the hope, suffering, and expectation of the tribe: the shaman has "an occult power over nature, which he can use either to harm or to benefit his fellows."³⁴ Conversely, Backstrom holds no power over nature and his comic ascension has grave consequences for Murdoch, Jonah Bledd, and the community in general. In place of the sanctity of shamanistic ritual, Backstrom offers the profane practices of the beer-parlour, where drinking, gambling, and boasting establish a common bond. While sickness, swelling of the body, and fainting fits may precede the shaman's rebirth, in Backstrom's case these are the sure signs of a hangover. The comic diminution of his occult power also emerges from the fact that while the shaman is made aware of his holiness and his ability to protect the people from evil at an early age, Backstrom's spiritual gift consists in the dubious knowledge that he was "sent for" as a baseball pitcher where he performed the invaluable public service of "fann[ing] twenty-seven men in a row" (WMR 11).

A third cultural archetype that Kroetsch invokes is the trickster of north American mythology.³⁵ A degree of continuity between the shaman and trickster is observed by Campbell who describes trickster as a "super-shaman."³⁶ The advantage to Kroetsch of employing themes and images from trickster mythology are manifold. In general terms, the trickster tale acts as a prism through which a society comes to see itself. The trickster erupts into a world that he is destined to redefine; through trickster's exigencies, and the effect he has upon those around him, the storyteller is able to construct a portrait of an individual society. Moreover, trickster is a fundamentally ambivalent figure who oscillates between identification with and disruption of the existing social and moral order. He is a fool, a lecher, and a cheat; but he is also the bringer of culture and self-knowledge. Kroetsch inculcates trickster's ambivalence in Backstrom, who brings the "equally matched opposites" of Canadian cultural discourse into a single discursive space. The outward signs of this discursive ambivalence are evident in Backstrom's chronic unreliability as a narrator. The coexistence of opposing impulses appears in Backstrom's narrative often in a stark form: "I cannot stand forgiveness" (WMR 61) he expostulates; "I wanted forgiveness" (WMR 121) he admits of a conversation with the wall-eyed farmer. At other times

Backstrom's sheer lack of insight into his own motives is breath-taking. "But I believe to the best of my knowledge I recount events as they occurred" (WMR 134) the unreliable narrator continues, pausing only to note in the middle of a farrago of complaint that he is "not the sort of man who would let on that he is undergoing an ordeal" (WMR 114). In words perfectly applicable to Backstrom's narrative Paul Radin writes of the Winnebago Trickster:

Trickster is at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself. He wills nothing consciously. At all times he is constrained to behave as he does from impulses over which he has no control. He knows neither good or evil yet he is responsible for both. He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions, yet through his actions all value comes into being.³⁷

A number of correspondences between Backstrom and trickster may be established at an individual and a thematic level. Backstrom, like trickster, is defined by his "uninhibited sexuality"³⁸ and his uncontrollable appetites. We have seen that he introduces himself as a "heller with women" and his wife's pregnancy testifies to his sexual potency. Adverting to his own voracious appetites he confides:

"I consume and I consume. Chapter and verse. Newspaper columns that bulge with advice. The want ads. Food. Hats. Socks. Gasoline. Women. Beer. Hardstuff. I have a large jaw and mouth, my appetite is healthy. My eyes are twenty-twenty and so eager they hate to sleep. My ears are wax-free and larger than normal. I consume and I consume . . ." (WMR 95)

Like trickster, he is also initially defined by his unconsciousness, unpredictability, destructiveness, and self-appointed suffering. Backstrom's unpredictability is signalled ten years before the present crisis by his abrupt departure for the east on "some gigantic roll of the dice" (WMR 24). His dislike of the process of socialisation and the experience of community leads him to dream of "[t]hat old earth without form and full of the void" as "that mysterious thing" seized him, "[t]hat longing for the old chaos" (WMR 101). He retains a vestige of trickster-magic, which appears when he "dr[aws] a circle" around the beer-parlour "with [his] old magic arm" (WMR 11). But underneath his magic and his holy innocence lies the impulse of the "ravening lusting beast" who must "corrupt and destroy" (WMR 63).

From these rather unpromising beginnings the trickster cycle presents the gradual development of trickster's self-awareness: he evolves from a state of pure animality to become the regenerate hero of the tribe. By the middle point of his

wanderings, trickster is shown "emerging out of his complete isolation and lack of all identity, and as becoming aware of himself and the world around him."³⁹ During this difficult passage through the trials of individual and social integration - for trickster's escapades are concerned as much with the discovery of the nature and function of his bodily parts as the quality of his natural environment - he becomes the collective focus for a host of societal energies and tensions. As Jung remarks, "[a] collective personification like the trickster is the product of a totality of individuals and is welcomed by the individual as something known to him, which would not be the case if it were just an individual outgrowth."⁴⁰

However, Backstrom's role as trickster is deeply damaging to the Albertan population. His unconsciousness, unpredictability, and latent destructiveness infect his practical judgement. In Backstrom's hands, the politics of alienation become an alienating politics. Kroetsch registers this disturbance by introducing a number of incompatibilities between the development of the trickster cycle and Backstrom's eccentric progress. Thus in the Winnebago trickster cycle, the Assiniboine trickster myth, and the "Raven" trickster narrative of north-western Canada the world "is represented as originally covered by water."⁴¹ In this environment, trickster only begins his "mediating function" of resolving outstanding "polar terms"⁴² and creating new stories after the water has subsided of itself or after he has caused it to subside. In a variant on the Canadian Raven narrative "the world is represented as being in complete darkness." Kroetsch inverts these narrative principles by showing Backstrom's struggle to provide rain to a community afflicted not by darkness but by a burning sun. In so doing, he problematises Backstrom's role as a "culture-hero."⁴³ This aspect of trickster's character is clearly demonstrated at the end of the Winnebago cycle, where he is pictured removing obstacles to the native Indians from the Mississippi. As the storyteller reports, "[w]hatever he thought might be a hindrance to the Indians he changed."⁴⁴ In contrast, the paradoxical story of Johnnie Backstrom ends with its narrator isolated from the community and curiously defeated by events, aware that his own sympathetic identification with the natural world has been an elaborate fraud.

Some of the unscrupulousness of a trickster denied his final vindication adheres to Backstrom's political campaign. It is certainly possible to detect in his flirtation with Social Credit the shallow self-interest of a man whose inability to understand that the

political crisis of the 1930's is also a crisis of historical identity leads him to define moral and cultural values in a vacuum. In order to underline this point, Kroetsch deliberately exaggerates the ahistorical spiritual fervour of Aberhart's political platform, and, by re-christening Aberhart as "Applecourt," adds a touch of vaudeville comedy to the proceedings. Kroetsch's purpose in making these changes is to emphasise that Social Credit offers a mythological and dangerously exclusive vision of a new prairie identity. Thus although Peter Thomas is correct to observe that through Applecourt Kroetsch expresses "that rhetorical compound of Biblical revelation and judgement which serves as historical commentary in the oral tradition of the prairies," it is essential that he adds the supplementary point that Applecourt offers "the implicit model of the times with its satisfactory wished-for closure in moral judgement."⁴⁵ Backstrom's gleeful acceptance of this moral "closure" is made plain when he attends to one of Applecourt's political sermons during an election meeting at his home:

Applecourt was onto the dirty Easterners who were gouging the West. He had built up to that and now he was onto them. He was talking about the Second Coming and the Last Judgement, the final reckoning of the Fifty Big Shots. Just wait, he said. And he gave them a blanket condemnation. "Just wait, and in short order the wicked will be punished and the suffering good will be rewarded." It was a great formula. People looked at me and nodded and smiled. And I smiled and nodded. We were getting the hang of it fast. The Fifty Thieves, Applecourt said. You're damned tooting, I nodded. (WMR 35-36)

Two features of Kroetsch's presentation of Social Credit demand attention. First, Applecourt's tendentious references to the "Second Coming" and the "Last Judgement" discover a panacea for western cultural marginalisation in the resurrection myth of the Old World. As Guy found on Lobstick Island, such a strategy is problematic for the New World subject and this contradiction returns to haunt Backstrom during his dalliance with Helen in Murdoch's edenic eastern garden. Secondly, Applecourt's dogmatic substitution of a temporally unspecific moral apoplexy for a rational assessment of prevailing economic conditions creates the climate for the naked opportunism that characterises a great deal of Backstrom's behaviour. Applecourt's use of an apocalyptic idiom to underpin a fascist rhetoric is genuinely chilling; the substitution of "Jews" for "Easterners" in the above quotation provides an unhappy reminder of other nationalist discourses of the decade. His rhetorical appeal to fear and prejudice rather than reason provides the perfect opportunity for the unscrupulous to exploit an uncertain situation for personal gain. For the estranged figure of Backstrom, who lost his father at Ypres during a colonial war and who rebels at the order and domesticity of family life (symbolised by his neglect of his pregnant

wife), such an opportunity is too good to miss. He accepts Applecourt's political position, launches a series of scandalous personal attacks on the Ontario-born Murdoch, and uses the resulting emotional hysteria dramatically to increase campaign contributions from an outraged and bewildered public. Backstrom's ludicrous attempt to disguise his random cupidity as political integrity is skilfully undermined by Kroetsch, who juxtaposes his narrator's self-congratulatory participation in "a fine discussion of cultural heritage and the flow of credit as the bloodstream of the nation" with the more prosaic admission that he "took in over four dollars" (WMR 40). Similarly, Backstrom's remarks that "[i]t was a great formula" and "[w]e were getting the hang of it" betray the tone of an advertising-manager, further amplifying the cynicism with which he records his motives for entering the political contest:

And I knew all the time that a single funeral, the cheapest kind of funeral, could save me. Just a few dollars in the old tin cash box and I'd campaign Murdoch right off the dirt roads. Out of the farmer towns and the skating arenas and the country schoolhouses. Just one hundred dollars cash from one man who was rich enough to die; I'd be a member of the Legislative Assembly come September. You bet your sweet life. Let the snow fly and I'd be sitting up there in the Parliament buildings, gawking out a window at the streetcars crossing the High Level Bridge. The micks and bohunks be damned; let the krauts and the crazy Swedes bury their own dead. Tough titty, boys. No more digging the grave myself to make the extra two bucks. Not for John B., M. L. A. Indemnity, they call it; nothing so crass as salary. Compensation for money that was never yours to lose. Five solid years of good green indemnification. (WMR 7)

In a judicious sentence Peter Thomas has argued that Backstrom "adopts the tone of Applecourt's voice, its hyperbole and metaphors of extremity, without its faith in a final resolving order."⁴⁶ For Backstrom, disorder is the only order because he violently resists the authority words possess to frame individual action and solidify time into history. Since Backstrom narrates the story of the Albertan election, with all the scope for characterisation, opinion, and judgement that the act of storytelling entails, his antipathy to narrative form is not the least of his paradoxes. However, his artistic taste for "ordered chaos"⁴⁷ poses a genuine threat to those who unashamedly live in history and time. This is particularly true in the case of his longtime friend Jonah Bledd. Unlike Backstrom, Bledd represents responsibility, fidelity, and a sense of historical rootedness. As Backstrom recollects, Bledd was "so relaxed and contented himself, sipping away at a beer in his wife's presence, a brood of kids climbing all over him, while he pretended to read that rag of a local paper" (WMR 69). Backstrom's ultraromantic credo "[I]ive, live. Roar, roar" (WMR 144) is the complete antithesis of Bledd's example; his drunken irresponsibility, which leads him to crash his car thereby

breaking Bledd's arm and rendering him unfit for work, is the direct cause of his friend's suicide. Bledd's christian name thus becomes grimly appropriate: he is swallowed up by Backstrom's need to "stride and thunder and roar" (WMR 162).

Backstrom's refusal to engage with those situations of brute fact that resist the dynamic sweep of his personality is nowhere better illustrated than in his encounters with the wall-eyed farmer. Betrayed by the collapse of agricultural markets, the farmer auctions off his property to avoid its confiscation by the bank. Backstrom's contribution to the farmer's relief-fund is the promise of one hundred and twenty-eight dollars that he cannot possibly pay. The reason for his bid is simple: "Words were in me, knocking to be let out. Pain was in me, and I let out the pain" (WMR 86). Confronted by a predicament that eludes his personal control, his response is to set up a private verbal world to rival the real. His seduction by the open-ended rhetoric of redemption, beginnings, and endings explains why he can never finally break with Applecarr's apocalyptic vision. Although he rounds on Applecarr, accusing him of being a "flatulent windbag" who is hopelessly submissive to the "old dualities" (WMR 94), the charge is so close to a self-indictment that the exchange is best understood as a conversation with his own conscience. His temperamental inability to engage with history without recourse to Applecarr's apocalyptic discourse becomes apparent during his famous "hind tit" speech at the stampede, where the need for political agency forces him to retreat into the scriptural idiom of revelation and renewal:

It was while I was mopping the sweat off my bare forehead that more of the Bible came to my mind. Just like that. "And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire." I shook my fists at that blazing hammering sky. And then I dropped my voice. I let the hush fall. "We are afflicted," I said. "Afflicted and plagued, my friends. But remember. Let me repeat: remember. If you feel - if you feel in your heart and bowels that the heat can no longer be endured. If you know that the burning must cease. If you agree that we must have back our self-respect, our sense of decency, our hope, our pride - maybe then you should vote, my dear friends - you should vote for the clown. (WMR 112)

But if Backstrom is the mythological trickster whose comic duplicities articulate his "insatiable hunger not just for something but for everything" (WMR 146), he is also a shaman who must offer a vision that puts into language the western experience of exclusion and marginalisation. Because he personifies as shaman the divided narrative of Canadian history, Backstrom is continually attracted to an east that he associates with closure, stasis, and the privileged discourse of imperial order. No matter how great his

aversion as trickster to established rhetorical and historical forces, his shamanistic experience compels him to recognise the impossibility of understanding western existence without recourse to the constant tensions between east and west, history and mythology, form and flux. The inexorability of these cultural tensions is symbolised by the Oedipal tension between Backstrom and his eastern 'father' Murdoch. Because Backstrom's entire electoral campaign bespeaks his need to find an independent voice beyond the limit of Murdoch's rhetorical and political authority, it is difficult to interpret the relationship between the two men as anything other than an allegorical exploration of the tension between the imperial father (given Murdoch's willingness to identify himself with the imperial image of the Union Jack) and his estranged colonial offspring. The delicate political allegory implicit in this paternal relationship is enhanced by the idea of surrogacy that Kroetsch introduces. Murdoch is not Backstrom's natural father; he exercises a powerful but discrete influence upon his surrogate son from a polite distance. As Helen reminds Backstrom, her father "almost sees you as a son" (WMR 63). Backstrom is, in Murdoch's words, "the first child I brought into this world" (WMR 6); and the undertaker always remains Murdoch's "first-born" (WMR 22). In return, Backstrom is drawn to the order and coherence of Murdoch's eastern background. Travelling east on a "harvest excursion" (WMR 56), he enters Murdoch's east to discover a vision of Eden that is the complete antithesis of the west with "all those damned dirt roads running nowhere in straight lines" (WMR 59):

"Eden," I said. By God, I just burst out. "The green lush old Eden." For a moment there I really felt good. I forgot the blinding sun outside, out there past that rubber plant and the Venetian blinds; I forgot that vast empty glare of sky that was waiting to humiliate me one more. Just for a minute I felt really on top of the world. "That was A-1," I said. "Once I got a whiff of that country, I had some idea of what heaven must be like. (WMR 58)

The tension between the closure of Old World myths of origin and the uncreated history of the west is enacted during the lovemaking of Backstrom and Helen in Murdoch's paradisiacal garden. Murdoch's garden is his "private domain" (WMR 160), a "little bit of the East" (WMR 158) that he has brought back to the arid west. Its order, lushness, and fecundity place it in stark contrast to the cracked and desolate land tended by the bankrupt prairie farmers. Here, in the timeless space of "an artificially sustained Eden cut off from change,"⁴⁸ the dual halves of Backstrom's personality undergo a radical separation. Alive to the transfigurative potential of Murdoch's lush Eden, Backstrom joyfully accepts Kettle Hornyak's invitation to construct a New

World mysteriously redeemed from the loneliness and self-division of the post-colonial experience:

I stood naked before Helen. The branches of trees, the flower beds and the bushes blossomed anew in sweat-stiffened clothes, in clothes that were much the worse for wear. My shorts were nothing but holes. I stood naked and proud in that garden, one sock on my left foot, my feet tender, nevertheless, my hands raised up in stark humility to that hidden bird, the stars wheeling as they pleased. "Helen," I said, it's all gone and a good riddance of bad rubbish. I'm going to start over, from the ground up, from my birthday suit out." (WMR 166)

At the same time, however, Backstrom's phallic energy and exalted sense of his own "mortality" (WMR 162) make a mockery of "Christian duty" (WMR 161) and the adamic inheritance; his "seven nights in a row" (WMR 157) in Murdoch's garden enact a "parodied creation-myth"⁴⁹ that declines to exchange secular agony for the rhetoric of redemption. The contradiction in his discourse between the desire for transcendence and a rueful acknowledgement of mortal fallenness is captured perfectly in his self-parodying remark that he has "less than twenty-four hours in which to lay on a cloudburst" (WMR 172). Both creator of meaning and ironic commentator on meaning's collapse, he occupies the space reserved for the Canadian artist between the contending claims of God and Coyote:

the artist him / her self:

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

he lets in the irrational along with the rational, the pre-moral along with the moral. He is a shape-shifter, at least in the limited way of old lady Potter. He is the charlatan-healer, like Felix Prosper, the low down Buddha-bellied fiddler midwife (him / her) rather than Joyce's high priest of art.⁵⁰

In retrospect, Backstrom's simultaneous identification with God and Coyote marks the triumph of paradigm over story and deprives him of the power of shamanistic vision. His reflex decision to unite these equally matched opposites in a single discursive space, instead of examining them as the effect of a historical and cultural schism, locks Kroetsch's semiotic grid into place and forecloses on narrative itself. The failure of paradigm to issue into story is plain throughout Backstrom's rhetorical attempt to present himself as the "One Honest Man" who could "sire a new age" (WMR 180). The significance of this phase of his career is that the redemptive unity symbolised by his new incarnation assimilates each of the dualisms outlined in

Kroetsch's semiotic critique into a transcendent vision of self. As such, it develops the messianic theme that runs throughout Backstrom's narrative: he is thirty-three years old (Christ's age at his crucifixion); his life is a constant struggle against "temptation" (WMR 102); and his predicament at the square-dance, where he is surrounded by a howling mob of female claimants, parodies the fervour of Christ's petitioners. Kroetsch points out the absurdity of Backstrom's redemptive rhetoric by bringing him face-to-face with a number of his profane *doppelgänger*s. One of these doubles is the rodeo clown who, like Backstrom, is "crowding six-three or six-four" (WMR 106) and is "[m]aybe in his thirties" (WMR 122). The clown's fate suggests the awful destiny awaiting those who mistake the true nature of their circumstances. Innocence is not enough for the clown in the bull's den; he is ripped and gouged to pieces. Looking down at the clown's broken body, Backstrom experiences a *frisson* of recognition. "The spirit struck into frantic despair; I saw it all right. Without so much as peeking, I saw and I saw" (WMR 106). Elsewhere, as Kenneth Graham notes, "[a]nother of Johnnie's selves that he is fated to meet repeatedly is the filthy, old, itinerant prophet, who promises audaciously that the world will end tomorrow and repeats the promise unreservedly on the following day."⁵¹ Fittingly, it is in the company of the prophet that Backstrom is forced to acknowledge the hollowness of his reputation as rain-bringer and provincial messiah. It therefore seems quite appropriate that the prophet climbs into Backstrom's hearse "as if he owned it" (WMR 187).

Each of Backstrom's comic doubles represents a symbolic warning to him to foreswear Applecart's spiritual and cultural holism and to articulate the historical and linguistic difference of the Canadian story. But by this stage of his narrative he is, like the young rodeo-rider with whom he briefly empathises, set on a course of action that he cannot check. Although the thought of conducting a dispassionate historical analysis of the situation momentarily commends itself to him, it is swiftly superseded by the resurgence of his projection of himself as the mythological redeemer of the prairies. Ironically, though, his "One Honest Man" speech, which attempts to transcend alienation through the redemptive rhetoric of eternal presence, disintegrates into the verbal chaos that defines trickster's world of "beginnings and endings. The old confusion" (WMR 125):

My dear friends, it has not rained and I'm sorry and I'd like to go up to the Parliament buildings this fall and make amends. I'm in this with you. This poverty is our poverty. This drought, my dear friends, is our drought. We need new blood. We need action; enough of words and promises and filthy lies. And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, I will

spare all the place for their sakes. Or for twenty. Or for ten. Or- yes, my dear friends, yes - One Honest Man can do what a gang of cutthroat schemers, agents of the Fifty Big Shots, has never done. Has never been able to do. Never will do. One Honest Man, my dear friends - (WMR 180)

In this passage, God and Coyote are locked in mortal combat. A speech which promises an end to mere "words and promises and filthy lies" is turned into an empty verbal pattern, ending as it began with the phrase "my dear friends." The circularity of Backstrom's rhetoric is simply the manifestation in language of the binary paradigm that he has internalised. All his visionary outburst achieves is to shift the site of cultural conflict from the community at large to the schismatic body of his own narrative. Simultaneously trickster and messiah, individualist and focus of communal longing, dynamic "heller with women" and beaten icon, Backstrom is no longer able to put his vision into words. As Kroetsch's semiotic paradigm reasserts itself, Backstrom is first "undecided" (WMR 181), then "speechless" (WMR 202). In a remark that could stand as his epitaph, he laments that "[w]ords always fail me at the wrong time" (WMR 203). Ironically, he is granted an insight at the last into the manifest illusion of his shamanistic power. Driving with the prophet towards an election rally at Coulee Hill, he is caught in a downpour of rain. Taken by surprise, he is consumed by a "terrible doubt." "The more I confronted the facts," he admits, "the more I was overwhelmed by a terrible realization. I had nothing to do with the rain" (WMR 192). Denied access to the universal rhetoric of redemption, Backstrom is left with the contradictions from which he began. The bitter truth of Elaine's remark that he could "beat them *without* rain" (WMR 174) by identifying western paralysis as a crisis of self-image as well as a lack of material prosperity comes back to haunt him. But it is too late; his rhetoric has outrun him. Bringing Murdoch home from his wasted labour at the Gunn farm, Backstrom is exposed to the misplaced gratitude of a people who believe that they have found their messiah. Here, at the climactic moment of his electoral campaign, he is trapped within a narrative that he can no longer control:

A family met us with a warm drink, hot cocoa, teetotallers again, a couple with two little kids who just wanted to see me. Little pale kids who looked thin and sickly shivering down there beside the wagon wheel, their big eyes staring. See me of all people, Johnnie Backstrom, a mere undertaker, sitting up there on that springboard seat beside an M. D. The lantern just barely managed to light up the streaking rain. If I'd been alone I think I would have cried. The father picked up the little kids one at a time and raised them closer. But having the Doc with me that way, I was embarrassed. (WMR 203-04)

The "terrifying irony"⁵² that increasingly comes to characterise Kroetsch's writing pervades the final pages of the novel. Backstrom's primary impulse is to speak

for a people stranded between history and mythology, who have, in Dennis Lee's fine phrase, "made an alien inarticulacy their own."⁵³ But by merely internalising this opposition within his own discourse of western identity, Backstrom leaves himself without a position from which to speak. In his final "speech" of the novel he provides a poignant image of his own irremediable stasis:

One hour to meditate on the nature of raw ambition and man's ultimate end. . . . One hour in which to prepare a speech. They'd probably come out to meet me; out into the rain, hundreds of people, running and waving and cheering in the rain. Over and over I tried different approaches. "My dear friends," I said, speaking directly to the horses, that coffin joggled along behind, "my dear friends, I met tonight with Duncan Murdoch, the man who delivered . . ." Beginnings and endings. I had to make amends. By God, the world is a wicked place. A man could get piles, sitting so long on a cold, wet board. "My dear friends, the time is at hand. We've had enough suffering. Enough crying. We've had enough pain. Enough dried codfish-" No, damnit, 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 teetotallers, the pious-" No no no no. A man has to make amends. I owed it to the old Doc. I'd fight my way tight-lipped into that hall. I'd be up on that stage before I opened my mouth. We must make amends in this world. "Rain," I would have to begin, the flags stilled about me; the crowd tense and waiting. I'd be soaked to the skin. I let the binder canvas fall to the floor of the wagon; hunched I sat, stubborn against the rain, soggy and alone as a creature of the deep. It was blistering cold in the wet night, I have never been so alone. But I had a duty and I couldn't stop; somehow I would have to begin, "My dear friends, rain . . ." (WMR 210-11)

In this last burst of frustrated eloquence, Backstrom's ability to convert paradigm into story is irrevocably lost. His desperate attempt to give "a name to what [he] knew" (WMR 150) ends in repetition, contradiction, and disjunction. This rhetorical breakdown is signalled by his hapless use of anaphora. "One hour to meditate," he reminds himself, only to run into the blank repetition of "[o]ne hour in which to prepare a speech." He tries different approaches "[o]ver and over" but the engine will not sputter into life. Sentences end in ellipses, lost in the maze of "[b]eginnings and endings." "My dear friends," he tries again, unaware perhaps that this phrase announced the premature end of his "One Honest Man" peroration and will inevitably conclude this speech as well. "No, damnit, no," he castigates himself, "[e]xplain, explain." He begins again with the phrase "my dear friends" only to end with the injunction "[a] man has to make amends" which pops up again in almost identical form a few sentences later. As he thrashes around for a way to begin, sentences such as "[i]t was blistering cold in the wet night" appear to belong to a different story altogether. His insistence that he "had a duty and [he] couldn't stop" is ironic; the problem is that his narrative cannot start. He knows that somehow he will

"have to begin," but the last phrase "[m]y dear friends, rain . . ." takes him back to the beginning and delivers him up to his own emptiness.

By the close of the novel, Backstrom is hopelessly lost in the "conundrum in naming" (WMR 168) that all his speech has become. As Kroetsch concludes, Backstrom "has this rage to tell a story and he can't tell his own story."⁵⁴ Silence once more becomes his business because, as Rosemary Sullivan points out

Backstrom's confessionalism, his continual self-rehearsals end by vitiating all potential energy in the self. The problem we begin to recognize, is egocentrism. Prophets go into the desert to lose the self. But Backstrom is no prophet. All action is located in the self. The paradox of romantic egotism is that it cannot put trust in the self by reference to something larger than the self, be it Kroetsch's "community" or "God." Yet at the same time it demands for the self, total control. And of course the quest for perfection, the impulse to totality, is presumptive and destructive.⁵⁵

The ultimate paradox of Backstrom's position is that his "impulse to totality" is by definition unable to articulate the post-colonial experience of marginalisation, division, and exclusion. His "presumptive and destructive" quest for perfection simply dissolves into a series of unresolved oppositions. In this sense, John Clement Ball is correct to argue that *Words* is about the "bringing together of normally separate things" but wrong to say that this process leads to the "resolution of dichotomies."⁵⁶ With Backstrom's narrative, Kroetsch is not "writing against the prairie mythology (the 'systems') that he himself has identified"⁵⁷; rather, he has discovered a vibrant colloquial idiom in which to illustrate these systems in the most striking way possible.

Words brings the initial phase of Kroetsch's novelistic fiction to a conclusion. In the unreliable and schismatic narrative of Johnnie Backstrom, he discovers the perfect structural model with which to demonstrate the effect that the divisions and exclusions of post-colonial experience have had upon native Canadian discourses of self-identification. But having diagnosed the Canadian impulse toward paradigm and stasis, Kroetsch must, as a chronicler of the post-colonial experience, find a way of dealing with the paradoxes that leave Backstrom in a "terrifying and total solipsism."⁵⁸ His solution to this conundrum is to undertake the journey described by Sullivan from "the self" to "something larger than the self" by examining the dualisms of Canadian experience as products of discourse rather than existential truth. His decision to abandon mimesis for the fundamentally ironic framework of a deconstructive poetics

enables him to examine the Canadian binary paradigm in terms of the relationship between discourses of history and institutional sites of power. In this context, it becomes possible to explore the construction of the history of the colonial subject within an analysis of the textual production of meaning. The Canadian critic Dennis Lee has hinted at just such a project:

Try to speak the words of your home and you will discover - if you are a colonial - that you do not know them. . . . To speak unreflectingly in a colony then, is to use words that speak only alien space. To reflect is to fall silent, discovering that your authentic space does not have words. And to reflect further is to recognise that you and your people do not in fact have a privileged authentic space just waiting for words; you are, among other things, the people who have made an alien inarticulacy your own. You are left chafing at the inarticulacy of a native space which may not exist. . . .

But perhaps - and here was the breakthrough - perhaps our job was not to fake a space of our own and write it up, but rather to find words for our space-lessness. . . . Instead of pushing against the grain of an external, uncharged language, perhaps we should finally come to writing *with* that grain.⁵⁹

To write the history of Canadian "space-lessness" is to embrace the deconstructive insight that it is necessary to unname in order to name. It is Kroetsch's investigation of the relationship between history, power, and unnamings, embodied in Demeter Proudfoot's biography of Hazard Lepage, that this thesis will now address.

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- 1 Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobsen and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (1968; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979) 366.
 - 2 Russell M. Brown, "An Interview With Robert Kroetsch," 2-3.
 - 3 Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," *The Lovely Treachery of Words* 23.
 - 4 Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," 23.
 - 5 Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," 24.
 - 6 Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths of Voice* 135.
 - 7 Brown, "An Interview," 6.
 - 8 Brown, "An Interview," 9.
 - 9 Donald Cameron, *Conversations With Canadian Novelists: Part One* 85.
 - 10 Robert Kroetsch and Diane Bessai, "Death is a Happy Ending," 215.
 - 11 Neuman and Wilson 124.
 - 12 Rosemary Sullivan, "The Fascinating Place Between: The Fiction of Robert Kroetsch," 167.
 - 13 Robert Kroetsch, *The Words of My Roaring* (Ontario: PaperJacks, 1977) 110. Future references to this edition will be marked by the abbreviation "WMR" and incorporated into the main body of the text.
 - 14 Kenneth W. Graham, "Picaro as Messiah: Backstrom's Election in *The Words of My Roaring*," *Mosaic* 14. 2 (1981): 181
 - 15 Graham 180.
 - 16 Graham, "Picaro as Messiah," 178.
 - 17 Lecker, *Robert Kroetsch* 42.
 - 18 Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* 224.
 - 19 Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism And Semiotics* (1977; London: Methuen, 1983) 34.
 - 20 Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* 87.
 - 21 For this distinction between transitive and intransitive modes of writing, see Roland Barthes, "To Write: An Intransitive Verb," *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man: The Structuralist Controversy*, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1970) 143.
 - 22 Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* 229.
 - 23 Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (1972; Princeton and London: Princeton University Press, 1974) 109.

²⁴ Commenting upon William Aberhart in his cultural guide *Alberta* Kroetsch writes: "The man deserves a major biography; fortunately we have at least a chapter in John A. Irving's brilliant but neglected study *The Social Credit Movement in Alberta*." Kroetsch, *Alberta* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1968) 22.

²⁵ John A. Irving, *The Social Credit Movement in Alberta* (1959; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968) 4.

²⁶ "As assistant director of the Royal Aircraft Works in England during the First World War, he made comprehensive studies of cost accounting which led him to the conclusion that, in over 100 industrial establishments, the weekly sum-total of wages and salaries was continuously less than the weekly collective price of the goods produced. It was upon this conclusion that he formulated his now famous "A plus B Theorem." In this theorem, A equals the flow of purchasing power to the masses (as represented by wages, salaries, and dividends), and B equals bank charges, overhead costs, taxes, and the cost of raw materials. If A plus B represents the cost of production under the financial system, the rate of flow of purchasing power to the masses will be less than the rate of flow of prices in the same period of time. There will thus be a discrepancy, which Douglas maintains must be permanent, between A (the purchasing power of consumers) and A plus B (the total cost of production). The "A plus B theorem" became the key conception of Douglas's economic theories, and provided him and his followers with one of their principal slogans, "Poverty in the Midst of Plenty," a paradox which clearly has very great propaganda value in a period of widespread social unrest fostered by an economic depression." Irving 5

²⁷ Irving, *The Social Credit Movement in Alberta* 51.

²⁸ Irving 55.

²⁹ John Clement Ball, "The Carnival of Babel: The Construction of Voice in Robert Kroetsch's 'Out West' Triptych," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 39 (1989): 3.

³⁰ Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths of Voice* 122.

³¹ Alexander Blackburn, *The Myth of the Picaro* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979) 202.

³² Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology*, vol. 1 (1976; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982) 231.

³³ Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* 198.

³⁴ Campbell 249.

³⁵ In an interview Kroetsch expands on the importance to his work of the trickster myth. "I went and looked in my copy of Radin, but I couldn't discover when I first read him on the trickster. In any case, I was certainly aware that I had tuned in on the

figure of the trickster before I knew that it was a trickster in Radin's sense. The trickster's a mythic figure that really speaks to me. Partly this is because a trickster breaks down systems. There is no logic to his behavior, or only an anti-logic. . . . He's energy independent of moral structure and moral interpretation. He's very subversive, very carnivalesque. Furthermore, the trickster is often tricked. That intrigues me." Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths of Voice* 99-100.

³⁶ Campbell, *The Masks of God* 275.

³⁷ Paul Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*, with commentaries by Karl Kerenyi and C. G. Jung (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956) ix.

³⁸ Radin, *The Trickster* 168.

³⁹ Radin, *The Trickster* 135.

⁴⁰ C. G. Jung, commentary, "On The Psychology of the Trickster Figure," *The Trickster* 201.

⁴¹ Radin, *The Trickster* 156.

⁴² Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* 226.

⁴³ Radin 166.

⁴⁴ Radin, *The Trickster* 52.

⁴⁵ Thomas, *Robert Kroetsch* 46.

⁴⁶ Thomas 47.

⁴⁷ Lecker, *Robert Kroetsch* 42.

⁴⁸ Lecker 40.

⁴⁹ Thomas, *Robert Kroetsch* 42.

⁵⁰ Kroetsch and Bessai, "Death is a Happy Ending," 209.

⁵¹ Graham, "Picaro as Messiah," 181.

⁵² Sullivan, "The Fascinating Place Between," 168.

⁵³ Dennis Lee, "Cadence, Country, Silence: Writing in Colonial Space," *Boundary 2* 3. 1 (1974): 163.

⁵⁴ Neuman and Wilson 174.

⁵⁵ Sullivan 170.

⁵⁶ Ball, "The Carnival of Babel," 6.

⁵⁷ Ball 7.

⁵⁸ Sullivan, "The Fascinating Place Between," 171.

⁵⁹ Lee, "Cadence, Country, Silence," 163.

Chapter Four
Whose Story is it Anyway:
Biography as History in *The Studhorse Man*

Discursive practices are not purely and simply ways of producing discourse. They are embodied in technical processes, in institutions, in patterns for general behavior, in forms for transmission and diffusion, and in pedagogical forms which, at once, impose and maintain them.¹

No one wants to be part of a fiction, and even less so if that fiction is real.²

Both *But We Are Exiles* and *The Words of My Roaring* offer compelling meditations upon the Canadian search for historical and cultural identity. By presenting Peter Guy and Johnnie Backstrom as questing figures who symbolically represent the aspirations and anxieties of an entire people, Kroetsch uses their adventures to make a general comment about the character of post-colonial culture. The contradiction that both characters perceive between the desire for an identity uncontaminated by difference and the dislocation from historical origin that constitutes the post-colonial experience becomes one of the primary themes of his work. The subtle negotiation between individual and collective destiny in Kroetsch's early novels therefore lays lasting claim to our critical attention.

These two early novels not only introduce the tension between identity and difference into Kroetsch's prose fiction: they also provide an artistic reflection upon the forms in which this theme should be narrated. Kroetsch's increasing emphasis upon the act of narration is signalled by his shift from the third-person narrative of *Exiles* to Backstrom's schismatic and contradictory first-person voice. I want to suggest that the mutability in Kroetsch's approach to the question of narrative is produced by the incompatibility that exists between realist aesthetics and the expression of cultural alterity. In order to make this point clear, it is necessary to return momentarily to Colin MacCabe's analysis of the classic realist text.

In his remarks upon the nineteenth-century novel, MacCabe suggests that classic realism is a form that produces meaning by enforcing a repressive hierarchy between the various discourses that make up the literary text. This strict discursive hierarchy is held in place by an unspoken authorial meta-narrative that provides the reader with an interpretative apparatus with which to judge the relative merits of the

individual discourses that he or she encounters. One of the great achievements of Joycean poetics, in MacCabe's eyes, is that it compels the meta-narrative of realism to acknowledge its "own status as writing - as marks of material difference distributed through time and space"³ and thus liberated the individual object-discourses from a position of subservience. One important consequence of this dissolution of a dominant meta-narrative is that "[t]he claim of the narrative prose to grant direct access to a final reality" and to "represent the invariable features of humanity"⁴ is challenged as a number of different discourses struggle for hegemony across the space of the typographic page.

I am placing considerable emphasis upon MacCabe's critique of the realist text because it offers several clues to the development in Kroetsch's work from a mimetic to a postmodern poetics. It is clear from the remarks of Homi Bhabha recorded in Chapter Two that mimesis, which proclaims the transparency of the relationship between word and world, is a problematic medium in which to explore the "alien inauthenticity"⁵ of the post-colonial condition. In addition to Bhabha's assault upon the political status of mimesis, MacCabe's analysis of realism asserts that the realist text segregates individual discourses from each other and therefore makes an implicit distinction between different orders of experience. The fact that realist meta-narrative provides an hermeneutic code by which the reader discriminates between different orders of discourse presents particular difficulties for Kroetsch because it assimilates the marginal and the "other" into a uniform textual field. The translation and explication of alterity within the discourse of the "same" therefore repeats at a textual level the suppression and marginalisation of the radically "other" by an homogenising discourse of identity and presence.

Realist fiction is, in other words, an unlikely form in which to consider the question of cultural alterity because it enforces exacting limits upon the expression of difference. Its authorial meta-narrative might itself be said to have a colonising function since it remorselessly interprets the new within a preconceived system of values. The connection that can be established between the colonising tendencies of certain forms of political and literary discourse offers an intriguing perspective upon the direction taken by Kroetsch's work after *Words*. For *The Studhorse Man*, his third novel, explicitly links the operation of a literary meta-language to the imposition of a discourse of cultural order. The ability of the discourse of colonialism to revisualise colonial space

and incorporate the "other" into its own field of reference was central to its success. In one of the most significant developments of his novelistic career, Kroetsch creates in *The Studhorse Man* a resonant textual metaphor for this act of colonisation. At a rudimentary level, the novel records Demeter Proudfoot's attempt to write a complete biographical account of Hazard Lepage, studhorse man, and symbol of a vanishing strand of western Canadian history. But Kroetsch uses this deceptively simple narrative to forge an allegorical link between Demeter's biographical appropriation of Hazard's history and Western representations of colonial identity. The act of biography therefore functions in the text as a metaphor for the discourse of colonialism; it represents a vision of history that must be displaced before the indigenous Canadian voice can properly be heard.

By focusing so insistently in *The Studhorse Man* upon the relationship of power between biographer and biographical subject, Kroetsch signals his desire to examine the material production of discourses of colonial history. In fact, both *The Studhorse Man* and *Gone Indian* mark a shift in Kroetsch's approach away from the interior history of the Canadian subject's division toward an examination of the political discourses that circumscribe post-colonial experience. The development in these novels from a passive representation of cultural alienation to a transformative reading of cultural discourse is shown by the increasingly contestatory character of the struggle they depict between individuals for a position of discursive hegemony. In both novels the act of biography is introduced as a metaphor for the influence of colonialist discourse upon the narrative of Canadian history; it is also used to detail the individual's struggle for autonomy within a discourse that it cannot control. Neither Hazard Lepage nor Jeremy Sadness (the postgraduate student who tries to discover his identity in the northwestern Canadian interior) exist outside the contextualising discourses of Demeter Proudfoot and Mark Madham which appropriate and interpret their experience. By charting the failure of Lepage and Sadness to attain an enunciative position from which to articulate their own story, Kroetsch bears eloquent witness to the discursive constraints placed upon the independent expression of Canadian experience.

The Studhorse Man and *Gone Indian* are not, however, unidirectional narratives of domination and exploitation. Lepage and Sadness both make a number of attempts to contest the sequestration of their own history. Their dissent is crucial to the

meaning of both texts: the refusal of these characters to occupy the positions allotted to them within the totalising discourses that claim to represent their lives demonstrates that post-colonial identity is not a 'natural' condition anterior to discourse but an ideological construction formed by the interchange of discursive rules and prohibitions. The textual antagonism between 'author' and subject in these novels therefore allows Kroetsch to expose the assumptions and exclusions that characterise Demeter and Madham's colonising narratives. By creating an allegorical relationship between the act of biography and the dynamics of colonialist appropriation Kroetsch is thus able to denaturalise politically coded images of post-colonial culture. He also manages to effect the transition from the private space of character to that radical discursive exteriority where different versions of post-colonial history come into open conflict.

As these remarks suggest, the appearance of *The Studhorse Man* in 1969 constitutes a major turning point in Kroetsch's artistic career. In this chapter I want to consider four developments in his work that fundamentally alter his approach to the discursive colonisation of Canada. The first, which illustrates the broadly Foucauldian character of Kroetsch's prose fiction, concerns Kroetsch's exploration of cultural and historical discourses as *discourses of exclusion*. If Kroetsch's first two novels consider the relationship between dominant cultural discourse and the self-divided Canadian subject, his subsequent fiction examines the way discursive formations form the subjects they represent. Who, these works ask, are granted access to discourse, in what circumstances, and under what prohibitions? Secondly, the period following the publication of *The Words of My Roaring* charts Kroetsch's transition from a synchronic or 'structuralist' investigation of opposed cultural codes to a post-structuralist examination of the hierarchies of power inscribed within the binary stasis of Canadian cultural discourse. Next, Kroetsch develops in this period a series of trenchant political allegories of colonial cultural dispossession which operate dialectically upon dominant cultural discourse to expose the illusion of its political neutrality and resituate its synchronic or unitary readings of Canadian difference within the diachronic process. The gradual fragmentation of hegemonic cultural discourses in each of Kroetsch's five most recent novels is therefore directly attributable to the formation of counter-discourses of modern Canadian history. And finally *The Studhorse Man* announces Kroetsch's first sustained experimentation with an open postmodern form which foregrounds the processes by which post-colonial subjectivity is constructed.

Although these four themes are interlinked it is useful to consider them in temporary isolation from each other. The Foucauldian strain of Kroetsch's thought becomes most evident when his work is considered together with Foucault's theoretical analysis of the genesis and structure of discursive formations. In a group of texts comprising *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, "The Discourse on Language," and the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* Foucault depicts a series of discursive formations "characterized by the delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories."⁶ Discourse demarcates, orders, and regulates the field of truth for hegemonic social groups; and it does this by establishing *relationships of power*. Discourse, Foucault famously asserts, must be conceived as "a violence that we do to things, or, at all events, as a practice we impose upon them."⁷ In Richard Terdiman's words, discourses become "the complexes of signs and practices which organize social existence and social reproduction" and, through their material persistence, "give differential substance to membership in a social group or class or formation" by mediating both an "internal sense of belonging" and an "outward sense of otherness."⁸ By applying the Foucauldian analysis of the establishment of discursive formations to the discourse of colonialism it becomes possible to envisage the latter as the name "for that system of signifying practices whose work it is to *produce and naturalise* the hierarchical power structures of the imperial enterprise and to mobilise those power structures in the management of both colonial and neo-colonial cross-cultural relationships."⁹

The notion of discursive formations as violent and repressive structures that naturalise the power relationships they instantiate is crucial to readings of both *The Studhorse Man* and *Gone Indian*. These texts problematise the process of naturalisation by which Demeter Proudfoot and Mark Madham construct images of Hazard Lepage and Jeremy Sadness. In both novels Kroetsch deconstructs established images of Canadian history to expose the influence of the discourse of colonialism upon the representation of colonial space. Kroetsch's identification of a violent hierarchy within the field of discourse is one important consequence of his passage from a structuralist to a post-structuralist poetics. As I suggested in Chapter Three, Kroetsch's early fiction partakes of the comparativist character of structuralist poetics; his influential analysis of Canadian cultural discourse in terms of the static binary opposition produced by a collision of unresolvable cultural codes reproduces the

intrinsic binarism of the Saussurean linguistic paradigm. However, a structuralist reading of cultural history in keeping with the Saussurean critique of language is problematic for Kroetsch since Saussure's analysis produces a theory of differences *without positive terms*.¹⁰ Far more pertinent to Kroetsch's concerns is the Derridean notion of *différance*, which, by an infinitesimal and radical displacement of the classical oppositions of Western ontology, identifies a hierarchical relation of domination within the neutral couplings of the Saussurean dyad.¹¹ One of the most striking features of *différance* as the enabling condition of conceptuality is that its emphasis upon the historical primacy of one term within a classical opposition reintroduces diachrony into Saussure's synchronic paradigm. Derrida's emphasis on the historical constitution of binary structures enables Kroetsch to see within the binary stasis of Canadian discourse the continual effacement of certain forms of experience before others. His progressive elaboration of a deconstructive mode of fiction from the end of the 1960's therefore allows him to develop from "paradigm" into a version of the Canadian "story" that examines cultural discourse as a contestatory form in which opposed interests, values, and histories struggle for pre-eminence.¹²

The admission of diachrony into a synchronic paradigm is also the most salient feature of Kroetsch's use of allegory as a counter-discourse to the rhetoric of colonialism. As he shows in *The Studhorse Man* and *Gone Indian*, one of the primary discursive strategies of colonialism is the projection of its own system of values and beliefs onto the uninscribed space of the colonial "other." This tactical transposition of cultural codes has a dual motivation: the "other" culture becomes rapidly assimilable within a colonialist frame of reference, while the disquieting irruption of manifest cultural difference is translated into a deficiency *within* colonial culture that can only be remedied by the renewed application of external control. The helpless imprisonment of the colonial subject within a European matrix of cultural reference is demonstrated in both novels by the indebtedness of Kroetsch's surrogate narrators' to the narrative of *The Tempest*, which enforces a moral and political distinction between the untutored and bestial native subject and those who aspire to mastery of the Book. In Kroetsch's allegories of power and dispossession access to the order of discourse is conferred only by mastery of the traditional values of European civilisation; while those marginalised by the narrative of enlightenment progress must encounter their own history in the guise of a foreign language.

The trope of allegory (which comes from the Greek *allos* or "other" and *agorevein* which means to speak publicly or openly) is particularly well suited to contest the seamless transposition of different cultural typologies. Indeed, as Paul de Man has shown, the structural dependence of allegory upon the temporal repetition of an anterior sign with which it can never coincide insists upon the irreducible fact of difference. Writing on the relationship between the allegorical sign and its meaning he comments:

We have . . . a relationship between signs in which the reference to their respective meanings has become of secondary importance. But this relationship between signs necessarily contains a constitutive temporal element; it remains necessary, if there is to be allegory, that the allegorical sign refers to another sign that precedes it. The meaning constituted by the allegorical sign can then consist only in the repetition (in the Kierkegaardian sense of the term) of a previous sign with which it can never coincide, since it is of the essence of this previous sign to be mere anteriority. . . . Whereas the symbol postulates the possibility of an identity or identification, allegory designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin, and, renouncing the nostalgia and the desire to coincide, it establishes its language in the void of this temporal difference.¹³

By designating primarily "a distance in relation to its own origin" allegory is hostile to the enforcement of universalising European values onto the colonial landscape. Instead, the schism between history and origin constitutive of allegorical meaning encourages the recognition of cultural pluralities, heterogeneities, and differences. *The Studhorse Man* and *Gone Indian* continue the transformation of synchrony into diachrony by employing allegorical references to the European and American imaginative traditions (Augustine, Bunyan, and Frederick Jackson Turner for example) to institute counter-discourses of post-colonial history. These counter-discourses have a potent subversive effect because they establish "an oppositional, disidentificatory voice within the sovereign domain of the discourse of colonialism"¹⁴ and thereby expose the historically constituted character of colonialist discourse.

Kroetsch's attention in his use of the allegorical sign to the historicity of discursive formations clears the way for a discussion of his development of a postmodern poetics. This concern with the locus of history and textuality introduces a problem that haunts his early postmodern fiction and which allows us to identify a relation of compensation between *The Studhorse Man* and *Gone Indian* that is of signal importance for his later work. Before we turn to this issue, it is necessary to

consider the possible significance of 'postmodernism' as a generic label for the expression of identity and difference. The term 'postmodern' is problematic since it describes simultaneously an artistic, philosophical, and historical category. Such a migration across conceptual boundaries is typical of a movement of thought that has been variously described as paralogical, anti-totalising, parodical, acutely self-conscious, ahistorical, pluralistic, ludic, and neo-conservative. On one hand postmodern culture has been celebrated for its removal of the boundaries between popular and elite culture, commended for its inclusion of a range of different cultural registers within political discourse, and applauded for its deconstruction of totalising historical narratives that embody the masculine and Western values of the Enlightenment project. Conversely, however, it has been condemned for its naive valorisation of semantic indeterminacy and identified pejoratively as a mere extension of the commodified social sphere of late monopoly capitalism. But whether postmodernism is identified by its foregrounding of ontological rather than epistemological issues,¹⁵ lambasted for its "depthless, styleless, dehistoricized, decathected surfaces,"¹⁶ or congratulated for its progressive "critical reworking"¹⁷ of hegemonic cultural values, postmodern thought persistently invades the interpretative space between "same" and "other" enforced by colonialist discourse.

Within the more general movement of postmodern thought there exists, however, a bifurcation that assumes considerable importance for an analysis of the novels of Kroetsch's middle period. I refer to the schism detectable in theories of postmodernism between those who assert the subversive potential of semantic indeterminacy and others who turn their attention to the political and historical forces that underpin specific discourses of cultural identity. The first position is synonymous with the work of Jean-Francois Lyotard. Lyotard's influential treatise *The Postmodern Condition*, with its emphasis upon the postmodern "incredulity towards metanarratives"¹⁸ and valorisation of "the heterogeneity of language games"¹⁹ over the coercive unity of Enlightenment grand narratives, has a seductive appeal for a writer striving to redefine post-colonial subjectivity. Lyotard's commitment to the disordering effect of paralogy and contradiction has had a sustained influence upon Kroetsch's work; it is therefore unsurprising that Lyotard's name should figure so prominently in such a recent statement of Kroetsch's cultural politics as "Disunity as Unity."

The second position meanwhile is represented by those who, like Fredric Jameson, are concerned to establish a connection between decentred subjectivity and the displacements of the signifier on one hand and the "great global multinational and decentred communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects"²⁰ on the other. Although Jameson's Hegelian heritage impels him toward a Marxist critique of modern cultural production that Kroetsch does not necessarily endorse, his strictures upon the political consequences of a fall back into "a view of present history as sheer heterogeneity, random difference, a coexistence of a host of distinct forces whose effectivity is undecideable"²¹ refocuses attention upon the crucial relationship in Kroetsch's work between history and textuality. Certainly, Jameson's insistence upon a political critique of the notion of "play" in order to prevent an awareness of "the alienation of the subject" being replaced by "the fragmentation of the subject"²² has a particular relevance to *The Studhorse Man*. Moreover, his conception of postmodernism as a "cultural dominant" which "allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate features"²³ enables us to thematise the postmodern as the reciprocal exchange of identity and difference. Jameson's intervention is calculated, at one level, to make precisely this point: to characterise "the postmodernist experience of form" in terms of the paradoxical proposition "difference relates," which repudiates theories of difference that "stress disjunction to the point at which the materials of the text . . . tend to fall apart into random and inert passivity" and to develop a "more positive conception of relationship which restores its proper tension to the notion of differences itself."²⁴

In both the remainder of this chapter and my reading of *Gone Indian* in Chapter Five I wish to contend that the development of Kroetsch's postmodern poetics pivots upon his transition from the first to the second of these critical positions. In *The Studhorse Man* his allegorical exploration of the cultural dispossession of the post-colonial subject makes repeated strategic use of semantic dubiety to undermine Demeter Proudfoot's history of the Canadian west. As my reading of the novel will demonstrate, Demeter, in a duplicitous move that replicates the logic of colonialist discourse, simultaneously employs the fundamental division between nature and culture enforced by Western metaphysics to situate Hazard as "other" to enlightenment discourse while attempting to portray Hazard's anarchic condition as prior to the act of representation. To expose this willful duplicity Kroetsch deconstructs Demeter's binary logic by showing how the dichotomy between nature and culture rests upon a further opposition between presence and non-presence that is constitutive of all

signification. For, as Derrida remarks, "the signification 'sign' has always been understood and determined, in its meaning, as sign-of, a signifier referring to a signified, a signifier different from its signified."²⁵ In a development fatal to Demeter's dream of a complete and self-enclosed biographical record, the act of biography, by converting the 'presence' of its human subject to the status of a sign within a literary text, inscribes identity within an infinite chain of substitutions. Consequently, Hazard is transformed by the very act of biographical representation from a "form of present-being" whose itinerant, bestial nature is simply reflected by Demeter's text into "a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions c[o]me into play."²⁶

The gulf that Demeter perceives between signifier and signified challenges the mimetic assumptions of his own biographical discourse and creates a space in which the alterity of post-colonial history can be articulated. The ambiguity of the freedom granted to the post-colonial subject in *The Studhorse Man*. becomes clear, however, if we acknowledge that the collapse of Demeter's position at the end of the novel is caused by Hazard's *unrepresentability* within a discourse that ignores the ruptures of colonial history and posits an unbroken immediacy between language and experience. Despite this ambiguity, Kroetsch suggests that the post-colonial subject can force a breach in the repressive discursive formations of colonialist historiography by highlighting the semantic slippage between word and world. His faith in the subversive political potential of linguistic play is evidenced by the name Hazard Lepage, which draws attention to the ludic possibilities offered by the printed page of the literary text.

The political consequences of the dissolution of historical discourse into the endless configurations of the text should give us pause for two reasons. First, the specificity of the colonial experience of effacement and marginalisation is menaced by an aesthetics that privileges semantic indeterminacy over the claims of historical reference. Without some conception of the force that underpins certain discourses of history, Kroetsch's ludic strategies threaten to slip over into historical relativism.²⁷ Secondly, the assumption that by deconstructing colonialist discourses of history a space opens *of itself* in which post-colonial identity can be articulated is deeply flawed. In particular, it ignores the question of "explicitly and systematically posing the problem of the status of a discourse which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself."²⁸ It negates, in other words,

the complex relationship between coloniser and colonised created by their possession of a common language.

All of Kroetsch's prose fiction dating from *The Studhorse Man* insistently poses the question Derrida introduces concerning tradition, deconstruction, and counter-discourse. I want briefly to outline a method of reading Kroetsch's postmodern fiction that accounts for both the problematic status of *The Studhorse Man* and the greater success of *Gone Indian* in examining the formation of discourses of historical and cultural identity. Accordingly I believe that the second and third panels in the "Out West" triptych are most usefully considered in the context of Fredric Jameson's distinction between pastiche and parody in postmodern textual practice. For Jameson, this distinction is based upon a notion of relative linguistic normality:

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue that you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists.²⁹

In the light of this distinction it would seem that *The Studhorse Man*, with its promiscuous interchange of different literary genres (biography, the quest novel, satire, mock-epic, trickster-tale and so on) resembles postmodern pastiche since it places in parenthesis the historical world behind the linguistic patterns of its various discourses. In contrast *Gone Indian* approximates more closely to the "satiric impulse" of postmodern parody. The chief difference between these two modes is that postmodern parody establishes a connection between text and world that examines this loss of historicity as a *consequence* of a disordered political reality. Chapter Five will therefore investigate Kroetsch's attempt in *Gone Indian* to expose the institutional sites that order, regulate, and legitimate cultural discourse. The focus of his interest therefore shifts from the troubled sensibility of the individual biographer to the influence of the institution of the university where texts, identities, and cultural values are created and examined.

The Studhorse Man presents one version of the life and death of Hazard Lepage, rural trickster and studhorse man, who travelled the length and breadth of the Canadian west in the first half of this century to breed his horse Poseidon and perpetuate the line of Lepage blue roan stallions. Hazard's story is narrated by Demeter

Proudfoot who recounts, from his current confinement in a lunatic asylum, his failed attempt to apply conventional standards of narrative continuity to the chaotic life of his biographical subject. In fact, Demeter's biography of Hazard tells of his initial enchantment with Hazard as an embodiment of the traditional values of rural Canadian society, his subsequent despair at Hazard's reckless abandonment of the sacred duties with which he is entrusted, and his own eventual usurpation of the role of studhorse man. Curiously, then, Demeter converts biography into autobiography and becomes the hero of his own narrative. Yet far from appearing abashed by this unusual transposition of roles, Demeter defends his actions as the only possible means of safeguarding his history of the west from the wilful disruptiveness of Hazard's behaviour. He is thus able to assert his own importance as a tragic figure whose dream of giving historical legitimacy to an unrepresented strand of western experience was frustrated by the anarchism and cultural primitivism of the subject of his attentions.

Accepted on its own terms, Demeter's text portrays the biographer as the innocent victim of his principled effort to bring historical rigour and objectivity to bear upon the mythological landscape of the Canadian west. Yet if we respond to Kroetsch's invitation to treat Demeter's claim sceptically - an invitation made more seductive by the fact of Demeter's mental breakdown and his implication in Hazard's death - the novel stands revealed as a comic allegory of the relationship between coloniser and colonised. For it is possible to show that Demeter's deceptively simple outline of comic antagonisms, duplicities, and reversals is designed to conceal his considerable indebtedness to the rhetoric of imperialism. This sceptical reading of *The Studhorse Man* therefore seeks to highlight the similarity between Hazard's helplessness within Demeter's narrative and the historical position of the Canadian subject whose experience is mediated and circumscribed by the discourse of colonialism. It would focus, in particular, on Demeter's treatment of Hazard's life as a mobile configuration of meanings that must be deciphered and assimilated within a prior system of identification that dissimulates the "awesome materiality"³⁰ of its own status as discourse. Such an approach allows us to investigate the process by which Hazard is constructed as an object of knowledge by a colonising discourse that situates him as an "other" in a cultural matrix designed primarily, in Stephen Slemon's words, to "interpellate a subjectivity"³¹ for the coloniser himself.

Interestingly, Kroetsch promotes an allegorical identification of Demeter as an agent of the colonialist enterprise by means of the biographer's attitude to history and narrative. Like Mark Madham in *Gone Indian*, Demeter's obsession with reason and order is presented as a perversion of the ideals of European Enlightenment discourse. Both men attempt to impose extreme narrative coherence upon the scattered fragments of the Canadian story. In each case, the urge to confer unity and closure upon a heap of textual fragments is seen to be antithetical to the reality of the Canadian experience, where questions of authenticity and belonging are informed by Canada's ambivalent position between different discourses of historical and cultural identity.

The struggle in both novels between the homogenising impulses of an 'omniscient' first-person narrator and a character who insists upon his difference from the narrative that envelops him may be interpreted as a fictional prototype of the dialectical cultural vision that Kroetsch outlines in "Disunity as Unity." The relationship between the private desires of an authoritarian narrator and the predicament of an individual lost in the labyrinth of an obscurely plotted world becomes one of the basic paradigms of Kroetsch's fiction; and it is calculatedly used to introduce the theme of cultural appropriation. Demeter Proudfoot, Mark Madham, William Dawe, and Jack Deemer each dream of eliminating difference by alighting upon the one true narrative of history; each, in his own way, is symbolically associated with the cultural presuppositions of the Old World. Fittingly, perhaps, this dream of transplanting the established structures of imperial identity to the New World receives its most elaborate parody in *Alibi*, Kroetsch's most recent novel, where Dorf traces Deemer's vision of history to the ruins of Roman civilisation at Bath.

The desperate search for a moment of absolute self-identity is recurrently linked in Kroetsch's work with the ruthless suppression of alterity. More importantly, those characters who embark upon such a quest are symbolically associated with European cultural values and the coherent narratives of imperial history. This pattern is repeated in *The Studhorse Man*, since Demeter's biographical method reflects the naive positivistic assumptions of nineteenth-century historiography. Hayden White has pointed out that this period gave birth to

the dream of a historical discourse that would consist of nothing but factually accurate statements about a realm of events which were (or had been) observable in principle, the arrangement of which in the order of their original

occurrence would permit them to figure forth their true meaning or significance.³² 177

Kroetsch exploits Demeter's attraction to the hypothesised neutrality of historical positivism to make a specific political point. For he detects in this simple and objective interest in the "arrangement" of "factually accurate statements" a parallel between positivist historiography and the ethnological discourses used by the coloniser to justify the act of appropriation. In each case, a calculated appeal to conventional standards of evidence conceals the fact that such standards only have meaning from the perspective of the colonisers themselves. It is difficult, for instance, for the victims of colonialism to accept the proposition that "historical discourse" consists of "nothing but factually accurate statements" when their own experience of marginalisation and effacement so often failed to be recorded in the documents of history.

The Studhorse Man depicts the encounter between the representative of the positivist "dream" of European historiography and a character whose experience of history is mediated by the mythopoeic imagination of western Canadian oral culture. The scholarly ethos of European historiography, with its corollary desire to forego "what were regarded as the intuitive procedures of the makers of fictions"³³ in its apprehension of reality, is central to Demeter's project because it enables him to deny that his selection and arrangement of the 'facts' of Hazard's life is in itself an act of interpretation. He therefore supports his blithe assertion that his biography is an "extremely objective account of the life of one good man"³⁴ with some bizarre displays of scholarly rectitude. In two particularly memorable incidents we find Demeter examining railway timetables to "get some sense of the response our hero must have known" when he encountered the "sudden and alien world" (SM 24) of a country railway station, and claiming personally to have used the fork that Hazard employed to remove his stallion's excrement. Demeter explains his compulsion to attain the objective rigour of European historiography by insisting that this approach is consistent with "the interest of logic, of continuity, [and] the need to instruct and direct future generations" (SM 99). But as early as the second page of the novel, Kroetsch undermines his surrogate's belief that language presents a simple window on reality by revealing Demeter's biographical discourse to be a comic travesty of Zola's encyclopaedic method:

Thus it was that on Thursday, March eighth, Hazard Lepage got out of bed three hours earlier than usual - he was sleeping in his fifth bed, the significance of which I shall explore later - made his porridge and tea, combed his hair and

beard, put on his overshoes and mackinaw and fur cap, and precisely at 8:15¹⁷⁸ he went outside to dig a hole in the snowbank covering his recently accumulated pile of bones.

By 10:10 he was kicking around in the powdered snow, hitting almost nothing. He found a horse's skull, knocked it clean on the sleigh's bolster, tossed it onto the pile that now humped out of the sleigh's weathered green box. He gave one last kick, found a jawbone, and then, knocking the snow off his wet leather mitts, out of his beard, he crawled up from the hole he had by this time dug to a depth of nearly six feet. He cursed rather freely the pain in his back. (SM 8)

Towards the end of *The Studhorse Man* Demeter is forced to acknowledge that facts do not speak for themselves independently of interpretation but that the historian, in White's words, "speaks on their behalf, and fashions the fragments of the past into a whole whose integrity is - in its *re* presentation - a purely discursive one."³⁵ Yet Demeter repeatedly insists upon the innocence of the division between statement and interpretation - "[t]here is no need for interpretation" he reassures us at one point (SM 21) - in order to obscure his discursive control over readings of Hazard's life. In this progressive naturalisation of a meta-discursive function we not only recognise one of the governing devices of the classic realist text; but we also encounter the technique by which the coloniser denies responsibility for the ideological distinctions that it enforces between different orders of subject. To appreciate the extent of Demeter's indebtedness to the binary logic of colonialist rhetoric, we need only compare and contrast his jaundiced vision of Hazard with this image of his own rectitude. His own actions are invariably represented to us in the language of enlightenment benevolence. As one of the "seekers after truth" (SM 34) he insistently underlines the moral responsibility of the biographer's historic mission:

The biographer is a person afflicted with sanity. He is a man who must first of all be sound of mind, and in the clarity of his own vision he must ride out the dark night, ride on while all about him falls into chaos. The man of the cold eye and the steady hand, he faces for all of humanity the ravishments and the terrors of existence. (SM 152)

The fact that Demeter writes these words from an asylum alerts us to the duplicity of his appeal to "the clarity of his own vision." Indeed, his assertion of a spurious distinction between his own "sanity" and the "chaos" of the world that he must order reproduces the rationale for imperialist intervention noted by Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*. Demeter extends this rhetorical division between enlightenment and anarchy by assiduously associating Hazard with bestial, irrational, and uncivilised attitudes. To this end, he repeatedly conflates Hazard's role with that of the stallion he accompanies. We can detect this gradual erosion of the boundary between man and

beast in Demeter's ironic use of Hazard's term "Old Blue" for Poseidon to refer to Hazard's own "shrivelled" penis (SM 21), his insistence that Hazard "whinnied" (SM 133) while making love to Marie Espheter, and his reference to Hazard's unaccountable "horse-man cry of pain or delight" (SM 169) at the scene of his death. As Demeter's text emphatically reminds us, Hazard's "only means of livelihood was the white and black dink of that stallion" (SM 60). Who, his narrative asks us, would listen to the ravings of a man who is merely the appendage of an appendage if it were not for the interpolations of a more reasoned observer?

Throughout his biography Demeter introduces selective criteria of competence and knowledge to justify the discursive prohibitions that define and regulate Hazard's existence. For the colonising tendency of Demeter's discourse is reinforced by his implicit assumption that the studhorse man is incapable of representing himself. By presenting Hazard as a "dear ninny" who happens simply to be "terrified of history" (SM 33) he attempts to conceal an act of cultural appropriation in the language of moral beneficence. Demeter perpetuates the illusion that by speaking for Hazard he is merely making Hazard's voice heard by his antiseptic technique of quoting Hazard's own idiom and then translating it into civilised speech. Confessing that he must "control a certain penchant for gentleness and beauty" Demeter admits that Hazard did not use the expression "the high raw odour of mares and spring" but preferred the more colloquial "raw bitch of a wind was full of crocuses and snatch" (SM 12). By means of this artful form of semantic imperialism Demeter simultaneously suggests Hazard's primitive crudity and his own reserves of tact and discretion. However, if the date of the events described by Demeter's biography is taken into account, the discursive constraints under which Hazard labours are seen to have not merely a social but also a political significance.

The Studhorse Man is set in 1945, at the end of a conflict that confirmed the pre-eminence of American power and hastened the collapse of the last remnants of direct European colonial influence. This transference of authority and shifting of allegiances is reflected in Hazard's private world by the supersession of the horse by the automobile. The proliferation of the automobile in rural Canada in the middle decades of this century has serious implications for Hazard whose studhorse trade is based, of course, upon the continuing viability of the horse as a cheap source of transport and labour. Demeter draws the appropriate conclusion from the facts of social

and cultural transition in his remark that "Hazard knew his arbitrary and high-handed rule was being challenged, his era might draw to a close" (SM 88). But the appearance of the automobile, with the foreshortening of distances and the redefinition of community boundaries that it brought in train, also threatens Demeter's unitary narrative of Canadian history since the car, as Kroetsch remarks in an interview with Rudy Wiebe and Shirley Neuman, is linked to the evolution of new and plural narratives of cultural identity:

Kroetsch: I think you're on to something because another thing that changed things was the car. The minute everybody had a car you joined other communities.

Wiebe: Yes, we literally never had a car in Saskatchewan. The car was the great vehicle for spreading you all over the place and immediately the boundaries of the community disappeared.

Neuman: And that creates its own tradition of tall tales.

Kroetsch: Exactly, it changes the story completely.³⁶

To preserve the hegemonic status of his own version of history Demeter must resist the profusion of new indigenous narratives of cultural experience through what Neuman terms the west's "old tradition of tall tales." His response to the threat posed by the eruption of heterogeneity reveals a great deal about his political and cultural attitudes. In the same reactionary spirit as T. S. Eliot, Demeter transposes the structure of classical myth onto chaotic modern experience in order to draw a number of specific ideological conclusions from the "immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history."³⁷ In *The Studhorse Man* Demeter effects this strategy of containment by mapping the narrative of the *Odyssey* onto his story of Hazard's peripatetic adventures. One added advantage of this manoeuvre is that it enables him to imply that his self-privileging representation of post-colonial history is simply one example of a universal mythic pattern that underlies Western narratives of self-registration.

The conservative impulse behind Demeter's valorisation of synchrony over diachrony in fact resembles the strange but necessary paradox by which the discourse of colonialism asserts its historical mission to civilise the colonial nations while insisting upon the immutability of the structure of power between imperial and colonial culture. Demeter's transposition of the framework of Greek epic narrative onto the tale of a rural trickster converts Hazard into an amoral Odysseus whose passage upon

Poseidon (the ocean) through an assortment of trials is merely an excuse to avoid a return to domestic responsibilities. Similarly Martha, the fiancée who for thirteen years patiently awaits his homecoming despite the presence of "ardent suitors" (SM 165), becomes, like Penelope, a symbol of constancy in an inconstant world. Demeter, meanwhile, covets the role of loyal Telemachus for himself. The disingenuousness of Demeter's scorn for the "violent yokings of greek wisdom" (SM 81) becomes apparent when we consider how his mock-epic description of Hazard "slugg[ing] away at his terrible task" (SM 83) during the studhorse man's involuntary union with Widow Lank and his characterisation of Marie Espheter as a contemporary Circe who "cast a spell" (SM 124) on Hazard to detain him at the Espheter ranch impose the idiom of classical mythological discourse upon the native contours of Canadian experience.

Demeter's appeal to European narrative conventions to order the chaos of Canadian history is symbolised by his name, which recalls the Greek goddess of the *Eleusinian* mysteries. However, Kroetsch has written of his need to "tell [his] way out" of Canada's "entrap[ment]" within the "mythic stories"³⁸ of the Old World. His work repeatedly ironises the imperialist pretensions of those characters who attempt to tailor New World history to fit the paradigms of Old World cultural discourse. Kroetsch draws attention in *The Studhorse Man* to the incommensurability between Demeter's frame of cultural reference and the eclipse of a phase of western history by detailing his narrator's commitment to the principle of mimetic 'reflection' shown in *But We Are Exiles* to be problematic for the representation of post-colonial identity:

If you look at a map of Alberta you will recognise that, traveling from Mrs. Lank's stump ranch eastward into the parklands, Hazard must inevitably have driven along the road that is visible from my bathroom window.

By a fortunate combination of light and reflection, I am able to see out of my window without leaving my bathtub. A mirror is so placed above my sink that I have been able to sit for hours, attempting to imagine what in fact did happen (allowing for the reversal of the image) exactly where I imagine it. It is then *time* that I must reconstruct, not space. Further, I am able to see far distant; it is what is nearest that I cannot always make out from my high window. (SM 85)

In this passage we confront not only Demeter's admitted inability to make sense of the evidence nearest his "high window" (which we may take in this context as an oblique reference to the details of Hazard's existence), but also the inevitability, given his longing for a "whole image of the vanished past" (SM 34), of his eventual decision to "revers[e]" the projected image in the mirror and usurp the role of studhorse man.

Kroetsch's parody of Demeter's dependence upon mimesis is one feature of a more general assault upon the biographer's use of European cultural discourse to situate the post-colonial subject outside the sphere of civilised Western values. If one aspect of this discursive inheritance is identified as Homer's *Odyssey*, Demeter also makes use of the configuration of political and moral judgements that constitute Shakespeare's *Tempest*. The political allegory of *The Tempest* assists Demeter's enterprise in two areas: it offers, in the figure of Prospero, a potential moral justification for the hegemonic position accorded to those who possess the Book; while it provides, in the figure of Caliban, a prototype of the bestial colonial subject "on whose nature / Nurture can never stick."³⁹ However, Kroetsch counters Demeter's emphasis upon the structural relationship between different narrative codes by introducing diachrony into Demeter's synchronic system. In the same spirit as De Man's characterisation of allegory as a semantic complex that distributes signs through time in search of a moment of historical origin with which they can never coincide, he exposes Demeter's political allegory of colonial history as a semantic process dependent upon a series of exclusions, omissions, and prohibitions to hold its meanings in place. By highlighting both the temporal nature of language as a signifying process and the ambivalence of the colonial subject's relationship to indigenous and external discourses of identity, Kroetsch shows Demeter's biography to be an ideological reconstruction of post-colonial reality. The incompatibility of Hazard's actions and Demeter's interpretation of them therefore opens up a way of reading against the grain of Demeter's text to establish the fact of cultural heterogeneity and difference and to identify what Slemon calls "the investments of allegory in the semiotics of imperialism."⁴⁰

One way for Kroetsch to denaturalise Demeter's steady colonisation of the western experience and form a dialectical intervention in the production of cultural meaning is through Hazard's frequent transgression of Demeter's binomial categories. For Demeter's effort to confine Hazard's rebellion against order, categorisation, and closure to the single stereotype of the trickster enjoys only limited success. To be sure, his description of Hazard's various sexual encounters (those involving P. Cockburn, Widow Lank, Marie Espheter and Mrs Laporte for example) and release of 800 horses into the centre of Edmonton succeeds in depicting Hazard as an elemental force devoid of historical or social consciousness. Other aspects of Demeter's biography, though, are more problematic. It is noticeable, for example, that the staunchly realist biographer completely fails to register the subversive potential of Hazard's association with Eugene

Utter. As his name implies, Utter personifies the transfiguring power of the word. His unconstrained behaviour and his refusal to accept established ideas of individual and social identity - illustrated most graphically by his incineration of a public schoolhouse - offer an anarchic insight into the possible redefinition of the self suggested by the oral narratives of western Canadian culture. Demeter also passes quickly over Hazard's preference for the genealogies of *The General Stud Book* rather than the narrative continuities of his own biography, even though Hazard's attention to the generational rhythm of equine ancestry, with its repetition of the biblical term "begat," bespeaks a desire for a new creation myth sensitive to the needs of the post-colonial experience.

But before following Robert Lecker in describing Hazard as "[d]efiant of history, order, and closure"⁴¹ in general terms, we should note that Hazard is often strategically positioned by Kroetsch to contest highly specific symbols of historical domination. Thus in a number of incidents Hazard subverts established images of Canada's colonial history. This subversive process is sometimes suggested in single incidents such as Hazard's occupation of an Englishman's isolated mansion which was completed "on the day Queen Victoria died" (SM 52). At other times Hazard's refusal to be coerced into Demeter's unitary narrative brings together a complex of allusions. An example is the important scene in which Hazard is carried unconscious into the bedroom of P. Cockburn, curator of the provincial museum. The allegorical resonance of this occasion is deepened by the fact that Cockburn's bedroom doubles as a replica of the bedchamber of the chief factor of the Hudson's Bay Company. Here Hazard defines himself by his resistance to Cockburn's attempt to transform him into a waxen image of a studhorse man; he then wakes the next day to find himself confronted by a gallery of symbols depicting the history of Canada as a settler colony:

Along either side of the high bed were three life-sized figures: on one side the resplendent figure of an Indian chief, the buckskin of an early explorer, the red coat of a Northwest Mounted Police constable; on the other the black robe of a missionary, the coat and tails of an early premier, the black gown of a university president. (SM 33)

Hazard's response to his unwilling incorporation within the narrative of a history that has excluded him is instructive. By proceeding "to dress as one of Queen Victoria's admirable redcoats" (SM 37) he not only makes good his escape, but also registers his dissent from the institution of government whose "door in closing had locked behind him, had locked him out" (SM 38). As John Thieme remarks:

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The museum episode ends with Hazard escaping, wearing a redcoat taken from the wax figure of a mountie - later he dons the garb of a clergyman - and this disguise typifies his trickster-like subversion of the symbols of Western Canadian authority, as well as his repudiation of official versions of history.⁴²

Although Demeter continues to insist that he is devoting his life "to the making of [Hazard's] present into history" (SM 10), his willful neglect of the political specificity of Hazard's protest shows that he is unable to register the meaning of Hazard's continual displacement of hegemonic images of western Canadian history. For Hazard's repeated transgression of "official versions of history," his violation of communal forums such as schoolhouses and wedding ceremonies, and his constant interchange of identities dramatises the sense of exclusion from dominant cultural discourse felt by the post-colonial subject. But Demeter, who refuses to acknowledge the pressure that discursive formations exert upon the worlds they construct, can only engage with a history of exclusion by recreating it as an exclusion of history. Hazard's deeply political dissent from the discourse of colonialism is therefore sidestepped by his biographer, who explains away his subject's truculence as the result of his "peculiar little aversion to history" (SM 32).

The scene in the Legislative Building makes a concrete connection between the meta-discourse of Demeter's biography and the political control exercised by dominant cultural discourse. The discrepancy that Kroetsch creates between Hazard's actions and Demeter's biographical explanation of them provides a space in which a counter-discourse of western Canadian history can function. As the novel proceeds, Demeter's anguished realisation that an alternative version of Hazard's biography can be glimpsed through the gaps and omissions that his text cannot conceal forces him to confront the ideological character of the act of representation. But before Demeter undergoes the textual crisis recorded in the second half of the novel, Kroetsch continues to alert us to Demeter's continuing failure to explore the real political significance of the events he describes. A particularly good example of Demeter's abrogation of historical responsibility occurs in an important early episode, where Poseidon is pictured challenging a "bronze replication" of a horse supporting a regal lady:

There is - or at least until this happened there used to be - a statue of a royal lady on a horse on the lawn in front of the beautifully domed Legislative Building. Now a simple cairn has been put up by the Historic Sites and Monuments people, and on it the inscription "To this land of prairie, foothill, mountain and river, where the Indian roamed . . ." A group of legislators and a number of women, coming out from an evening session, had surprised Poseidon in the act of confronting his bronze replication.

Hazard, hearing laughter, sought out its source and found his stallion. He must have at that moment known premonitions of a competition that was to enter into his own life. Poseidon snorted in wonder and fear at the poised and perfect bronze beast, approached, turned to lash out viciously with his heels, reared up himself just as the tall bronze stallion reared.

Two strong males contending for one mare could not have been locked into a more desperate equilibrium. Hazard climbed at once onto the ice-sheathed granite base of the work of art, intending to put a halter to Poseidon's head and lead him away in defeat. Instead he found himself booed and mocked for not letting the battle be resolved.

A man of ministerial voice announced the bronze horse to be superior: "The artist has done it. In bronze. Forever."

The man's colleagues repeated these words and nodded. "Forever. In bronze." They applauded briefly.

One lady alone was so reckless as to defend the mortal blue stallion against his critics. She praised loudly the fullness of Poseidon's natural endowment, pointing out that the artist, in casting his bronze model somewhat larger than life, had in fact erred in making its parts ridiculously small. (SM 29-30)

Demeter's description of this highly political struggle between an image of imperial domination and a representative of the dissident Canadian west strips the confrontation of any semblance of historical context. Blithely ignoring the fact that a representative of an effaced historical experience is challenging the authority of Queen Victoria, matriarch of colonialism, to impose herself upon the Canadian landscape, Demeter, in a gesture both venal and typical, chooses to focus upon the phallic imagery on display. His closing remark that "my story is of Hazard, not of the sordid behaviour of politicians" (SM 30) is disingenuous, since Hazard's story explores the consequences of a life without political control over the discourses that disseminate social and political power.

Demeter's attempt to naturalise his appropriation and reconstruction of Hazard's history depends upon the elimination of the ontological divide between life and representation: only by establishing his biography as a complete, contemporaneous and disinterested account of Hazard's career can Demeter hope to disguise his own role as a producer and distributor of discourses of place, history and identity. Paradoxically then, Demeter, the realist *par excellence*, is involved in a postmodern search for the death of the author. His solitary achievement, though, is to be the death of his historical subject. Taking as his representational model the "old Chinese artists" who "drew their horses true to life" (SM 134), Demeter tries to obstruct our view of his creative role by arguing that "[t]here is no need for interpretation" within the biographical process. Unfortunately for him, the biography that he actually writes

demands a series of staged withdrawals from this uncompromising position. As soon as he begins to develop his portrait of Hazard, Demeter's need to establish a suitable social distance between his discourse and the crudities of the studhorse man leads him to admit that "[a]lready I find myself straying from the mere facts. I distort" (SM 12). Eventually the tension that exists between his air of scholarly detachment and the obvious signs of his manipulation of Hazard's position compels him to adumbrate an ungainly compromise proposal: "While a biographer must naturally record, he must also, of necessity, be interpretive upon occasion" (SM 18). But by yoking together the ideas of "natural" and "interpretative" documentation in this formulation Demeter simply re-opens the hermeneutic gap between experience and representation that he elsewhere tries to deny.

Demeter's stance is complicated further by his recognition of a fundamental instability within the linguistic sign. Clearly the identification of an area of semantic indeterminacy between sign and referent poses a direct challenge to the synchronic and taxonomic closure of Demeter's rhetoric. I will argue at the end of this chapter that the use of the free play of the signifier to disorder the culturally constructed oppositions of colonialist discourse is in itself of dubious value for a radical post-colonial politics. What is not in doubt is that Demeter's insistence upon the ideological neutrality of biographical representation requires him to repress his understanding of language as a signifying system in which meaning is created from the patterns of linguistic exchange. Kroetsch in turn lampoons Demeter's unyielding linguistic positivism by crediting him with a text that depends for its meaning upon the exaggerated linguistic play between the signifiers "mare," "mer" and "Marie" (the christian name of Hazard's lover Marie Espheter). These three nouns are internally related in the novel because they symbolise Hazard's comportment towards death. The first reminds us that Hazard is driven to disaster by his search for a mare to breed with Poseidon; the second that he is warned of a death by water in the prophecy of the old woman at Paaschendale Ridge who tells him "*La mer sera votre meurtriere.*" The sea shall be your murderess" (SM 12); and the third that he is persuaded by Marie's Circe-like charms to exchange the security of home for the erotic promise of the Espheter Ranch. The rudimentary consistency of this thematic development not only exposes the impoverished imagination of a second-rate writer; but it demonstrates once again that Demeter's biography is a textual construct that imposes form and meaning upon the contentious evidence of post-colonial history.

By the second half of the novel, the constant tension between Demeter's calculated exploitation of a retrogressive image of Canadian history in order to interpellate a subjectivity for himself and his diehard belief in language as a natural reflection of a pre-given and self-identical reality fractures the representational surface of his text. This schism is most clearly marked at that moment when the mounting evidence of his selection and reconstruction of historical data forces him to acknowledge in the process of representation the diachronic displacement of a static structure:

The very process of recurrence is what enables us to learn, to improve, to correct past errors, to understand the present, to guide the generations that are to come. Yet it is precisely this same characteristic of life that makes life unendurable. Men of more experience than I have lamented at the repetitious nature of the ultimate creative act itself. It is only by a mastery of the process of *repetition* (you will note the repeated "e," and "t" and the "i," and the "tit" standing out boldly in the middle) that we can learn to endure; yet we can only master the process by a lifetime of repetition. (SM 127-128)

Demeter's reflection upon the "repetitious nature of the ultimate creative act" acknowledges language to be a signifying system that produces meaning by the temporal play of differences between its various terms. This inscription of diachrony within the synchronic has two devastating entailments for Demeter's theory of language. First, the notion of language as a temporal play of differences is, in Derrida's words, "incompatible with the static, synchronic, taxonomic, ahistoric motifs in the concept of *structure*."⁴³ Secondly, because the play of difference supposes that meaning is produced through the interweaving of a series of decentred signs, a text may be produced "only in the transformation of another text."⁴⁴ Demeter's insistence upon a set of binomial categories operating within a closed field of meaning prior to the act of representation therefore becomes completely untenable. With fine comic irony, Kroetsch illustrates Demeter's inability to police the borders of his text by superimposing the Oedipal narrative onto Demeter's borrowings from Homer. As Russell M. Brown has pointed out, Demeter Proudfoot is "a name which joins the Greek goddess of marriage to an English equivalent of the name Oedipus."⁴⁵ Demeter's Oedipal character is bleakly borne out by his role in the events that precipitate Hazard's death: not only is he antagonistic to Hazard, whose role he later reproduces; but his entry into Hazard's story is prompted by his incestuous desire for Martha, his own "first cousin" (SM 18). Meanwhile the implication of the signifier in a potentially endless chain of substitutions ushers in a range of intertextual references that Demeter is unable to control. In one of these, Demeter's portrait of Hazard as a priapic itinerant

mutates into an image of the forsaken Redeemer "turned and mocked away from where he would once have been more than welcome" (SM 85).

Demeter's predictable response to the growing threat of Hazard's instability within the text is to eradicate the space between sign and referent and reconstitute the binary oppositions on which his biography is based. In an act of considerable naivety he attempts to guarantee the passage from signifier to signified by becoming the subject of his own discourse. The end of the novel describes exactly this transition from biography to autobiography as Demeter picks up his saddle and declares "[t]hat morning I was D. Proudfoot, Studhorse Man" (SM 156). Ironically, though, Demeter's violent elimination of the play of differences between signs inevitably leads to his predecessor's demise since Hazard's ludic appellation and chronic over-determination as a rhetorical figure mark him out as a personification of the play of the signifier. Post-structuralist theory displaces the static structures of colonialist rhetoric as the novel culminates in a scene in which the biographer is implicated in the death of the native Canadian subject:

The stallion, with a slight touch of a shod hoof, rolled Hazard's figure about like a rag doll. I saw for the first time the bloodied face, and the gun of itself came up; terror raised my gun.

And over the sight I saw the last and only surviving stallion of the Lepage breed of horse.

I looked away and Hazard's eyes were open and looking nowhere and yet watching the horse's head.

"Kill him," Martha whispered. "Kill him".

"No," I answered.

"Kill him now. Hazard is still breathing."

"He's all that Hazard lived for," I said.

"No," Martha said.

And I thought of firing the gun; in my mind's eye the neck twisted and the head went sideways and up. The stallion fell and rolled over, kicking at the air. A grotesque dance of love, as if the world had turned, not the stallion. The great penis shrank back into the body of the dying horse. The calks of the horseshoes, bright, flashed with the kicking at the lions and the fleur-de-lis.

"No," I said. Martha-

And Hazard stirred then, trying once more to move across the floor. I swear he shook his head at the raised gun.

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. (SM 171)

Demeter's desire to reconstitute a number of fixed binary oppositions is evident at several points in this passage. His description of Hazard's need to break into the civilised domestic space of the house and effect a perilous reunion with his studhorse is intended to re-emphasise the basic animality of Hazard's character. As such, it makes subtle ideological use of the dichotomy of "horse" and "house" that Kroetsch identifies as a stock concern of prairie fiction:

The basic grammatical pair in the story-line (the energy-line) of prairie fiction is house: horse. To be *on* a horse is to move: motion into distance. To be *in* a house is to be fixed: a centring unto stasis. Horse is masculine. House is feminine. Horse: house. Masculine: feminine. On: in. Motion: stasis.⁴⁶

Equally the deft symbolic touch of the conjoined "lions and the fleur-de-lis" enables Demeter to reinscribe both the English and the French strains of the Canadian colonial inheritance at the scene of Hazard's death. And Demeter eventually closes his text with the composite figure of Demeter Lepage, daughter of Hazard and Martha, whose lineage reflects the oscillation between energy and stasis that Kroetsch defines as one of the "ambiguous"⁴⁷ legacies of Canada's ambivalent colonial status.

But Demeter's attempt to explain Hazard's death as the predictable consequence of his unnatural consanguinity with his studhorse is mere posthumous clamour. Whether Demeter usurps the role of historical subject by expelling Hazard from the text that was to bear his name, or insists, against all the evidence, that his own discourse exerts no leverage on the historical world, his identification of a continual diachronic displacement of the synchronic structures of language opens a space in the surface of representation that can never be closed. No matter what form of coercion he brings to bear, Demeter's experience of the mutability of the sign confirms to him that history is a text that can never be totalised. As his meta-narrative of western history collapses in the last pages of the novel, the contamination of each term of a binary dyad with its opposite is underlined as Demeter, personification of the enlightenment project, submits to the pressure of madness. So complete is his disintegration that his history of Hazard Lepage ends by celebrating an eschatological vision in which "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" (SM 174). Kroetsch, however, reserves the last laugh for himself, since Martha, the object of all Demeter's crazed attentions, is eventually bequeathed to Utter, whose polyphonic vitality leaves Demeter's narrow empire of discourse in ruins.

The end of *The Studhorse Man*, with its comic deconstitution of a totalising meta-narrative of western Canadian history, might appear to offer a momentary liberation from imposed paradigms of cultural value. However, in these concluding remarks on Kroetsch's novel I want to suggest that the allegory of colonisation and cultural dispossession that it contains is deeply problematic for an emancipatory post-colonial cultural politics. The chief difficulty with Kroetsch's approach is that by predicating Hazard's liberation from the armature of Demeter's narrative upon the collapse of Demeter's biography into a configuration of textual indeterminacies, he threatens to create an ontological wasteland between sign and referent that degrades history to the status of a gratuitous fiction. By placing such emphasis upon the damage done to the monolithic constructions of dominant cultural discourse by the radical contingency of language, Kroetsch envisages post-colonial identity simply as an effect of the semantic surplus of language. Because of this rather curious tendency of his work, his rejection of a meta-discursive standpoint is accompanied here by an unwillingness to consider what the relative status of various discourses should be. Discourses of knowledge, power and identity are therefore perceived simply as a collection of texts that interact with each other through the ceaseless circulation of signs. But such semantic relativism ignores the fundamental lesson of his novel, which is that certain discourses do achieve sufficient authority to hierarchise and subordinate other idioms and languages. Ironically, then, Kroetsch's highly political interest in the diacritical character of language leaves him in position from which to address those specific discursive practices that structure knowledge, regulate cultural production, and legitimate binary systems of knowledge and power.

This reflection on Kroetsch's handling of language and binary structures allows us to identify one troubling aspect of the terms in which his work has been received. It is noticeable that those critics who have endorsed the textual politics of *The Studhorse Man* frequently link Kroetsch's exposure of the textual character of historicity to a more general dissolution of binary structures by the self-differing discourses of post-structuralism. Hence Susan Rudy Dorscht, in a "post-feminist" reading of Kroetsch's fiction, commends *The Studhorse Man* for its exemplary articulation of textual and historical "difference" and its deconstruction of the binary structures of knowledge. She then goes on to claim that the struggle in Kroetsch's texts is always "a struggle to break down these oppositions between masculinity and femininity, indeed, the opposition between self and other, and so to engage in a post-feminist manoeuvre

which questions the notion of identity itself."⁴⁸ However, this implicit acceptance of the deconstitution of the opposition between "self" and "other" ignores the fact that this manoeuvre is problematic for a culture whose identity is based upon its historical difference from its colonial past.

This problem emerges most fully in the tension that exists between the textual strategies of postmodern pastiche, which gleefully subvert the binary structures by which dominant cultural discourse articulates historical and cultural identity, and the recognition that one of the primary needs of emergent post-colonial cultures is an "other" against which they can define their newly-discovered cultural freedom. The New Zealand critic Simon During has described the potential difficulties inherent in the contradiction between those strains of postmodern thought which testify to the loss of critical distance between "same" and "other," and the structure of post-colonial identity, which insists upon this distance in order to exist. As During remarks

the concept postmodernity has been constructed in terms which more or less intentionally wipe out the possibility of post-colonial identity. Indeed, intention aside, the conceptual annihilation of the post-colonial condition is actually necessary to any argument which attempts to show that "we" now live in postmodernity.⁴⁹

Yet it remains possible to envisage a form of representation that might avoid the peril of semantic relativism without reinscribing the meta-narrative of realist discourse: the genre of postmodern parody.

The advantage of postmodern parody is that it offers a textual form that permits us to contest some of the more depoliticised and dehistoricised developments of postmodern culture. One of the classic problem of postmodern ontology has been that the character of its mode of enquiry has contributed to the loss of the object under investigation. On one hand its hypersensitivity to the codes and conventions of the textual process has sharpened the reader's interpretative skills, assisting him or her to decode the informational overload of the modern world; on the other it has placed in ontological brackets the historical world to which the reader might apply these newly acquired techniques. This problem might be circumvented, though, by a form of parody which *contains* a postmodern reading of history as part of its basic structure of meaning. The epistemological, ontological and intersubjective questions that

postmodern thought has highlighted could then be linked to broader movements in modern political and cultural practices.

A practical example of postmodern parody at work sheds light on these issues. David Bennett, in his reading of *The Crying of Lot 49* argues that the crisis of verification experienced by Oedipa Maas is a microcosmic version of a larger crisis of identity foisted upon America by Macarthyite revisions of political and cultural history. Bennett shows that Pynchon manages to parody this crisis of historicity, without abandoning the material context of Oedipa's position, by the subversive manoeuvre of locating characters and incidents that are "historically, socially and ideologically determinate"⁵⁰ within the plural worlds of postmodern ontology. A connection can therefore be made between the textual interpretation of historical representations and the historical scene of textual interpretation. The use of postmodern discourse to analyse the historical development of our social and cultural practices opens up a rich seam of artistic enquiry in which the transformation of political discourse and cultural production carried out by media and communications technology can be assessed.

It is within the terms of this development from pastiche to parody that the middle stage of Kroetsch's artistic career is most usefully considered. If *The Studhorse Man* ultimately falls short of Kroetsch's ambition, it is surely because his refusal to accept any notion of discursive hierarchy fails to engage with the political reality of contemporary social and cultural practice. Given a political environment in which a handful of discourses - discourses of nationalism, unfettered individualism and technological 'progress' for example - are valorised at the expense of many others, Kroetsch's identification of an unbridgeable ontological gap between word and world leaves has no explanation for the relative success of individual narratives and bodies of belief.

This weakness in Kroetsch's analysis of the semiotics of imperialism is, as I have argued here, primarily a consequence of the textual pastiche of *The Studhorse Man*, which privileges semantic dubiety over an examination of the historical conditions of textual production. While it is true that by the end of the novel Demeter's constricting hold on the life of Hazard Lepage is over, Hazard is dead, Demeter is insane, and Martha Proudfoot and Marie Espheter have no voice of their own. Because

the text leaves no impression of what Jameson terms "linguistic normality" it is difficult for us to gain a position from which to interpret events beyond Demeter's calculated self-deprecation. The novel therefore becomes a comedy of hollow laughs and nervous side-glances in which the freedom of the subject from discursive enclosure paradoxically denies the specific character of post-colonial identity.

In conclusion, *The Studhorse Man* demonstrates the dangers implicit in the deconstitution of meta-narratives of colonial history if no recognition of the ideological power of certain master narratives is retained in the interim. *Gone Indian*, I believe, offers a way out of this abyss by operating in the manner of postmodern parody both inside and outside the discursive world of the text itself. The deconstitution of Mark Madham's taxonomical cultural order is therefore transformed into an assault upon an hegemonic discourse produced from a specific cultural site within a particular set of social and discursive practices. It is to this postmodern review of Canada's position as the "other" of Western enlightenment discourse that we now turn.

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- ¹ Michel Foucault, "History of Systems of Thought," *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (1977; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986) 200.
- ² Paul Auster, *The New York Trilogy* (1987; London: Faber and Faber, 1988) 225.
- ³ Colin MacCabe, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word* 15.
- ⁴ MacCabe 17.
- ⁵ Dennis Lee, "Cadence, Country, Silence," 163.
- ⁶ Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* 199.
- ⁷ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 229.
- ⁸ Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985) 54.
- ⁹ Stephen Slemon, "Monuments of Empire: Allegory/Counter-discourse/Post-Colonial Writing," *Kunapipi* 9. 3 (1987): 6.
- ¹⁰ "Everything that has been said up to this point boils down to this: in language there are only differences. Even more important: a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences *without positive terms*." Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course In General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye in collaboration with Albert Riedlinger (1960; London: Peter Owen, 1974) 120.
- ¹¹ Richard Terdiman has made this point with some force: "If *differance* introduces the notion of an inevitable displacement within binary opposition and projects the temporal priority of of one of the terms in relation, Derrida's notion of "deconstruction" socializes this directionality more radically still. It detects within binary oppositions a *hierarchy*, socially determined and determining. Within poststructuralism this notion begins to give conceptual substance and coherence to the image of culture as a "field of struggle". . . . It thus emerges that in its temporal dynamism and its inscription of social power, the sign begins to figure something like an elemental *machine for domination*." Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse* 33.
- ¹² The influence of Derridean post-structuralism upon Kroetsch's thought was probably accentuated by his co-editorship of *Boundary 2* with William V. Spanos. Spanos, a close personal friend of Kroetsch, is a Heideggerian who has become, in Vincent B. Leitch's words, "the leading American exponent of Heideggerian *destruction*." It is significant that *destruction*, which refers to the deconstitution of the history of Western ontology, shares a filiation (as well as important differences) with

Derridean "deconstruction." Vincent B. Leitch, *Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983) 60.

13 Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," *Blindness and Insight* 207.

14 Slemon, "Monuments of Empire," 13.

15 See Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1987) 9-10.

16 Terry Eagleton, "Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism," *Against The Grain* (London: Verso, 1986) 132.

17 Linda Hutcheon, "Beginning to Theorize Postmodernism," *Textual Practice* 1. 1 (1987): 11.

18 Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, Theory and History of Literature*, vol. 10, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, (Manchester: Manchester University Press) xxiv.

19 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* xxv.

20 Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (1984): 84

21 Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic," 57.

22 Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic," 63.

23 Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic," 56.

24 Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic," 75.

25 Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference* 281.

26 Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 280.

27 This problem with historical reference in Kroetsch's work has been remarked upon by other commentators. Situating Kroetsch's "postmodern" fiction within the paradigm of the modern metafictional "novel of exhaustion," Louis K. MacKendrick writes of *The Studhorse Man*: "Here in essence is the insistence of the novel of exhaustion on its reconstitution of chronology as much as of fact, its reflection of an *image* of reality, the freedom of imagination, and the creation of a personal, custom-made structure, the invention of the world." Louis K. MacKendrick, "Robert Kroetsch and the Modern Canadian Novel of Exhaustion," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 11 (1978): 22.

28 Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 282.

29 Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic," 65.

30 Foucault, *The Archaeology Of Knowledge* 216.

31 Slemon, "Monuments of Empire," 5.

32 Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978) 123.

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- 33 White, *Tropics of Discourse* 123.
- 34 Robert Kroetsch, *The Studhorse Man* (Toronto: General Paperbacks, 1982) 145. Future references to this edition will be marked "SM" and incorporated into the main body of the text.
- 35 White, *Tropics of Discourse* 125.
- 36 Shirley Neuman, "Unearthing Language: An Interview with Rudy Wiebe and Robert Kroetsch," *A Voice In The Land: Essays By and About Rudy Wiebe*, Western Canadian Literary Documents Series vol. 2, ed. W. J. Keith (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1981) 232.
- 37 T. S. Eliot, "Ulysses, Order and Myth," *The Dial*, Vol. 75 (New York: Kraus Reprint Corporation, 1966) 483.
- 38 Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths of Voice* 96.
- 39 William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* 4. 1. 188-89.
- 40 Slemon, "Monuments of Empire," 7.
- 41 Lecker, *Robert Kroetsch* 48.
- 42 John Thieme, "Robert Kroetsch and the Erotics of Prairie Fiction," *Kunapipi* 8. 1 (1986): 96.
- 43 Derrida, *Positions* 27.
- 44 Derrida, *Positions* 26.
- 45 Russell M. Brown, "Odyssean Journey," *Canadian Literature* 45 (1970): 89.
- 46 Kroetsch, "The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction," *The Lovely Treachery of Words* 76.
- 47 Kroetsch and Bessai, "Death is a Happy Ending," 215.
- 48 Susan Rudy Dorscht, "How 'The Studhorse Man' Makes Love: A Post-Feminist Analysis," *Canadian Literature* 119 (1988): 28.
- 49 Simon During, "Postmodernism or Post-Colonialism Today," *Textual Practice* 1. 1 (1987): 33.
- 50 David Bennett, "Parody, Postmodernism, and the Politics of Reading," *Critical Quarterly* 27. 4 (1985): 36.

Chapter Five
Empires of the Mind:
Parody and Counter-Discourse in *Gone Indian*

The north is not a typical American frontier, a natural world to be conquered and exploited. Rather, in spite of inroads, it remains a true wilderness, a continuing presence. We don't want to conquer it. Sometimes we want it to conquer us. And we don't have to go there literally in order to draw sustenance from it, any more than the American had to go literally to the west. It presses southwards into the Canadian consciousness.

The settled part of Canada becomes a borderland then, and a borderland is a place of interaction. This is, characteristically, a good place to look for poets, painters - the individual as artist.

The city of Edmonton for me is a place - and a metaphor - that enables me to talk about the confrontation of north and south. Conveniently, we have in Edmonton a technological centre that bills itself as The Gateway to the North. I am fascinated by characters who approach the city, resist it, leave it, enter it.¹

This passage, taken from Kroetsch's essay, "The Canadian Writer and the American Literary Tradition," offers a succinct introduction to the multiple borders that structure *Gone Indian*, the final text in his "Out West" triptych. In his fourth novel Kroetsch explores the tropological nexus represented by the terms "wilderness," "frontier," and "borderland" in order to examine the way in which a Western discourse of enlightenment is used to identify and appropriate of the cultural "other." These three terms are significant because they demarcate simultaneously the geographical area in which the action of the novel takes place and the principal rhetorical figures by which an image of northern Canada as an inchoate cultural environment is contrasted with the established epistemological paradigms of European enlightenment discourse. *Gone Indian* retains the bifocal character of Kroetsch's approach to the representation of Canada as a cultural "wilderness" by revealing a fundamental division between the story of a quest into the Canadian interior and a parodical investigation of the way meta-discourses of history are employed to circumscribe and delimit the expression of post-colonial experience. The importance to *Gone Indian* of the basic quest narrative, which records the disorientating encounter with alterity that prefigures every struggle in Kroetsch's fiction for a new and lasting vision of the self, becomes apparent from a brief summary of its plot.

Jeremy Sadness, a graduate student of literature at the University of Binghamton, is sent by his doctoral supervisor Mark Madham from New York to

attend a job interview in the Canadian northwest. While in Canada, Sadness is introduced to a repressed, atavistic side of his personality which undermines his rigid adherence to the sterile taxonomies of Madham's epistemology and alerts him to the existence of a Canadian historical experience commonly excluded by Old World discourse. Sadness's gradual disavowal of the restrictive rhetoric of the academy is comically suggested by his reincarnation as King of the Notikeewin winter festival, his sexual relationships with those agents of dislocation Jill and Bea Sunderman, and by his acceptance of the historically constituted character of discourses of culture and identity. Meanwhile, Kroetsch's emphasis on the restrictions placed upon indigenous narratives of post-colonial experience by the imposition of meta-discursive constraints is dramatised by the struggle for discursive hegemony between Sadness and Madham. Thus Sadness sends back to Madham a series of taped statements that record the details of his emotional and intellectual metamorphosis while Madham exploits this material to construct an alternative history of Sadness's quest that reinforces the set of distinctions upon which his vision of New World culture and society is grounded.

Certain similarities with *The Studhorse Man* will be evident from this synopsis of the plot of *Gone Indian*. In particular, the idea that the act of writing presupposes the existence of a "difference" that in turn enforces relations of power between subjects as they are admitted to or excluded from the order of discourse is common to both texts. This relationship between writing, difference, and power can be illustrated with reference to the field of anthropology. In the famous chapter from his autobiographical volume *Tristes Tropiques* entitled "The Writing Lesson" Levi-Strauss provides a fascinating account of the impact that the introduction of written script into the illiterate community of the Brazilian Nambikwara Indians had upon the structure of recognition underpinning its collective existence. Arriving among the Nambikwara, Levi-Strauss distributed pens and sheets of paper as a propitiatory gift. Because of their absolute unfamiliarity with written language, the Nambikwara amused themselves with the execution of a few desultory squiggles. However, the chief of the group, associating the anthropologist and the act of inscription with the possession of authority, insisted on conversing with Levi-Strauss by sketching nonsensical lines onto a writing pad. The illusion of communication deceived neither the anthropologist nor the chief; the point of the exercise was for the chief to "astonish his companions, to convince them that he was acting as an intermediary agent for the exchange of the goods, that he was in alliance with the white man and shared his secrets"² - in short, to invest in the system of differentiation that writing disseminates. Acknowledging the peculiar resonance of

this incident as a lesson on the coincidence of writing and power, Levi-Strauss is impelled toward a more general conclusion:

The only phenomenon with which writing has always been concomitant is the creation of cities and empires, that is the integration of large numbers of individuals into a political system, and their grading into castes or classes. Such, at any rate, is the typical pattern of development to be observed from Egypt to China, at the time when writing first emerged: it seems to have favoured the exploitation of human beings rather than their enlightenment. . . . My hypothesis, if correct, would oblige us to recognize the fact that the primary function of written communication is to facilitate slavery. The use of writing for disinterested purposes, and as a source of intellectual and aesthetic pleasure, is a secondary result, and more often than not it may even be turned into a means of strengthening, justifying or concealing the other.³

Two implications of this conclusion should be carefully noted. The first, which may be identified in Levi-Strauss's emphasis on the *interestedness* of writing, is of signal importance to the plot of *Gone Indian*. Writing, in Levi-Strauss's view, can never claim to be simply an objective documentation of an independent reality; the opportunities it introduces for the preservation and classification of knowledge, the organisation and division of labour, and the distinction it enforces between different orders of subject (those who do and those who do not have access to the systemic codes of writing) shows it to have a directly sociological, and not merely an interpretative, function. The division that writing produces between illiterate and literate subjects is shown in the response of the Nambikwara, who "withdrew their allegiance to their chief after he had tried to exploit a feature of civilisation" because they "felt in some way that writing and deceit had penetrated simultaneously into their midst."⁴ We should note, with reference to *Gone Indian*, that Madham's version of Sadness's quest insists upon this division between the Professor's written script and Sadness's oral narrative to support a distinction between his own rationality and his student's anarchic irrationalism. However, Madham's smug claim to intellectual objectivity is remorselessly parodied by Kroetsch who, in the two major judgement scenes that Sadness is forced to undergo, steadily deconstructs the opposition between action and interpretation in order to expose Madham's narrative as an ideologically motivated appropriation of Sadness's experience.

The second feature of Levi-Strauss's work relevant to our concerns is his radical contention that the idea of enlightenment in general (and of writing in particular) conceals the effect of slavery within its emancipatory gestures. Kroetsch develops this

idea by showing, in the character and the textual practice of Madham, how a discourse of enlightenment rationalism exploits the universalising impulse of Western reason to establish a relationship of political and cultural dependence between subjects. More specifically, Kroetsch shows how Madham's borrowings from, and perversion of, enlightenment thought underpin his appropriation and displacement of Sadness's history. The German philosopher Ernst Cassirer has described how the emphasis of the Enlightenment upon the mind alighting on the rules and systems of the universe contributed to a "belief in the unity and immutability of reason" and to the assumption that "[r]eason is the same for all thinking subjects, all nations, all epochs, and all cultures."⁵ To express these beliefs, enlightenment thinkers developed taxonomic systems to facilitate the classification of knowledge, expounded empirically verified laws to assist the correlation of empirical data, and conceived of an idea of process by which intellectual enlightenment is accompanied by moral progress. Madham accepts all of these tenets: he rigorously polices the boundaries of different discourses to show that it is only the retention of empirical laws and rules of evidence that prevent "our" culture from succumbing to the chaos represented by the northwestern Canadian spaces beyond Edmonton, the "last city on the far, last edge of our civilisation."⁶ But Madham perverts enlightenment thought by refusing to look for the character of phenomena in the evidence before him; rather, he imposes a rhetoric of judgement and value prior to a textual examination of Sadness's quest. Put simply, the spirit of enlightenment reason is inclusive: it casts its light equally over all orders of phenomena, experience, and knowledge. Conversely, the enlightenment projects of Demeter and Madham are exclusive: their rhetoric introduces a series of antitheses that reciprocally guarantee the 'reason' and 'order' of their own systems of belief. The ability of Demeter and Madham to impose their own epistemology upon the material they seek to elucidate is directly linked in each text to the narrator's power to control the dissemination of writing. Equally, their projection of Lepage and Sadness as cultural "others" on the brink of barbarism underpins their strategies of domination and offers eloquent testimony to the many enslavements that are concealed within their unitary drive to an enlightened conception of man.

The Studhorse Man and *Gone Indian* therefore share a common emphasis upon the relationship between representation and violence, the positions from which discourse is produced, organised, and distributed, and the designation of a cultural "other" to reciprocally define the identity of the writers of history. However, there are also significant differences between the two texts that allow us to establish *Gone Indian*

as a much more successful exploration of the constraints placed upon the expression of post-colonial experience. One of these differences is Kroetsch's progression from literary pastiche to the mode of postmodern parody. As I argued in Chapter Four, the axiomatic insight of postmodern parody that "[t]o say that the meaning of a text is indeterminate . . . is not to say that it *signifies* indeterminacy"⁷ enables Kroetsch to make a connection between the institutional sites which order representations of "Canada" and the subsequent ambivalence and over-determination of images of Canadian cultural life. Kroetsch inspects the relationship between representation and power by forging a link between the taxonomic procedures of Madham's academic discourse, which groups, classifies, and evaluates phenomena according to the requirements of predetermined areas of research, and the projection of Madham's discourse of history onto the 'uninscribed' spaces of the Canadian northwest. As Stanley Fogel observes, "[i]n much of the novel Kroetsch indulges in something seldom seen in his other works, a caricature of the university ambit that he knows so well."⁸

Another innovative feature of *Gone Indian*, which owes much to the parodic impulses at work in the novel, is Kroetsch's subversive reappropriation of themes and motifs from the European and American imaginative traditions. In particular, *Gone Indian* makes telling use of the European tradition of spiritual autobiography and the American *topos* of frontier fiction. By introducing these genres into a Canadian text investigating the discursive construction of Canadian cultural history, Kroetsch effects a parodic inversion of the ways in which "Canada" has been constructed as an "other" by the discourse of colonialism. In the concluding portion of this chapter I will therefore examine the use Kroetsch makes of the work of figures as diverse as Augustine, Bunyan, and Frederick Jackson Turner in his quest for a new vision of Canadian identity.

Madham's narrative commences, appropriately enough, with an undisguised attempt to impose the systemic codes of his own discourse onto the random details of Sadness's history. In response to a plea from Jill Sunderman for assistance in deciphering the evidence of Sadness's ambiguous disappearance with her mother Bea, Madham produces an exhaustive inventory of the discursive strategies of colonialism. He begins by exculpating himself from any responsibility for the events under discussion; Sunderman must understand, his letter begins, that he feels "under no

obligation to explain anything" (GI 1). But having thus distanced himself from Sadness's narrative, Madham immediately introduces a distinction that governs his entire presentation of his student's story. Sadness, like Hazard Lepage, is identified chiefly by "his inability to get anything down on paper" (GI 1); denied access to the order of civilised discourse, he uses his tape-recorder "to insult everything the university must stand for" (GI 1). Madham's move into the imperative mode is revealing: it betrays an anxiety about the status, integrity, and application of knowledge that will become deeply significant as the novel proceeds. Here, the contrast between his own rectitude and the intellectual incoherence of a man who outlines three contradictory methods of interpreting his recorded messages forms the basis for a more general comment on the internal chaos of Sadness's mind:

I am transcribing a few passages from those same tapes, simply that you might better appreciate the kind of rascal you found yourself involved with. It is my own opinion that everything he says can be taken at face value. He was as surprised as are we by the course of events, failing to understand, as he did, the nature of freedom. His wife, however - and I suspect he did not tell you he was married - Carol insists that he was faking everything from the moment he spoke the first sentence into the recorder. The hard academic truth was never adequate to Jeremy Sadness. Therefore she would have us distrust his original promise to "hurry back," and even the evidence of his "tragic" end. (GI 1-2)

This passage, with its scornful characterisation of Sadness as a "rascal" blind to the "hard academic truth" and therefore unable to understand the true "nature of freedom," offers an excellent insight into the way Madham presents Sadness as a figure inexplicable within rational boundaries of behaviour and expectation. Our subsequent discovery that Sadness's quest is actually a complex meditation on the way such boundaries curtail freedom renders these prefatory remarks grimly ironic. In fact, the contents of Madham's letter, especially the section that records the Professor's usurpation of Sadness's position in Carol Sadness's affections, is best understood as a sustained example of what Edward Said has termed the "substitution and displacement"⁹ of indigenous narratives of history by the external codes of colonialist rhetoric. Several aspects of Madham's letter testify to the implicit imperialism of his textual appropriation of Sadness's experience. Foucault, for example, has noted the tendency of scholarly commentary to displace and re-order the material that it claims to elucidate. With regard to the "rules concerned with the principles of classification, ordering and distribution" commentary is always, in his words, "involved in the mastery of another dimension of discourse: that of events and chance."¹⁰ Certainly in Madham's account of Sadness's adventures we encounter textual commentary not as a

scholarly means of clarification, but as a practice that systematically forms the objects of which it speaks. In a spirit similar to Foucault, Edward Said's influential treatise *Orientalism*, which examines Western ideological reconstructions of the Near and Far East, emphasises the Orientalist's use of the conceptual framework of academic discourse to give ideologically conditioned judgements the character of universal truths:

To the extent that Western scholars were aware of contemporary Orientals or Oriental movements of thought and culture, these were perceived either as silent shadows to be animated by the Orientalist, brought into reality by him, or as a kind of cultural and intellectual proletariat useful for the Orientalist's grander interpretative activity, necessary for his performance as superior judge, learned man, powerful cultural will.¹¹

If Madham employs the "the rhetoric of high cultural humanism"¹² to underpin a rigidly binomial opposition between civilisation and barbarism, his use of scriptural rhetoric also reveals his indebtedness to the thematics of imperialism. In his study of the evolution and development of the idea of "Europe" Denys Hay has shown that a primary factor behind the nascent "cultural unity"¹³ of the European people in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was the implicit ideological division between the superior intellectual, moral, and economic capacity of the European and the perceived inferiority of other races. Quoting Samuel Purchas, Hay demonstrates that the unity of the European sensibility was produced by the conflation of European imperial expansion and the "ennunciation of Christ's European mission":

But what speke I of men, Arts, Armes? Nature hath yeilded her selfe to Europaeen Industry. Who ever found out that Loadstone and Compasse, that findes out and compasseth the world? Who ever tooke possession of the Ocean, and made procession round about the vast Earth? Who ever discovered new Constellations, saluted the Frozen Poles, subjected the Burning Zones. And who else by the Art of Navigation have seemed to imitate Him, which laies the beames of his Chambers in the Waters, and walketh on the wings of the Wind?¹⁴

The interdependence Hay adduces between scriptural and imperialist rhetoric offers a compelling insight into Madham's strange remark at the end of his letter that the "necessary documents" of Sadness's history will show him to be "so to speak, unfallen" (GI 3). Indeed, if this enigmatic formulation is read alongside Madham's subsequent characterisation of the "professor's domain" as "[t]he word made human" (GI 13) it becomes clear that Madham's own discourse of self-identification is imbued

with the desire for a redemptive) which negates difference and denies Sadness's insistence upon the historical specificity of all cultural values.

The bluff confidence of Madham's tone, mixing effortless superiority with dismissiveness in equal measures, is therefore intended to underline the assured individualism of a character who is unreservedly his "own man" (GI 3). Even at this early stage, however, Kroetsch invites scepticism concerning the absolute security of Madham's act of self-recognition. Thus Madham's answer of "Never" to Carol's assertion that "Professor Madham . . . is being Professor Madham" (GI 3) and his graphic transcription, in his letter to Sunderman, of his forename "Mark" (with its overtone of 'making your mark') focuses attention on the ambiguity of identificatory motifs. Meanwhile, Madham's erotic metamorphosis into a bull that catches up Carol's underwear "as if with great bruising horns" (GI 3) prefigures Sadness's later transformation into a buffalo and introduces a degree of consanguinity between the two characters that I shall explore later in this chapter. But the most striking feature of Madham's approach remains his reliance upon a pre-given system of value to explain Sadness's behaviour. This desire to compel unfamiliar data to conform to the epistemological borders of known experience recalls Anthony Pagden's remarks upon the doomed effort of the coloniser to sustain an absolute distinction between the act of seeing and the process by which what is seen is classified as knowledge:

But observers in America, like observers of anything culturally unfamiliar for which there exist few readily available antecedents, had to be able to classify *before* they could properly see; and in order to classify in any meaningful sense they had no alternative but to appeal to a system which was already in use. It was indeed that system, not the innate structure of the world, that determined both what they actually believed to be the objective reality before them and the areas of it they selected for description.¹⁵

The chronic tension between Madham's taxonomical imagination and the deconstructive logic of Sadness's journey into the Canadian interior emerges in Sadness's account of the emotional and psychological damage he sustained attempting to conform to Madham's insistence on the rational priority of the act of classification before independent action within history. In a series of flash-backs to his time at Binghampton, Sadness shows that his unhappiness there was provoked by his decision to follow Madham and substitute the refinement of an individual sensibility for active engagement with the outside world. In thrall to Madham's belief in the epistemological privilege due to "the world of reflection, of understanding" and the "insight born of

leisurely and loving meditation" (GI 13) Sadness develops an inability to engage with experience outside the classificatory structure of literary analysis - a malady he attributes directly to the "PhD syndrome" (GI 35). Sadness's constant confusion of "appearances" and "joy" during this period is a staple ingredient of his encounter with Miss Cohen, one of his students:

Carol, I'm sorry. No. Professor. Listen. Me with my genuine nose for calamity, I keep mistaking appearances for joy. This Miss Cohen. It started quite by accident. Let's make love up against the bookcase, I suggested. Are you *kidding*? she said. So I slipped it into her right there, Lit and Comp 1, Section 13, tits on her like snowcapped volcanoes: we were in my office in the Library Tower. She wanted to know about passion. What is a destructive passion, Mr Sadness? she inquired. My office looked like a barbershop after, there were pubic hairs scattered from my *Norton Anthology* through *Anatomy of Criticism* to my notes on Bishop Berkeley (thus I refute the Bishop). (GI 45-6)

Sadness's insatiable need to reassimilate social and sexual experience within the evaluative paradigm of academic critique is not simply a hindrance to his casual erotic encounters. His desire to substitute detached analysis for the demands of emotional intimacy is also the reason behind the disintegration of his marriage:

But we'd had a bad scene before I left. Carol and I. The last night, the tender moment before I ventured into the world to seek my fortune. We were in the sack. "Read," I said. She pulled a book off an unpainted plank, dusted it; she began to read: Gibbon, *The Rise and the Fall*. No, *The Decline and Fall* . . . history of same. "I don't like it," she said. "No," I said, "read. Read on." Maybe, I was thinking, maybe I'm so programmed that I have to be in a learning situation. She read another page. "Just what in hell are you *doing*?" she burst out. I was frantic. "Just *read*," I shouted. We got into a wild argument about the length of Gibbon's sentences. (GI 55)

His increasingly terse references to women, notably his rueful admission that "I've done some graduate work in that area of specialisation" (GI 65), subtly embody the system of values implicit in the division of intellectual labour within academic institutions. Ultimately Sadness's acknowledgement of the incommensurability between the development of his interpretative skills and the social practices that should accommodate them precipitates a complete breakdown in his relationship with others:

Then I'm grading everything in my whole life: lunch at McDonald's, C-minus; my wife's spaghetti, F; Miss Cohen's swollen nipples, A-plus; The Defecation in Swift Man lecturing on sin, C over D; the cheeks of Miss Cohen's perfect ass, A-plus; a memo from the Acting President on turning out lights, A-minus; my brilliant little lecture on *Hamlet*, F; Miss Cohen slipping her panties into my desk drawer lest we be surprised of a sudden, A; my xeroxed letter applying

around the nation and into foreign lands for gainful employment, F-minus; Miss Cohen straddling my lap on my broken office chair (yes, I could and probably still can make it sitting even if not lying), A-plus; my three job interviews at MLA, F-minus: my friendly explanation to my professor, my wife, my father-in-law, my dissertation committee, my dead mother, my draft board, my unremembered father, my bank, my mother-in-law, my anti-scientific aunt, Matthew Arnold, Grey Owl, Our Dean who art on the fifteenth floor hallowed be Thy Keyholes . . . FFFFFFFFFFFFFFFF.

A failure. An F-minus-minus-minus fucking failure. (GI 47-48)

Barbara Johnson has pointed out that the decision to privilege the interpretation of cultural phenomena over independent action within history is not ideologically innocent. "Just as the attempt to know without doing can itself function as a deed," she writes, "the fact that judgement is always explicitly an act adds a further insoluble problem to its cognitive predicament."¹⁶ Against the taxonomic closure of Madham's discourse Kroetsch strives to resituate the interpretative act within the social exchange of knowledge and power. Contrary to Madham's expectations, Sadness's journey to the Canadian northwest demonstrates that the act of interpretation always exerts leverage upon the historical world and that the reinterpretation of cultural history marks a conscious ideological intervention. By dramatising Sadness's gradual realisation of the isolation of his hermeneutic stance from the social and cultural practices that it helps to define, Kroetsch is therefore able to expose the gap that exists between representations of Canadian cultural identity and the reality of post-colonial Canadian experience.

Uncomfortably aware that Madham's valorisation of the intellectual over the material renders him a "transcendent man" and a "MIND-FUCKER" (GI 49), Sadness searches for a way of reconciling critical thought and social engagement. Interestingly, his first impulse is to develop a deconstructive discourse that examines the effect modes of representation have upon the experiences they describe. This commitment to explore the semantic tensions that inhabit language, which reaches its apotheosis in the hypothetical titles of his academic dissertation "The Plot Against Plot" and "The Quest Unquestioned" (GI 149), characterises the opening of his idiosyncratic discussion of the discovery of America: "Christopher Columbus, not knowing that he had not come to the Indies, named the inhabitants of that new world - " (GI 21). This curious sentence, which reverses its movement in mid-stream and instils a crisis of identity in the formative gesture of New World history, suggests that Madham's diffuse positivism is an inappropriate response to the post-colonial experience of alterity. The

process of defamiliarisation that this acknowledgement of cultural difference begins continues with Sadness's arrival at Edmonton International Airport, where, stripped of the obvious trappings of his American identity, his first words in response to the Customs Official's challenge are "Hey . . . This isn't mine" (GI 6).

The scene depicting Sadness's arrival at Edmonton airport offers the reader a first opportunity to consider the appropriateness of Madham's critical commentary to the text of Sadness's quest. Sadness's crisis of identity is obvious from the very first words that he utters. Entering Canada with nothing to declare, the contents of his past can only be recovered by means of "a veritable jailor's ring of keys" (GI 6). However, Sadness provides an important insight into the reason for his curious placelessness when he states that the purpose of his trip is for him to "become" Grey Owl. Seizing upon this admission, Madham provides an instant interpretation of his student's unusual ambition:

Jeremy Sadness might have chosen no end of frontiersmen to embody his dream of westward flight. Curiously, he chose a model from the utmost cultivated shores of the civilized world. Given as he was to self-deceiving self-analysis, he believed that his life's predicament found its type in Grey Owl. He was almost anally fascinated by that quick-tempered English lad who left Victorian England, disappeared into the Canadian bush, and emerged years later as Wa-Sha-Quon-Asin.

He-Who-Travels-By-Night. (GI 6-7)

Madham's sneering reference to Sadness's penchant for "self-deceiving self-analysis" coupled with his assertion that the "possibility of transformation . . . played no little part in Jeremy's abiding fantasy of fulfilment" (GI 7) deliberately replaces the wider cultural implications of Sadness's fascination with Grey Owl with a problem of personal psychology. Yet a radically different reading of Sadness's desire for metamorphosis is available which examines his interest in the story of Archie Belaney, the "quick tempered English lad" who threw off the cultural presuppositions of Victorian England and re-emerged as the Indian warrior Grey Owl, as a way of challenging the meta-discourse of colonialist history through a direct encounter with the Canadian interior. In this regard, Belaney stands in the same relation to Sadness as Kroetsch to Felix Paul Greve, the German who reinvented himself in Canada as Frederick Philip Grove to become "perhaps the most complex and most instructive ethnic writer yet to appear on the Canadian literary scene."¹⁷ Grove's importance to Kroetsch is that his life and work show that "[t]he un-naming allows the naming."¹⁸ At

once symbol and explorer of the post-colonial experience he strives, in "a situation where signified and signifier do not cohere,"¹⁹ to rewrite the myths of the Old World in terms of the silence of a nation without its own myths of origin. Kroetsch discusses the dynamic of Grove's art in terms strikingly reminiscent of *The Studhorse Man* and *Gone Indian*:

If there is a gap between word and object, the final question is language itself, and the question of naming. Perhaps the completion of the narrative is made possible, not primarily by the surface story, but rather by a narrative movement that entails a changed sense of language, a movement from the old language, through silence (a silence that might be imagined even as a death) into a new language.²⁰

Sadness's experiences repeat the narrative movement of Grove's work: liberated from the confines of the academy, he progresses beyond the "old language" toward a final "silence" that suggests the possible "death" of colonialist rhetoric and the emergence of new forms of cultural identity. For Sadness's story to achieve its widest allegorical significance, it is important that Kroetsch establishes him as a cultural site upon which the struggle between colonialist and post-colonial discourse can be enacted. Kroetsch suggests the duplicity of Sadness's function as both 'character' and metaphor for an evolving cultural consciousness by presenting him as the personification of a psychological and cultural borderline between two states of being.²¹ Madham identifies Sadness's interstitial position between American and Canadian codes of recognition in his remark that "[o]nce you are through the Catskills you are free of the east, and the east will never hold you again. But you are not yet west" (GI 94). The ambiguity of Sadness's role is again emphasised when he replaces two symbols of transgression within the novel: he substitutes for Dorck, who went "across the line" (GI 12) between life and death, as Winter King; and then duplicates Robert Sunderman's place in Bea Sunderman's bed following her husband's unaccountable exit from prairie life.

Arrested in a curious interzone between different cultural borders, Sadness's quest to find the nature of freedom implicates him in a continual uninvention of representations of Canadian cultural history. His need to question received narratives of identity and place is given comic expression by his loss of his suitcase upon his arrival in Canada (he is, in fact, handed an identical suitcase that belongs to the mysterious Roger Dorck), and his discovery that his best chance of escaping further

confinement by the Mounties is to escape from the airport "DISGUISED AS MYSELF" (GI 11). Thus transformed, he enters the Canadian "labyrinth" (GI 11) to feel the first stirrings of a buried life within himself "like a large, heavy animal pawing its way through a crust of snow" (GI 12). Sadness's journey to Notikeewin, which he undertakes in order to return Dorck's possessions and recover the suitcase that guarantees his connection with his American past, merely increases his distance from his former life. Riding through the immense northwestern prairies, Sadness experiences "a kind of still but endless motion" (GI 16) that defies Madham's insistence upon causality and closure and confronts him with the prospect of "space itself, undreamed, silence undreamed" (GI 19). "When will you *begin*?" (GI 21) asks Madham, seeking form and pattern in his student's life; to which Sadness bluntly replies "Endings be Damned" (GI 24).

The contrast between the Professor's passion for verisimilitude and orderly progression and Sadness's need to reinvent himself outside the constraints of Madham's narrative is evident in Madham's complaint that Sadness's recordings do not "give us adequate motivation, adequate *allowance*, for what happens" (GI 30). But mimesis, as Sadness quickly discovers, is a problematic mode in which to record the deconstruction and reconstitution of the self implicit in the bivalent example of Dorck, his elusive *doppelgänger*, who lies suspended "alive and dead" (GI 29) between two opposed conditions of being, and Archie Belaney, the Englishman who "died into a new life" (GI 62). Instead, the plural ontologies of Canadian reality, dramatically encapsulated in the multiple universe of Bea Sunderman's home *WORLDS END*, demand a form of representation that challenges the univocity of Madham's cultural critique. One of Sadness's first acts in Jill Sunderman's apartment is therefore to "tr[y] to reach through the glass and touch my own skin" (GI 19), a gesture which reveals, in Lecker's words, that Sadness is "trying to penetrate the mimetic barrier that confines him in a world of duplicated, rather than invented, meaning."²² Far from being "*trapped* in the blank indifference of space and timelessness" (GI 124), Sadness's rebirth in the uninventing spaces of the Canadian prairies is threatened only by the image of his "decapitated body" that he glimpses "hung in suspension" (GI 53) in a wilderness of mirrors.

Edward Said has suggested that the problem with the border that divides "same" from "other" is that it can be traversed in both directions.²³ Unhappily aware that

Sadness's assault on mimesis threatens his construction of Canada as an unconditional ontological category, Madham makes a concerted bid to undermine his student's testimony. An early example of Madham's strategy can be seen in the scene that describes Sadness's first meeting with Jill Sunderman. This episode begins with Madham's insinuation that Sadness's taped record of this encounter is so shocking that, in the name of Jill's "feminine reticence," it is necessary for Madham to interpret Sadness's version of events "in my own words" (GI 20). Having neatly displaced Sadness from his own narrative, Madham then introduces the urbane brutalities of pornographic discourse to demonstrate the inherent baseness of Sadness's imagination. His textual ventriloquism presents Sadness watching Jill who is "cocked forward over a desk" touching the "bone handle" of Sadness's "hunting knife." Despite being "in a way that is vaguely sexual, immobilized," Madham recalls, Sadness projects an image of Sunderman as "a woman desiring her isolation to be violated." However, a suspicion lingers throughout this scene that Madham is guilty of overplaying his hand: his gloating remark that Jill is "creating" Sadness out of the "immense joke that is the life on exhibit in that suitcase" into her private "version of a savage" only reinforces our sense of Sadness's helplessness within a discourse that circumscribes his every action. As if sensing the implausibility of this portrait of Sadness as an intellectually confused Caliban, Madham suggests that his student's crisis of cultural identity was in fact prompted by his inability to project his own image onto the seductive blankness of the Canadian landscape. Accordingly, he superimposes Marlow's imperialist dream of appropriation in *Heart of Darkness*, where he is pictured as a "little chap" with a "passion for maps" that were subsequently filled with "rivers and lakes and names," onto Sadness's vision of the northwest:

He went to the iron rail. He looked over the rail, down into the falling snow, trying to see the North Saskatchewan River. He let his mind dream the name. The name that had been so long in his dreaming. All those hours spent over a school atlas, studying maps. Finding blank spaces. Finding that thin blue line of river that melted out of the Rocky Mountains and fell across the northwest, into other thin blue lines, into Hudson Bay. (GI 59)

The mutability of Madham's approach reflects a tension within the needs of dominant cultural discourse outlined by Richard Terdiman:

When a particular social practice emerges as hegemonic, its relation to other competing and contesting practices is subtly altered. By virtue of its status as dominant, it becomes the target for "vampirization," for colonization, for subversion by its rivals. It begins to be the inevitable referent of their counter-assertions. And, as in the parable about the jailer and the jailed, those seeking

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to undo it necessarily spend more time and energy toward this end than the dominant can spend countering such efforts.²⁴

The corollary of this paradox in *Gone Indian* is that Madham's attempt to establish Sadness as an "alien strain" and give him "an analytical, visible, and permanent reality" as a "natural order of disorder"²⁵ depends upon the illusion of Sadness's freedom. Yet this illusion can be sustained only by the provision of a discursive space that Sadness exploits to undermine Madham's narrative. Sadness underlines his difference from Madham by developing an ironic counter-discourse which, in Terdiman's words, "materialises the counter-term which any dominant usage seeks to suppress" by projecting an alternative "through which any element of the here-and-now may be shown as contingent, and thereby to subject the whole configuration of power within which it took its adversative meaning to the erosive, dialectical power of alterity."²⁶ In the limited space that Madham's narrative allows him, Sadness is able to develop a powerful critique of Madham's motivation for sending him to Canada:

The whole idea sets me to thinking about you. As I reconstruct the impulse now, it was at your suggestion that I applied for a job out here. I begin to suspect your motive. I know you have a professorial desire to exercise your impotence on my gullible wife, Professor Madham. Your lassitude appeals to her. Not to mention your huge head with its greying wavy hair, your squash-player's perfect figure, your Zapata mustache smelling, as Carol once idly remarked, of meerschaum pipes and rum and honey. I know you would add her upstate innocence to your collection of beautiful objects, use her to stimulate your failing appetites. And that is why you sent me out here into the eternal goddamned temptations of the wilderness. Into what you, in your appalling ignorance, like to *think* is the wilderness - (GI 60)

Sadness's ironic identification of the link between Madham's "appetites," his colonisation of Sadness's private life, and his expulsion of Sadness from New York successfully contests the privilege Madham accords to his own actions. But if Sadness manages to impose the dialectical power of alterity upon Madham's frame narrative, his own life is gradually transformed by the pressure of Canadian history upon his exposed sensibility. Kroetsch underlines the fluid, metamorphic quality of the experiences that Sadness is to undergo by substituting him for Roger Dorck as King of the Notikeewin Winter Festival. The Winter Festival is the first example in Kroetsch's fiction of the influence upon him of the Bakhtinian notion of "carnival" which I will examine at some length in my discussion of *What the Crow Said* in Chapter Seven. Briefly, the term "carnival" denotes a period of social and cultural upheaval when hierarchies are suspended and normal relations of order and causality are reversed. The inversion and parody of empirical codes of classification intrinsic to carnival play poses an explicit

challenge to Madham's epistemology. "Perched as it is on the edge of carnival celebration, Notikeewin is decreating itself"²⁷ writes Lecker, and the possibilities for transformation that this process introduces change Sadness irrevocably. The distance that he has travelled from Madham's closed world becomes apparent during his participation in a snowshoe race, where he crosses the frontier between Madham's repressive "innocence" and the postlapsarian paradise of northwestern Canada:

The snow was a garden. Flowers of light and shadow bloomed out of the banks of the frozen river, out of the mouth of a cave, the curve of what must be stone, under the blue snow. A broken crow's nest in a crooked poplar had sprouted petals of light. A fallen tree had raised up the blown snow into a mound beneath its fall, and the mound splintered the fall of the sun's rays. A patch of fractured and reset ice was an alpine meadow of varied white, and where a spring had cracked loose from the winter itself the bent grasses were fixed in blossoms of translucent glass. (GI 84)

Sadness's epiphany challenges Madham's "unfallen" vision by introducing time and process into the edenic "garden." The regeneration that this passage describes, where light blooms and grass blossoms out of the frozen landscape, duly takes place around the spectral presence of the "fallen tree." Against Madham's transcendent dream of the "highest paddock" (GI 2), Sadness envisages the promise of mankind "beneath its fall" where the "diffusion of personality into a complex of possibilities rather than a concluded self" (GI 152) becomes an inescapable fact of human existence. The fall into contingency that accompanies Sadness's vision of a "splintered" paradise reveals Madham's image of himself as a new Adam innocently reading the experience of the New World to be a fiction designed to conceal his narrative control over discourses of Canadian history.

By enforcing a distinction between different orders of cultural experience the motion of writing, in Levi-Strauss's terms, merely reworks the imperialist strategies of colonisation at another level. Consequently, Madham can only establish the innocence of his adamic acts of identification by excluding from his gaze those forms of New World experience erased by the European process of colonisation. Conversely, Sadness's ironic counter-discourse, which lampoons Madham as the "old mad Adam of the original day" (GI 91), powerfully dramatises the Amerindian heritage marginalised by European enlightenment discourse. It achieves this primarily by recording Sadness's growing conviction that his own identity as a post-colonial subject depends upon a rapprochement with the original forms of New World experience. Following

his unlikely victory in the snowshoe race, Sadness 'goes Indian' by admitting to the existence of an 'Indian' side to his own personality. His transformation begins with an overpowering sense of alienation from his surroundings. His companions, a sullen and resentful group of beaten runners, metamorphose before his eyes into "muskrats" (GI 89), while the fracture of Sadness's personality is evident in his remark "I found my own right hand, under the table, one of two matching hands" (GI 89). The reflex response of the local men to inexplicable difference, which is to identify the newcomer as a "part Indian" (GI 91) interloper from the Hobbema Reserve, is accepted by Sadness, who sees "the potential truth of the observation" and refuses to point out their mistake since any explanation would force him to speak in "a tongue [he] did not understand" (GI 93). Instead, his transformation is given symbolic expression by his encounter with the Cree Daniel Beaver, who rescues him from the snow after he undergoes a vicious physical assault. In the quiet privacy of an Esso station washroom Beaver dresses Sadness in the jacket and moccasins of a plains Indian; bereft of the "ring of keys" (GI 98) that open the way back to his old life, and encircled by the "engulfing wave" (GI 99) of Beaver's huskies, Sadness's incorporation of two distinct phases of New World history into his own life is complete.

Sadness's deconstruction of the "sterile, *named* East characterized by concluded speech and written form"²⁸ represented by Madham is symbolised by his reincarnation as the Indian warrior Has-Two-Chances. Asleep in the back of Beaver's truck, Sadness experiences a dream-vision that challenges Madham's use of the Canadian interior as "other" to enlightenment discourse. In the professor's sardonic paraphrase, "[i]t was Jeremy's notion that two great waves of culture have washed out from Europe, one to the east, one to the west. On the Great Central Plains of America they had met again. Bloodily" (GI 103). However, this "notion" of New World history as the consequence of a struggle between "two great waves of culture" allows Sadness to envisage an alternative scenario in which the moral claims of enlightenment discourse are tested against the practices that gave them hegemonic status. Accordingly, his dream of the "scalping of Edmonton" inverts the logic of genocide against the indigenous population and exposes the role of the guardians of order (educators, policemen, missionaries) in the history of barbarism:

Hardly had the sun found the sky when the earth was red with fire and blood. Department stores gave up their treasures to crackling flame: banks bubbled and burst like cauldrons of molten money. High-rise apartments and their occupants fused at last into a community of soul, smoked like wildcat gushers into the darkening sky. Lovers ran arm in arm from their cheap motels,

perishing together in speaking tongues of fire. Businessmen at a conference, hand in hand, leaped together from a balcony of a large hotel, fell like a strand of dark pearls onto the indifferent cement. Drivers of automobiles, seeing the end so near, smashed their cars into poles, into trees, into plate-glass windows, into fleeing pedestrians, into each other. Rape was the order of the day for those, men and women alike, who escaped from their flaming beds. Trial by torture was the rule for those who survived the eloquent rape. Big Bear, with a handful of warriors helping, filled the local jail with uniformed policeman, then touched fire to the powder magazine; the smoking air rained badges and boots, rained ears and legs. Looking Glass found four professors and cut from each the thumb and first finger of the right hand, then asked them to lecture on truth while they bled. Crowfoot, remembering indignities of the past, captured six legislators, then forced them to scalp each other alive. A little fellow named Wolf Head cut off the testicles from a missionary and gently stuffed them into the good missionary's own mouth. (GI 104-05)

Sadness's reincarnation as Has-Two-Chances permits him to recover a stratum of Canadian experience preserved by the collective memory ^{of} western oral culture. His vision of the scalping of Edmonton employs the transgressive logic of dream-narrative to dramatise the way in which Madham's enlightenment rationalism represses native discourses of Canadian history. Stung by the irruption of repressed historical material into his narrative of Sadness's decline, Madham lambasts his student's "perverse dreaming" and re-emphasises the difference between their respective methodologies:

I must break my silence, Miss Sunderman. Your idiot lascivious student knew *nothing*: and yet he would dare to dream *my* northwest. If you understand his perverse dreaming, then you might understand my careful accounting for his end. It was earned and willed and *deserved*. (GI 101)

However, Sadness's experiences in the carnivalesque environment of Notikeewin question the value of the distinction Madham makes between his own "careful accounting" and Sadness's response to marginalised narratives of western experience. The unreliability of Madham's faith in pure causal relations in a world where, he admits, explanations are assigned "almost at random" (GI 51), is made clear to Sadness when he is arrested by the Festival Redcoats, whose behaviour parodies normal rules of detection and evidence. Disoriented by his predicament in a situation where all charges "had changed since the time of arrest" (GI 70), Sadness is brought to be judged by the White Bear (Bea Sunderman). Her cross-examination of him demonstrates the relative and culturally specific nature of judgements of historical value, and ridicules his residual belief in the universal applicability of Madham's naive empiricism:

"Then tell us," the bear said, "is it better to be beautiful or to be happy?"

She riddled me a tough one. I was close to a cold sweat, wishing I could get hold of that microphone. Ask Jill, I thought to myself: ask your daughter. She drove over icy roads and knocked on the door of her own apartment, a terrified stranger.

I said nothing.

"Fine," the bear said. "Exactly."

The crowd laughed.

"Then tell us further," the bear said, is it better to seek beauty or to seek truth?"

Again I had nothing to say. You should meet our poor dear Madham, I thought. He would stumble between a woman's legs while staring into her eyes. The crowd surged into a closing circle, threatened me with a chorus of boos. I was ready and willing to run for it. Make a break. But where would I go?

"Exactly," the bear said. "And now, Mr Judge, please, tell us one last thing?"

Last thing all right. And last things. My speciality since the beginning. Bringing up the rear.

I nodded.

She either nodded in reply, or bent her head and licked at her fur.

"Tell these three waiting princesses. Is it better to be beautiful, or is it better to be free?"

Excellent question, I decided. Excellent. Consult Mr Dorck for details. He kicked himself loose from gravity itself. (GI 72-73)

Bea Sunderman's final injunction to Sadness to "[g]o free yourself" (GI 74) underlines his imprisonment within a sterile hermeneutics. The force of her judgement unsettles him, prompting him to locate the cause of his social isolation in his adherence to Madham's rhetoric:

I know what you will say, Madham, even before you say it. The mark of the well-trained professor. Separate and alone, Sadness, my boy. *Separate and alone*, the tragic figure of our unhappy days, embracing the shadow of his imagined self. Dreaming his universe in his own little skull. Lost in his own conniving. (GI 108)

Sadness's disorientation continues in his own judgement scene - the election of the Winter Queen. In this episode Sadness is asked to fulfil his obligations as Dorck's surrogate by choosing the most beautiful woman from three candidates so similar they "might have been Xeroxed copies of some lost original" (GI 112):

The three young ladies had commenced the ritual. They had performed it so often in the past they had no need to be told now what to do. And why should I know what they were doing?

I was the only goddamned stranger within 500 miles of that stage. Trust my luck.

These three mysteries were carrying roses that were peculiarly orange and purple in the blazing lights, the bright blossoms themselves almost lost in green leaves. Quickly I scratched on my pad: RED YELLOW BLUE.

Miss Red stood up from her chair and arranged her hands under her bosom. Her bosoms. Which is it? She smiled, walked along the apron of the stage directly at me, smiled again, turned around, eased her hips into motion, walked along the apron of the stage, sat down again.

The thunder of applause. Goddamn. Whoopee. Look at that.

Miss Yellow arose and did likewise. The crowd loved it. My despair grew. Hooray. Thunder of applause.

It was a problem in the angle of perception. The audience had a view of each candidate in profile, of motion across the field of vision; a horizon and a foreground united by a common pursuit. But the candidates were coming straight at me, then moving straight away. I was getting no depth into the picture. I was trapped into my own tight focus on that which zoomed in, retreated. Under the heading of Dissertation Number Eight I wrote: *The Forgery of Distance: Ritual for a Long Night*. (GI 113)

The pivotal importance of Sadness's judgement of the Winter Queen to a reading of *Gone Indian* is that this scene presents the collapse of politically disinterested discourses of cultural order. Through Sadness's crisis of judgement Kroetsch satirises the claim of empiricism to objective status outside the social practices and institutional centres that identify, structure, and legitimate knowledge. He achieves this by systematically subverting the epistemological dichotomy of action and interpretation, showing interpretation to be, in the words of David Bennett, "always already infected with action, the interpretative act as ineluctably a social act."²⁹ Although Sadness is introduced as an "objective," "disinterested," and "final" (GI 112) arbiter of aesthetic value, he discovers that the absolute identity of the three women before him forces him to counter the "problem in the angle of perception" by openly projecting his own personality into his evaluative paradigm. Trapped within his own "tight focus," Sadness's reaction to the extremity of his situation is to replicate Madham's behaviour and use the 'neutral' epistemological strategies of academic analysis to conceal his own crisis of identity:

Not once did any one of the candidates speak a word. Not a human word. To me, a man forever attracted to the maelstrom. Something in me wanted to write in the margins of those lives: Awk. Frag. Emph. Cap. Fig. Instead: I was offered silence. What In heaven was I supposed to judge? (GI 114)

But, as Barbara Johnson has shown, "[w]hat every act of judgement manifests is not the value of the object but the position of the judge within a structure of exchange. There is, in other words, no position from which to judge that would be outside the lines of force involved in the object judged."³⁰ Sadness's enthronement of Jill Sunderman (a non-contestant) as Winter Queen is an appropriate response to the

"lines of force" involved in the object judged. Daughter of Robert Sunderman and colleague of Roger Dorck, she occupies a pivotal role in Notikeewin's carnivalesque celebration of temporary freedom from the "concluded self" of fixed identity. By identifying Jill as Queen of the Festival, Sadness acknowledges that to interpret may be to name, but to name is also to interpret. Only at this point is he able to break out of the hermeneutic circle that imprisons him, and signal his ultimate disavowal of Madham's coercive rationalism:

I was staring at Jill where she sat on the throne. But looking at her, at the beautiful blonde crowned queen of winter - God forgive me, I thought of Jeremy Bentham. Jeremy *Bentham*. The ultimate professor. It was too much altogether. That ultimate crowned head of professorhood. He who would give a grade to justice, pleasure, law, luxury, will, duty, ambition, honor, pain, belief, fiction, chaos . . .

I knew I had to get out of there.

Jill had flicked on the microphone. "My dearest subjects," she was saying, regal and sure, "let us now clear the chairs and benches from the floor. Tell the players to bring up their instruments. We will dance until dawn."

I wanted to dance, let me tell you. Just once in my goddamned fucked-up book-spent life, I wanted to dance clean through the night: damn the unwritten papers. Damn the forthcoming exam.

I left through a fire exit. (GI 123)

The final line of this passage suggests, however, that the liberation of the post-colonial subject from imposed discourses of cultural order is not easily achieved. Madham's textual mediation of Sadness's personality is demonstrated once again when, immediately after the election of the Winter Queen, he introduces a number of distinct discourses (anthropology, ethnology, literary criticism) to 'explain' Sadness's testimony as a symptom of delusional behaviour:

Miss Sunderman: The sort of emotional anxiety your hero was experiencing, we are led to understand, is not uncommon in frigid climates. The phenomenon sometimes described as arctic hysteria has been examined by a number of Russian authorities, especially Krivoshapkin and Vitashevsky - though in all fairness I should add that a Mr. Elaide disputes their conclusions. The extreme cold, the long nights, the solitude of *unbounded* space: these are the enemies that induce that northern ecstasy. I had hoped to send you a copy of Ohlmarks, *Studien zum Problem des Schamanismus* - but I cannot find an adequate translation. At any rate, the afflicted person, quite commonly, senses the presence of another who is not in fact there. Mr. T. S. Eliot, to take a literary example, attributes the experience to the members of Shackleton's Antarctic Expedition: those explorers, at the edge of exhaustion, were deluded into believing there was amongst them *one more member* than could actually be counted. (GI 123-24)

In the concluding chapters of the novel Sadness's efforts to come to terms with his "otherness" within Madham's totalising narrative system reach fever-pitch. Driven through the streets of Notikeewin by his "loneliness and isolation" (GI 124), he undergoes a symbolic resurrection at a party in Johnnie Backstrom's funeral parlour, where, after dozing in a coffin provided for his temporary support, he awakes from a dream of his own epitaphs to concede that the "jest and mockery" his life has become is "too much" (GI 133). But in order to divine his real identity, it is essential that Sadness confronts his *doppelgänger* Dorck. Alone in a hospital room with Dorck's prone body, Sadness condemns the "fucking old king of the winter" (GI 141) as a fraud whose comatose tranquillity mocks the helpless confusion of his festival subjects. As Peter Thomas points out, Sadness's anger arises because of his conviction that Dorck's leap into vacancy grants him "a dubious freedom from the female claim in time"³¹ represented in the novel by Carol Sadness and Jill and Bea Sunderman. However, Thomas is quite wrong to suggest that Sadness's "function" is "to survive Carol, Jill and Bea by trickster cunning and the escape into ficticity and story."³² In fact, Sadness's complaint is that Dorck's escape into stasis denies the process of historical change through which Sadness can challenge the absolute determinism of Madham's "codified worldview."³³ It is therefore the irruption of diachrony into a closed system of meaning that Sadness desires so vehemently in the form of a "message" detailing Dorck's death:

Are you *listening*, Dorck? I want you to do me a favour. I want you to die. Just goddamned *die* and get it over with. I can't stand this. We go around day and night waiting for one little message. He's alive. He's dead. It doesn't matter where we go, what we do. Always the question. When will the message arrive? (GI 141)

Sadness's need to break out of an atemporal "endless circle" within which he is "always the lost man circling blindly, come back upon himself" (GI 144) is explored most extensively at WORLDS END, the house to which he flees after his confrontation with Dorck. During Sadness's first visit to WORLDS END, shortly after his entry into the northwest, Madham describes Bea Sunderman's home as an "imprisoned garden" (GI 31) full of timepieces in which "[n]ot one clock was ticking" (GI 32). In contrast to the arrested temporality of Sunderman's dwelling, however, Sadness's quest redefines post-colonial identity by materialising the "invisible world" (GI 97) of Canadian history and opposing it to the hegemonic structures of American cultural discourse. The diacritical impulse behind Sadness's intervention becomes clear when his reappearance at WORLDS END introduces the process of mutability into

Sunderman's petrified garden. As he enters the house a number of clocks begin to tick; then he hears footsteps "like the tickings of a clock" (GI 145). The identification of Sadness as an agent of temporal process continues with his observation that "[s]omewhere, now, I could hear my own heart. Or was it a clock I heard?" (GI 146). And, in a moment of signal importance, Sadness contrasts the plural and interdependent discursive worlds of the New World experience with the "embalmed" (GI 146) and self-enclosed figure of his namesake Jeremy Bentham, that "hero of our reasonable world" (GI 51). "I have done a quick review of logic, called upon the paradigms of literature and history," Sadness explains, in an intellectual adventure that has "put to the test the whole theory of a liberal education" (GI 148). But after twenty-five years of study, and nine years of instruction in the violent displacements of Madham's cultural rhetoric, all he can be sure of is that "for a long, long time I had not heard the ticking clocks" (GI 148).

Sadness's ultimate understanding of the historically constituted character of cultural meaning, which leads him to describe his experiences in Canada as the "Columbus quest for the oldest New World" (GI 147), is a disaster for Madham. Said has noted that the synchronic vision of colonialist rhetoric, which erects a vision of the world upon a series of absolute cultural distinctions, crumbles if "diachrony is introduced into the system."³⁴ To ward off this threat Madham assumes executive control and banishes Sadness from the text. By expelling the sign of alterity in this way, Madham hopes to restore the status of his narrative as a discourse outside a system of differences. He therefore concludes *Gone Indian* with a little detective mystery, in which Sadness and Bea Sunderman flee into a prairie blizzard and are killed when their snowmobile is hit by a train. In order to account for the *lacunae* in this version of events (particularly the lack of bodies and the absence of any motive for the lovers' presence in the blizzard in the first place) Madham insists that since the couple were prey to the "kind of silliness that intrudes upon reason" (GI 153) their behaviour is best examined within the register of nihilism. Consequently they "rode away seeking NOTHING" because "THEY DID NOT KNOW WHERE THEY WERE GOING" (GI 156). Not surprisingly, Madham recognises the "benevolence of a generous Creator" (GI 156) in this final disposition of circumstances. But so abrupt is Madham's assumption of control for Sadness's narrative, and so unhesitating his expulsion of Sadness from the field of meaning, that his student's very absence guarantees the professor's sober explanations an ironic reception. Given Madham's manifest exploitation of the lovers' disappearance to illustrate the peril of departure from his own

discourse of enlightenment - Sadness and Sunderman, we recall, are said to follow "their own little light" (GI 156) to their death - we accept his statement "[t]hat the bodies were not to be found is no mystery to me I assure you" (GI 150) for reasons rather different to his own. Meanwhile, his insistence that he has "abjure[d] the apostrophe" (GI 154) in his presentation of WORLDS END is bleakly comic if the term "apostrophe" is understood as a speech given on behalf of one who is no longer present. Indeed, the sheer incommensurability between Madham's exaggerated respect for the integrity of Sadness's recordings and his imposition of a wholly alien framework of interpretation upon his student's story eventually forces him to admit of his own narrative that "[t]he rest is fiction" (GI 157).

Madham's admission that his objective representation of Sadness's last days is, to some degree, a fictional re-creation of his student's encounter with the northwest exposes the way he has constructed and positioned Sadness as an object of discourse. In this regard, Sadness is revealed to be not an autonomous and unified subject but "a space of exteriority in which a network of distinct sites is deployed."³⁵ The narrative in which this network of codes and images is articulated should not therefore be perceived as "the majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing, speaking subject" but rather as a medium "in which the dispersion of the subject and his discontinuity with himself may be determined."³⁶ The notion of discourse as a material practice through which the "discontinuity" of the subject with itself can be assessed is best explored by means of the series of references that connect the lives of Madham, Sadness, and Robert Sunderman. For a counter-discursive reading of Madham's narrative extends the tantalising suggestion that Madham is in fact none other than Robert Sunderman, the "boy-husband" with a "child-bride" who escaped the Canadian prairie because he could not stop "regretting the boyhood that he could not quite surrender" (GI 155). In this revised reading of *Gone Indian*, the character of Sadness becomes merely an "other" which Madham projects onto the Canadian landscape in order to exorcise his own guilt and emphasise the necessity of escape from the carnivalesque chaos of the northwest. Ultimately, then, Kroetsch's novel considers simultaneously the way in which the identification of cultural difference is used to justify the imposition of a hegemonic discourse of cultural order, and the crippling contradictions that beset the post-colonial subject (Madham) who internalises the meta-narrative of enlightenment discourse in order to come to terms with his own "discontinuous" experience.

As Arnold E. Davidson has pointed out, Kroetsch teases the reader with "various hints that the drowned Robert Sunderman has resurfaced as R. Mark Madham."³⁷ Not only are the men of the same generation (Madham, at forty-seven, is approximately the same age as Sunderman would now be) but they were born in the same place. "The truth is," Madham confides, at the beginning of the novel, "I was myself born out there on those wind-torn prairies, on the ripped edges of that northern forest - the details are unimportant" (GI 13). On the contrary, the details of Madham's past become more important as links between him and Sunderman are established. One connection is their shared love of ice-hockey. As Robert Sunderman's father remembers, Sunderman was the "best damned hockey prospect this country ever produced" with the "perfect physique for hockey" (GI 131). Much earlier in the novel Madham admits to Jill Sunderman that "I played a bit of hockey out there myself. When I was a boy. Didn't we all?" (GI 37). The general inclusiveness of this remark is meant to deflect attention from the specific quality of Madham's memory, but when this statement is added to Sadness's remark concerning his supervisor's "squash-player's perfect figure" (GI 60) a comparison with Sunderman becomes irresistible. Certainly the lingering attention the text pays to those who attempt to transcend the confines of their daily lives - and here we must number not just Sadness, but also the cowboy with his "desperate passion to fly" (GI 76), and Dorck, who leaps into free space "like a dream of himself" (GI 26) - might be thought to rehearse the guilt of the man who left without leaving any explanation. If so, Madham's strange statement that it "grieves" him to see *WORLDS END* deserted, and his equally unlikely admission that in ordering the fragments of Sadness's tapes he has "come to love that old house as well as if it were my own" (GI 154), offer poignant testimony to the ties with the past that can never be dissolved.

Once the detailed similarities between Madham and Robert Sunderman have been established, we can consider the ways in which the professor exploits his student's narrative to reconcile himself to his own split identity. Madham's significant personal investment in Sadness's adventures emerges in his admission that he sent Sadness to the northwest "as on a mission, as on a veritable quest for something forever lost to me and yet recoverable to the world" (GI 14). Kroetsch has playfully suggested that "the question of symbiosis" between Madham and Sadness is "complicated."³⁸ However, we can gauge the extent to which Sadness is a mere creation of Madham's melancholy genius by simply exchanging the two men's names

in certain situations. Thus it is Madham, not Sadness, who "believed that his whole life was shaped and governed by some deep American need to seek out the frontier" (GI 5); and it is the professor of whom it is "undeniable" that he "dreamed northwest" (GI 6). It is equally clear that Madham's withering comment on Sadness's "self-deceiving self-analysis" (GI 7) may be more fairly applied to a man who unearths details of his own past to serve as clues in an elaborate literary puzzle, while his scorn for Sadness's "voyeuristic fantasy" (GI 27) sits ill with his own initial description of Jill Sunderman.

Madham's cavalier disregard for the integrity of Sadness's story emerges particularly forcefully when he continues to attribute a narrative to Sadness even at those moments when it could not have been recorded. For over one-third of the novel (from Chapter twenty-five to Chapter thirty-eight) Sadness loses his microphone - Jill Sunderman leaves with it at the pancake breakfast at the First Presbyterian Church and Sadness only recovers it in Dorck's office after his judgement of the Winter Queen. Yet for the intervening period, Madham continues to supply us with a present-tense narrative that purports to originate from Sadness. With manipulation of this magnitude, it is altogether unsurprising that Madham decides to "destroy" Sadness's tapes for the inadequate reason that they were "cluttering up" (GI 154) his office. Madham's inexorable need for his cultural "other" is made plain, however, when Sadness reminds him during a conversation about Archie Belaney's passage between two versions of the self that "[o]ne false move, Professor, and instead of addressing you, I'll be you. That's serious" (GI 62). In a rare moment of candour, Madham reflects that "[t]he forest of my own intent is inhabited with strange creatures, surely" (GI 51). Not the least of these strange figures is his lonely graduate student, whose presence in the northwest is supposed to underpin Madham's timeless vision of Canada, and whose disappearance reintroduces history into the professor's abandoned home.

Sadness's diachronic intervention into the synchronic structure of Madham's narrative therefore embodies the need of post-colonial culture to achieve an identity unconstrained by universalist or Eurocentric concepts and images. This imperative is supplemented in the text by Kroetsch's appropriation of themes and motifs from the European and American cultural traditions. By incorporating dominant images from the Western imaginative tradition into a Canadian discourse of self-identification, Kroetsch reverses the relationship between the imperial "same" and the colonial "other." This

subversive act of semantic colonisation enables him to ironise those discourses - such as the notion of the "spiritual mission" of colonialism or the implicit division between civilisation and chaos represented by the idea of the frontier - that have traditionally circumscribed discussions of colonial identity and provides a critical space for an exploration of alterity itself.

There is an important moment in each encounter with an entirely new cultural environment in which the individual must choose between loyalty to established ideas and attitudes or the leap into a new constellation of imaginative possibilities. We can recognise this point of transition in Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It In The Bush* where the English lady is confronted with the reality of the Canadian experience.

"You have much to learn, ma'am, if you are going to the woods," said Mrs. J -
 "To unlearn, you mean," said Mr. D - . "To tell you the truth, Mrs. Moodie, ladies and gentlemen have no business in the woods. Education spoils man or woman for that location.³⁹

In *Gone Indian* Kroetsch seizes upon this fracture within the individual sensibility and transforms it into a metaphor for the ambivalence of the post-colonial position between the Old and New World. Like Susanna Moodie, Kroetsch's novel argues, Canadians must come to terms with the accumulated burden of the American and European cultural inheritance. This historical legacy receives particularly powerful expression in the frontier mythology of American culture. In one of its most basic emancipatory gestures, *Gone Indian* parodies the imaginative forms of American frontier fiction, appropriating for its own purposes that genre's brooding emphasis upon the demarcation and transgression of boundaries, its prevailing sense of personality in crisis, and its wariness of the malevolent "otherness" of the unhuman world.

Several aspects of the American frontier experience emphasise its suitability for Kroetsch's parodic intentions. To begin with, the ambiguous status of the notion of the 'frontier' produced by the tension the term embodies between the opposed poles of 'civilisation' and 'savagery' is an extension of the contradictory concept of the 'New World.' Thus the appellation 'New World' simultaneously suggests a form of original experience free from the restrictions of Old World history and social traditions, while accepting, by its designation as *New World*, its allotted position within the ideological framework of European colonialism. This fundamental contradiction helps to explain

the tension in American cultural discourse between the desire to establish the myth of the American as a 'new Adam' redefining human experience in a New World garden and the more pragmatic need to locate the New World experience within its European historical context. The sweep of Sadness's quest incorporates both extremes of this cultural divide: he is drawn to Edmonton by Madham's seductive vision of the blankness of Canadian cultural history, but he is ultimately transformed by the impact that the repressed narratives of Canadian history have upon his solitary consciousness.

Kroetsch initially demonstrates the effect that discourses of the American frontier have had upon the definition of Canadian identity by affixing one such discourse as an epigraph to *Gone Indian*. Thus the epigraph to his novel is taken from Frederick Jackson Turner's paper "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." Kroetsch fastens upon the closing moments of Turner's paper, where he moves into the declarative mode: "For a moment, at the frontier, the bonds of custom are broken and unrestraint is triumphant." By quoting Turner in this way, Kroetsch substitutes the Canadian prairie for Turner's vision of the great western American spaces in which ideas of social development, political philosophy, and cultural nationalism were developed, and which subsequently became the crucible of the North American imagination. Within this transposition, Canada becomes the first term in that symbolic "meeting point between savagery and civilisation"⁴⁰ that for Jackson Turner defines the American character. By superimposing Jackson Turner's frontier onto the northwestern landscape, Kroetsch suggests that the distinction within frontier rhetoric between civilisation and barbarism is reproduced in the dialectic between imperial and colonial culture. It is this dichotomy that Sadness deconstructs in his vision of the bloody meeting of the "two great waves of culture" (GI 103) on the Great Central Plains of America. Through this cataclysmic collision of the different cultural traditions that have "washed out from Europe" a space opens in which post-colonial identity can be articulated. Sadness's subversion of colonialist discourse eventually disorders even Jackson Turner's epigraph: despite the fact that Sadness's progress into the northwest slips the "bonds of custom" it is Madham, and not Sadness, whose "unrestraint" becomes "triumphant."

Another strategic borrowing from American cultural discourse of great significance to *Gone Indian* is Kroetsch's use of the doctrine of *felix culpa*, or the 'fortunate fall.' In the writings of the elder Henry James, the myth of the fortunate fall

acted as a corrective to the notion of the American as an unfallen Adam transplanted to a new Eden. Against this desire for historical innocence, James emphasised the importance of the lessons of the past to a full development of the personality. James's signal contribution to New World thought was thus to resituate the image of the American Adam within a larger historical cycle of loss and regeneration. R. W. B. Lewis has shrewdly identified the importance of the doctrine of the fortunate fall in James's thought and its implications for the self-declared innocence of the adamic personality:

The Christian suggestion teeters on the verge of heresy, and, for all its cheerfulness, it has always made its proponents uneasy. But as a metaphor in the area of human psychology, the notion of the fortunate fall has an immense potential. It points to the necessary transforming shocks and sufferings, the experiments and errors - in short, the experience - through which maturity and identity may be arrived at. This was just the perception needed in a generation that projected as one of its major ideals the image of man as a fair unfallen Adam. The claims of newborn innocence for the individual in America inevitably elicited the response that innocence is inadequate for the full reach of human personality; that life, in James's words, "flowers and fructifies . . . out of the profoundest tragic depths."⁴¹

In *Gone Indian* Kroetsch evokes the myth of the fortunate fall to show that a discourse of history that aims to reflect the "claims of new-born innocence for the individual in America" is quite inadequate to the task of portraying post-colonial experience. In the character of Madham he therefore parodies the Adamic strain of American transcendentalism associated pre-eminently with the poetry of Walt Whitman. Accordingly, Madham's robust belief in his own unfallen nature recalls Whitman's desire "to re-establish the natural unfallen man in the living hour."⁴² Moreover, his description of his naked frolic with Carol Sadness in his letter to Jill Sunderman echoes Whitman's Romantic return to the state of first things:

As Adam, early in the morning,
Walking forth from the bower refresh'd with sleep,
Behold me where I pass, hear my voice, approach,
Touch me, touch the palm of your hand to my body
as I pass,
Be not afraid of my body.⁴³

Madham's attempt to repudiate the vision of his own history represented to him by Sadness's narrative embodies the Whitmanesque imperative to slough off the influences of the past and begin the world again in a present made permanent. "Apart

from the pulling and hauling stands what I am, / Stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle, unitary"⁴⁴ Whitman declares in *Leaves of Grass*; but it is as well to remember Lewis's remark that in Whitman's view "the poet *projects* a world of order and meaning and identity into either a chaos or a sheer vacuum; he does not *discover* it."⁴⁵ In contrast to Madham's fidelity to the adamic ideal, Sadness's experiences show that the doctrine of New World man as an unfallen Adam fails to account for the separation from origin enforced by the need to name the New World in the language of the world it left behind. Behind discussions of Canadian identity lie, as Sadness's narrative explains, the great waves of European culture. Kroetsch repeatedly employs the trope of the "fall" to dramatise Sadness's awareness that history is not a random or contingent context for human experience, but a discourse of power that constructs subjectivities for the objects it describes. By falling from innocence into history Sadness therefore discovers a means of comprehending his own "otherness" within the discourse that envelops him. Initially unnerved by Notikeewin's carnivalesque dislocation of his cultural expectations, he is only too glad to be "saved" from "falling" (GI 40). But his time in the northwest slowly alerts him to the implicit violence of Madham's representation of Canada as a place of darkness in which order, meaning, and identity are threatened. Sadness eventually signals this discovery in his remark that the "trick" or secret of New World existence is "knowing how to fall" (GI 78) from Madham's idea of absolute selfhood (the "old mad Adam of the original day") and to acknowledge the mediation of New World identity by colonialist discourses of history.

Kroetsch's parodic appropriation of themes and motifs from American cultural discourse is supplemented by a series of intertextual references that connect his novel with the discursive forms of European culture. In particular, the story of Sadness's flight from inauthenticity towards a new vision of the self parodies the genre of spiritual autobiography which finds famous expression in Augustine's *Confessions* and the writing of John Bunyan. The narrative form of spiritual autobiography assists the thematic development of *Gone Indian* for three reasons. First, the historical discourse surrounding the genre of spiritual autobiography is one of chaos and fragmentation: both Augustine, witnessing the collapse of the Roman Empire, and Bunyan, imprisoned following the turmoil of the English civil war, write at a time when social authority is in abeyance and cultural identity in question. By reworking the textual motifs of spiritual autobiography into Sadness's quest-narrative, Kroetsch is therefore able to emphasise the moment of delegitimation that occurs at every frontier between

different paradigms of historical experience. Secondly, the tendency of the work of Augustine and Bunyan to use the experience of physical displacement intrinsic to the quest-narrative as a metaphor for an emotional and spiritual rebirth is replicated in the connection Kroetsch makes between Sadness's transplantation to the Canadian northwest and his attempt to escape the closed forms of Old World discourse. And, third, the dependence of the idiom of spiritual autobiography on the "old dualities" of scriptural rhetoric offers an excellent imaginative focus for Kroetsch's account of the paradoxical nature of the post-colonial search for new forms of identity within the discursive constraint of a mandarin language

Several connections between the *Confessions* and *Gone Indian* can usefully be established. The first correspondence between them is implicit in the title of Augustine's autobiography, because the confessional mode that he employs influences the form of Sadness's taped messages. Similarly, the textual structure of Augustine's "quest"⁴⁶ for redemption enforces a division between the modes of spiritual consolation and philosophical speculation that Kroetsch exploits in *Gone Indian*, where he allocates the former to Madham and the latter to Sadness. Furthermore, Augustine's anguished recognition that his exile from divine grace compels him to see himself as "*a confused reflection in a mirror*"⁴⁷ articulates the emphasis of both texts upon the link between the revaluation of the past and the development of new codes of recognition. Finally, Augustine's quest for self-knowledge is rooted in the experience of oral culture. The polyphonic discourse of oral culture is important to Kroetsch because the flexibility that its collective exchange of personality permits challenges received representations of historical and cultural identity. Commenting on *Gone Indian*, Kroetsch has acknowledged the appositeness of the unbounded inventiveness of oral discourse to a post-colonial situation "where we are literally in a new world telling ourselves about it, making each other up, inventing each other in this new world."⁴⁸

Themes and images from the work of John Bunyan also reverberate throughout *Gone Indian*. Thus Bunyan's repeated use of the "maze"⁴⁹ as a figure for the soul's tortuous journey towards God and his characterisation of paradise as a "new world"⁵⁰ are parodied by Kroetsch in Sadness's passage through the Canadian "labyrinth" towards the "oldest new world." By debunking Bunyan's theological discourse in this way, Kroetsch rejects the transcendent leap outside representation towards originary plenitude in favour of a deconstruction of the narrative frames that order Canadian

experience. In the same spirit, Sadness's journey from alienation to self-knowledge makes profane use of the tropes of trial and "judgement"⁵¹ that underpin Bunyan's Christian morality tales. However, Kroetsch's borrowings from Bunyan are not simply confined to the tropological level. Instead, Bunyan's writing extends to Kroetsch the possibility of further levels of meaning implicit in the epistemological strategies of Christian allegory. Accordingly, the curious names of Kroetsch's two narrators accrue meaning from their relocation within the allegorical nominative tradition apotheosised in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. By combining within itself a multiplicity of reference, the name "Madham" may be read as a parody of the professor's adamic desire to establish an unmediated relationship between sign and referent. Three possible connotations of his name should be noted: the ideas of theatrical insincerity ("mad-ham"), sexual insecurity ("madam") and the urge for transcendence ("the old mad Adam of the original day"). Meanwhile, the novel gains its internal dynamic from the attempt to discern a context for, and a solution to, the question of Jeremy's sadness. By establishing *The Pilgrims Progress* as an intertext for *Gone Indian* we can also appreciate Kroetsch's exquisite parody of Christian's status as the lonely wayfaring man who carries the world's sin upon his shoulders. In Kroetsch's revision of this story, Christian's burden is transformed into Sadness's back-pack and microphone. Consequently, the expulsion from origin signified by Christian's fallen wandering becomes a legacy of the proliferation of discourses produced by contemporary mass-media reality.

Before leaving this area, it should be noted that the themes and preoccupations of spiritual autobiography have been developed and modified in our own century in ways that anticipate Kroetsch's practice in *Gone Indian* and establish his novel within a continually evolving representational tradition. Thus Joyce Cary's picaresque novel *The Horse's Mouth*, which shares Kroetsch's concern with the discovery of new modes of fiction, pictures its hero Gully Jimson working on a canvas entitled "the Fall into Freedom." Completing "the Fall," Jimson is fascinated by the bifurcation between redeemed and unregenerate man symbolised by "[t]he old Adam."⁵² The schism within Jimson's creative sensibility between the rival attractions of innocence and experience leads him to identify what he takes to be the fundamental insight of Blake's work that "HIS OUTSIDE IS ON THE INSIDE."⁵³ In this paradoxical statement we recognise the outline of Jeremy Sadness, who enters Canada "DISGUISED AS MYSELF" to discover a hidden dimension of the New World experience.

These themes are developed in a fiction by a Canadian writer which incorporates both the image of the frontier and the motifs of spiritual autobiography into the quest for a new vision of the self: Malcolm Lowry's *Under The Volcano*. Lowry's novel rehearses many of the central issues of *Gone Indian*, and, in the character of the vice-consul Geoffrey Firmin, reveals a prototype for the figure of Sadness. Like Sadness, Firmin's life is presented as a "quixotic oral fiction."⁵⁴ Meanwhile, the despair he feels after his divorce - an act we are told that means "to sever" and "to sunder"⁵⁵ - foreshadows Sadness's divorce from his former life following his adventures with the significantly named Jill and Bea Sunderman. Interestingly, Firmin also shares Sadness's consciousness of the need to renounce the panaceas of the past in order to achieve a measure of self-knowledge. His awareness of this painful truth is conveyed in the haunting phrase that "sooner or later, I shall fall."⁵⁶ But before he goes to meet his private calvary, Firmin, seeking the meaning of his present agony within older forms of cultural expression, transforms himself into William Blackstone, "[t]he man who went to live among the Indians."⁵⁷ In his doomed attempt to reach "the final frontier of consciousness"⁵⁸ Firmin prefigures Sadness's transmutation into Grey Owl and his reappropriation of the Canadian cultural past.

In conclusion, it is appropriate to advance some more general remarks concerning the comparative textual politics of *The Studhorse Man* and *Gone Indian*. The obvious point of similarity between the novels is that they both describe the process by which the binary presuppositions of an hegemonic historical discourse are responsible for the effacement of the historical subject under discussion. Confronted with the obvious discrepancy between the designation of Hazard and Sadness as unreasoned and atemporal mavericks and the evidence of these character's struggle against a discourse that fails to represent their experience, both Demeter and Madham are forced to expel their protagonists from their texts. Yet behind this basic consanguinity of interest lies a fundamental difference in emphasis. Thus in *The Studhorse Man* Demeter's failure to preserve the neutrality of his biographical appropriation of Hazard's life is presented as an inevitable consequence of the resistance of language to fixed binomial categories. But as I pointed out in Chapter Four, the problem with predicating the recovery of colonial history upon the resistance of language to closure in general is that this approach disqualifies Kroetsch from contesting the relative and disproportionate influence enjoyed by certain discourses of historical and cultural order.

Two developments in Kroetsch's textual practice reflected in *Gone Indian* render such contestation possible. First, by identifying a node of what Jameson terms "linguistic normality" in an eastern American university, Kroetsch is able to show how an image of colonial culture as "other" has accompanied the unitary drive of Western enlightenment discourse. Secondly, by providing a space in the text for Sadness's ironic counter-discourse Kroetsch manages to expose the historical contingency of this view of Canada as "other" to the Western search for self-identity. Sadness's ambiguous position both within and without the ambit of enlightenment discourse enables Kroetsch to dramatise the full implications of Canada's situation as a cultural construction of European colonialism. In the same way that Canada's language and history ties it to those Western discourses that name it as "other," Sadness's ambivalent position in Madham's text demonstrates that there is no discourse uncontaminated by colonialism in which the post-colonial subject can articulate its experience. No matter how successful Sadness is in denaturalising the ideological assumptions of Madham's discourse, the professor always has the last word. In an appropriately ironic tone, Kroetsch has remarked that "falling out of cosmologies is at least an illusion of freedom."⁵⁹ The fate reserved for Sadness in Madham's narrative shows how dangerous such illusions can be.

But at the termination of the "Out West" triptych one difficulty remains. When Sadness's disappearance at the end of *Gone Indian* is added to the images of Hazard's death and Backstrom's final wordlessness, it becomes difficult to ignore the presence in Kroetsch's texts of the "peculiar will towards silence"⁶⁰ that he detects in other Canadian fiction. Despite Kroetsch's rigorous insistence upon the contamination of images of Canadian subjectivity by Old World discourse, his protagonists sometimes seem to tread a rather predictable path towards silence and erasure. In his essay "The Grammar of Silence" Kroetsch meditates upon this situation at some length:

How do these patterns of binary opposition get turned into narrative? How do we avoid a paralysis with characters caught between two worlds - caught, if you will, in silence? If we take departure and return as the basic or archetypal design of the journey, then the ethnic story immediately becomes problematic in that the traveller buys a one-way ticket.

If the elements in the binaries are the nouns in the grammatical set, what are the verbs that set things in motion? How do we articulate the silence?⁶¹

Badlands, Kroetsch's fifth novel, offers an ingenious solution to the problem of articulating the silence brought on by Canada's position "between two worlds." This solution consists in inverting the logic of his previous fiction and allowing the marginalised post-colonial subject to construct a meta-narrative for Canadian history. Accordingly, Anna Dawe retells the story of her father William Dawe's expedition into the Alberta badlands. Anna's narratorial intervention therefore appears to be the "verb" that "sets things in motion" beyond binary stasis. Given the masculine environment in which Dawe's quest for a perfect archaeological specimen is enacted, and his phallogentric exclusion of the female voice, Anna's disdain for his mission offers a welcome alternative perspective on the thematics of male imperialism. But, as Kroetsch has shown, the contamination of Canadian cultural discourse cannot be expunged by an unproblematic assertion of individual freedom. So, in a brilliant move, he uses Anna's revision of her father's history to pass beyond "paradigm" into "story" while showing, in Anna's complete capitulation to her father's exclusivist rhetoric, the contamination of her discourse by the patriarchal values she blithely dismisses. In a neat twist on the incipient paradigm of his male questers journey into silence, Anna Dawe is allowed to imprison herself in her own rhetoric. *Badlands* therefore defines a pivotal moment in Kroetsch's fiction: it extends the possibility of progress beyond the silence that reasserts itself when "the old story forms are no longer adequate to the new experience"⁶²; but it also exposes the unhappy consequences of a rhetoric of self-identification negatively defined against the exclusivity of dominant cultural discourse. To fully understand the necessity of Kroetsch's most bitter attack upon the grammar of silence we must consequently turn to the strange case of Anna Dawe's 'liberation' from the masculine discourse of history.

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- 1 Robert Kroetsch, "The Canadian Writer and the American Literary Tradition," *The Lovely Treachery of Words* 54.
 - 2 Claude Levi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973) 296.
 - 3 Levi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* 299.
 - 4 Levi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* 300.
 - 5 Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (1951; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979) 6.
 - 6 Robert Kroetsch, *Gone Indian* (Nanaimo: Theytus Books, 1981) 6. Future references to this edition will be accompanied by the abbreviation "GI" and incorporated into the main body of the text.
 - 7 David Bennett, "Parody, Postmodernism, and the Politics of Reading," 35.
 - 8 Stanley Fogel, *A Tale of Two Countries: Contemporary Fiction in Canada and the United States* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1984) 85.
 - 9 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge, 1978) 209.
 - 10 Foucault, "The Discourse on Language," *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 220.
 - 11 Said, *Orientalism* 208.
 - 12 Said, *Orientalism* 227.
 - 13 Denys Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1957) 120.
 - 14 Hay 121.
 - 15 Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and The Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: CUP, 1982) 2.
 - 16 Barbara Johnson, *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading* (1980; Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1985) 107.
 - 17 Kroetsch, "The Grammar of Silence," *The Lovely Treachery of Words* 84.
 - 18 Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," 32.
 - 19 Kroetsch, "The Grammar of Silence," 87.
 - 20 Kroetsch, "The Grammar of Silence," 91.
 - 21 Marshall McLuhan has also noted the borderline quality of the Canadian imagination. In particular, he believes that Canada has historically been situated as the "other" to America, an "anti-environment" in which the interface between oral and graphic culture is crucial: "Borderlines as such are a form of political ecumenism, the meeting place of diverse worlds and conditions. One of the most important manifestations of Canadian ecumenism on the Canadian borderline is the interface

between common-law-tradition (oral) and the American Roman law (written)." Marshall McLuhan, "Canada: The Borderline Case," *The Canadian Imagination: Dimensions of a Literary Culture* ed. David Staines (London: Harvard University Press, 1977) 246.

22 Lecker, *Robert Kroetsch* 69.

23 "Against this static system of "synchronic essentialism" I have called vision because it presumes that the whole Orient can be seen panoptically, there is a constant pressure. The source of pressure is narrative, in that if any Oriental detail can be shown to move, or to develop, diachrony is introduced into the system. What seemed stable - and the Orient is synonymous with stability and unchanging eternity - now appears unstable. Instability suggests that history, with its disruptive detail, its currents of change, its tendency towards growth, decline, or dramatic movement, is possible in the Orient and for the Orient. History and the narrative by which history is represented argue that vision is insufficient, that 'the Orient' as an unconditional ontological category does an injustice to the potential of reality for change." Said, *Orientalism* 240.

24 Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse* 64.

25 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1 (1981; Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1984) 44.

26 Terdiman 76.

27 Lecker, *Robert Kroetsch* 68.

28 Lecker 61.

29 David Bennett, "Parody, Postmodernism, and the Politics of Reading," 38.

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Chapter Six

Badlands: From a Counter-Discursive to a Deconstructive Poetics

How can I say, I say, that these are not the eyes of the law that stare from behind my eyes, or that the mind of the law does not occupy my skull, leaving me only enough intellection to utter these doubting words, if it is I uttering them, and see their fallaciousness.¹

Wherever he goes he leaves absence behind him.²

In *In the Heart of the Country*, the first novel of the white South African writer J. M. Coetzee, Magda, a lonely frustrated middle-aged spinster, tries to come to terms with both the pressure exerted upon her by a domineering father and the hierarchical vision of society that he represents. Her father's violent imposition of power upon the disenfranchised black majority is symbolised by his sexual coercion of Klein-Anna, the defenceless wife of his herdsman Hendrik. Appalled by this flagrant violation of the master/servant relationship, Magda shoots her father and attempts to create a new environment in his absence based upon social and economic co-operation with her servants. But given the chance to define herself outside the history of white imperialism, she is unable to escape the "language of hierarchy, of distance and perspective"³ which separates her, in turn, from Hendrik and Anna. Terrified by the collapse of social distance between herself and her servants, she eventually succumbs to the "frantic spurious babble"⁴ of a life lived by the arbitrary authority of the gun. Eventually all three antagonists enter into a curious sexual triangle where identities are exchanged, power transferred, but the underlying culture of violence and exploitation remains. Despite her idealistic vision of becoming "[n]either master nor slave, neither parent nor child, but the bridge between, so that in me the contraries should be reconciled"⁵ Magda is unable to deny the cultural heritage of South African racial history. In Helen Tiffin's words, her "ability to function in a relationship with 'others' is circumscribed by the inherited codes which subvert attempts to escape its hierarchical binary structurations."⁶ The tenacity of her father's influence upon her social attitudes is poignantly expressed in the last scenes of the novel where he reappears from beyond the grave, determined to outlive her, demanding his broth and weak tea without respite into a nameless future.

When Coetzee's scabrous vision of the inescapable violence of the master/servant relationship is restored to its proper context within the history of apartheid politics, it presents a compelling meditation upon the problematic relationship

between dominant cultural discourse and counterhegemonic discourses of political emancipation. Richard Terdiman has noted the political vulnerability of counter-discourses that "implicitly evoke a principle of order just as systematic as that which sustains the discourse they seek to subvert" by arguing that "in the image of the counterhegemonic . . . the counter-discourse always projects, just over its own horizon, the dream of victoriously replacing its antagonist."⁷ The existence of this unacknowledged dream of mastery is attested to by Coetzee himself, when, in a passage quoted by Tiffin, he speaks of a counter-discourse "which, subverting the dominant, is in peril, like all triumphant subversion, of becoming the dominant in turn."⁸ This peril can only be gainsaid by a strategy of subversion that meditates upon its own operation, examines its own implication within a wider field of social and cultural relations, and asserts its own provisionality in the face of the binary structures inscribed within post-colonial discourse. By a mode of contestation, in short, that makes the radical transition from a counter-discursive to a deconstructive poetics.

In *Badlands*, Kroetsch effects this transition from a counter-discursive to a deconstructive reading of history. Coetzee's artistic and critical reflections on the nature of counter-discursive strategies have an abiding relevance to a discussion of this development in Kroetsch's work. By using Magda's first-person narrative to emphasise the impossibility of simply rejecting dominant (in this case patriarchal and racial) discourse, Coetzee insists that counter-discourse must simultaneously rework and displace hegemonic discourses of identity and place. His decision to make it the victim's task to recreate through language the scene of her oppression shows that the counterhegemonic impulse has no choice but to engage with the historical discourses of order that govern its existence. Only when the counter-discursive has to some degree internalised the principle of order that it contests can it achieve that momentary assumption of hegemony from which it parodies the operations and motives of dominant discourse. It is at precisely this moment of subversive triumph, when the inexorable progress of the dominant has been retarded, that the counter-discourse must admit its own provisionality and examine the structural codes that underpin its own emancipatory gestures. Magda's fault may therefore be seen to lie in her refusal to make the progression from a counter-discursive to a deconstructive stance. Instead, she exploits her position of power to establish a new vision of order which reconstitutes her father's law through the sound of her own voice.

It will be clear by this stage that Coetzee's novelistic emphasis upon the inextricability of the relationship between the reconstitution and displacement of imperial order makes inevitable an analogy between post-colonial counter-discourse and deconstructive poetics. The necessity of this relationship between the counterhegemonic and the deconstructive becomes more pressing as a reading of *Badlands* proceeds. Initially, however, the most obvious point of comparison between Coetzee and Kroetsch is in their allegorical use of the struggle between father and daughter. *Badlands* meditates upon the tension between hegemonic and marginalised narratives of Canadian history by offering two narratorial responses to William Dawe's archaeological expedition into the dinosaur bone beds of the Albertan badlands in the summer of 1916. Thus the story of Dawe's expedition is recounted in a third-person present-tense narrative which charts his entry into the Red Deer River, his discovery of the dinosaur bones that are to immortalise his name, and his return to the border of modern Canadian history. Woven into Dawe's story is the narrative of his daughter, Anna Dawe, a forty-five year old semi-recluse, who retraces the path of Dawe's expedition fifty-six years later in order to settle accounts with her father's memory. Anna's narrative acts as a second reader within the text, offering contexts, restoring elisions, and providing a mythological and psychological interpretation of her father's quest. Her historical revision of her father's story is therefore presented simultaneously as a discursive and psychological liberation: her ironic commentary frames the narrative of her father's triumph and re-examines its cultural assumptions, while her physical return to the scene of his apotheosis culminates in her rejection of his field-notes, his history, and the shadow of his influence.

This reading of the narrative structure (and hence the meaning) of *Badlands* has the virtue of clarity and has been adopted by most commentators on Kroetsch's work. Its primary attraction is that it provides an excellent example of the counter-discursive displacement of hegemonic cultural formations which is such a recurrent theme of post-colonial literatures. By parodying the implicit imperialism of the male quest, Anna's narrative displaces phallogocentric discourse and provides a critical space for a feminist reading of history and national identity. However, if we return briefly to the relationship between reconstitution and displacement that I outlined above, it is apparent that the relatively linear conception of a feminist displacement of phallogocentric discourse fails to do justice to the complexity of the relationship between dominant discourse and counter-discursive strategies. In particular, Anna's ironic aloofness from the site of the male discourse of history conveys neither the intense pressure put upon dissident

expression in a hostile cultural environment, nor the hubristic temptation to internalise the despised principle of authority once a position of hegemony has been achieved. Consequently, an interpretation of *Badlands* that accepts the basic substitutive logic of Anna's feminist revision of Dawe's story accords her discursive intervention a degree of benevolence and a level of political success that modern cultural history simply denies.

In my discussion of *Badlands* I will seek to demonstrate that Kroetsch singularly fails to confer the degree of benevolence upon Anna's project that the conventional reading of the novel demands. His scepticism is clearly detectable from the evidence that the text offers for a quite different interpretation of Anna's intentions. This alternative reading begins from the radical premise that Anna is in fact responsible for both of the narratives presented within the novel. In this new disposition of circumstances, the omniscient third-person narrative is exposed as Anna's imaginative reconstruction of Dawe's motives, dreams, and secret fears, while her signed segments of text constitute an editorial comment on the experiences she has just described. By ascribing both narratives to Anna, Kroetsch is able to dramatise with great economy the danger to marginalised groups of victoriously replacing their antagonists only to become dominant in their turn. For Anna's novelistic representation of her father's experience replicates the imperialism of his behaviour by hypothesising the masculine as an embodied dream of conquest and appropriation that is in complete antithesis to the feminist vision of renewal and change. Her valorisation of the feminine simply inverts the binary logic of Dawe's quest to confer privilege upon the values that he denies. In an irony neither would recognise, both father and daughter mine the past for the image of sexual difference that their discourse requires without pausing to consider the culturally constructed meaning of 'difference' or its implication within social and political strategies of domination.

It should be emphasised that this deconstructive reading of *Badlands* does not completely foreclose upon the conventionally revisionist identification with Anna's first-person narrative. Indeed, it is not until we have travelled some distance through the text that inconsistencies and logical flaws in Anna's account force us to reconsider the whole question of narrative voice. By insisting upon this gradual process of revelation, Kroetsch encourages us to invest emotionally in Anna's counter-discourse in order to heighten our sense of shock when her absolute textual control becomes

apparent. Alerted in the last pages of the novel to the trick that Anna has played, we can only make sense of the text by re-reading it and holding the two narratives together in ironic tension. Because this process demands that we deconstruct both of Anna's narratives, we are compelled to move beyond the merely counter-discursive in order to examine the binary structure of her cultural vision. Meanwhile Kroetsch, by bringing the two narratives together in a way that forces them to revise each other, establishes a deconstructive space beyond the binary assumptions of patriarchal and counter-patriarchal thought. Sherrill E. Grace acknowledges that Kroetsch produces meaning by juxtaposing the two narratives to create a third realm of signification when she writes that "the two voices interact to create a third ironic point of view because the reader is given both fictions, and is forced to weigh and balance many opposites."⁹ In order to respect the properly dialectical shape of Kroetsch's text, which disillusion us only by involving us in Anna's many authorial illusions, I intend to begin with an analysis of her 'revision' of Dawe's story before commencing the deconstructive reading that calls her own version into disrepute. By undermining in this way the theoretical predicates of a counter-discourse negatively defined against the order that it challenges, it becomes possible for us to progress beyond the binary constrictions of *Gone Indian* and to identify a space within hegemonic discourse where the marginalised histories of post-colonial experience will eventually be written.

The counter-discursive impulse that contests hierarchical structures of meaning and resists narrative closure is present from the novel's opening pages. *Badlands* begins with a brief introduction from Anna Dawe. This simple fact is of the utmost significance, because Anna's introductory remarks are intended to reinscribe the sign of the feminine within a masculine discourse of history that has steadfastly excluded it. She searches for voice, name, and identity in an environment where the "male story"¹⁰ relegates the feminine to the margins of Dawe's fading field-notes. Years after Dawe's expedition has been converted into a footnote in archaeological history, his wife can decipher "her own boredom and possibly her loneliness, if not his outrageous joy" from the "blurred letters" and "hasty, intense scrawl"¹¹ that he has bequeathed her. The marginality of her textual presence is an ironic reminder of female dispossession in a world where they are expected to "sit at home" and are "not supposed to have stories" (B 3). Women, in this reading of the past, are "Penelopes to their [men's] wars and their sex" (B 3), the silenced and policed audience whose helpless admiration confers value upon the trophies that the men bring home from the tilled field of history:

I don't know that I ever received a letter from my absent father. He sent us instead, left us, deposited for me to find, his field notes; God help us we are a people raised not on love letters or lyric poems or even cries of rebellion or ecstasy or pain or regret, but rather old hoards of field notes. Those cryptic notations made by men who held the words themselves in contempt but who needed them nevertheless in order to carry home, or back if not home, the only memories they would ever cherish: the recollections of their male courage and their male solitude. (B 2)

From these beginnings, the novel explores two sharply contrasted responses to the "old hoards of field notes" that denote the scattered fragments of Canadian history. In order to salvage for herself "a past, an ancestor, a legend, a vision, a fate" (B 3) from the totalising narrative of masculine history, Anna deliberately emphasises the provisionality of the male story, resisting its tendency to disguise its political interests, and working to resituate it within a wider field of social and cultural meaning. She therefore punctuates the story of Dawe's expedition with her judgements and opinions, interpolating facts, decoding symbols, and commenting on matters of narrative form. Like a contemporary literary critic, she inspects the surface of the narrative that surrounds her, searching it for those moments of contradiction and ellipsis where a breach may be made in the unilinear text of Canadian history. The discursivity of history, its narrative status as a culturally constructed field of meanings, is of paramount importance to Anna because it leaves the present open to revision and change. Conversely her father, William Dawe, seeks to impose his own name upon the Canadian past and thereby grant himself the absolute historical privilege of immortality. Far from acknowledging the status of history as a semantic field written into coherence by the creative readings of its interpreters, Dawe searches for a level of meaning prior to discourse itself. For Dawe, the act of entering the ground and exposing the stratified levels of its archaeological formation establishes a direct connection between history and place free from the obfuscations of language. By moving beyond language into the site of the land itself, he contradicts Anna's basic premise that there can be no access to history outside its textualised remains. In a paradox that takes us to the core of the novel's ambivalence over the question of history, the male story exists for Dawe precisely because it is *not* a story but a record of domination, exploitation and erasure reflected by the bones of time themselves.

Dawe's paradoxical dream of a passage through time that mocks time out of meaning is a contradiction that attracts the attention of Anna's revisionist intelligence. As John Moss points out, Dawe's journey down the Red Deer River into the badlands "in search of immortality, the quest to defeat time, to become a word, is linear, a river

journey."¹² The narrative form of Dawe's quest towards the site of ultimate historical origins in fact emphasises the textual mediation of history since, in Dorothy Seaton's words,

[t]he notion of the river trip as a journey of discovery is a familiar mythological construction in Canadian self-definition: as told in the proto-texts of Canadian history and identity, the exploration and fur trade narratives, it is largely through river journeys, of course, that Canada was explored, named, and defined.¹³

In contrast to this sense of a return to a moment of collective self-definition offered by the journey back down the river of time, Dawe assembles his archaeological fragments in order to construct an exclusive individual vision of self. The closure of his stance is suggested by the fact that he is raiding the western Canadian bone beds in order to deposit the remains (and guarantee his reputation) in a museum in the east. Turning his back upon the narrative possibilities - and the potential for story - opened by the juxtaposition of archaeological fragments, he subordinates the uncreated history of the west to traditional eastern discourses of history and nationhood. In this sense he is, like Mark Madham, an enlightenment figure who would make the world "clear" to "these poor souls, the uninitiated, the ignorant, the vulgar" (B 7). Like Madham, too, he is driven on "by some absence he would escape" (B 230). Despite his inclusive gestures towards men severed from their historical inheritance, he seeks to establish an inviolable core of self safe from history and change. He is therefore described as a figure enclosed within his own hard little body: he is "hunchbacked," "small," and moves "stiffly" (B 6) through the landscape. In the physical act of creating the history of the west he renounces his contact with humanity, guided only by his "maniacal obsession" to discover "the one gigantic and perfect skeleton" that "would insinuate to him, however grotesquely, the whole truth" (B 8).

Dawe's "quest for self-definition, through the search for origins in the bones of dead dinosaurs"¹⁴ becomes the explicit theme of his inmost reveries. "Looking and looking . . . *Daweosaurus magnicristatus* . . . the lost bones . . . the dead creatures immortalizing the mortal man" (B 36) he muses to himself. His need for an absolute identification with a site of prehistory uncontaminated by language is ironically underlined by his physical resemblance to the landscape he examines. Throughout the novel our attention is drawn to "the mountain on his back" (B 174). He is, in essence, "sculptured down to naked clay, a landscape unto himself" (B 56). However, Dawe's strangely ahistorical quest for a point in time before history began, which sends him "in search of Eden, the lost perfect world of humanity's origins,"¹⁵ receives its first

challenge from his encounter with the squaw Anna Yellowbird at the very start of the novel. The significance of Dawe's meeting with Yellowbird is that her story insists that history is not a discontinuous collection of relics awaiting the presence of an ordering hand, but a discourse that disseminates power through an inscrutable system of privileges, checks, and prohibitions. Instead of offering "the formless unity of some great evolutionary process,"¹⁶ history, for Yellowbird, is the record of the displacement and division of her community by white society. A widow at fifteen, having been told that her husband "was vanished and gone, with an iron ship bound for something called England, for something called the World War, she had wandered blindly towards the east, knowing that England lay to the east, the war raged to the east." It was, as Anna reminds us, "another of the ironies of that season that the wars of Europe had sent the Indian girl into the canyon of my father's dreams" (B 148).

The conflict between Dawe and Yellowbird first becomes evident over their different interpretation of the phrase "the place of the dead" (B 8). In Dawe's eyes, Yellowbird's intuitive native response to the land promises a secret knowledge of the archaeological treasures that he seeks. His request for assistance in locating "the bones of the dead" is merely the next stage of his quest for immortality. But for Yellowbird the "place of the dead" is a phrase that suggests a link between the traditions of the past and the present. This link, which is a part of the shamanistic experience of death, revelation, and renewal, provides an important clue to Dawe's identity that undermines his narrow interest in a moment of personal male redefinition. For from the beginning, as Peter Thomas observes, "Dawe is cast for the shaman's role."¹⁷ His hunchback is a "magical hump" that stands out "like some talisman of splendid good fortune" (B 7). Alert to the shamanistic resonance of the journey into the Land of the Dead, Yellowbird is quick to identify the meaning of Dawe's role:

[A]nd vaguely, desperately, despite the Anglican if not Christian missionaries who taught her husband submission and love, she recalled a shaman whose whereabouts she did not know but whose sacred and recollected words she knew she must heed. And she found, was found by, three strange white men and a chinaman. And she knew, had known . . . it was the hunchbacked man, not the others, who could find the way to the place of the dead. Even as she vaguely knew, vaguely and yet vividly remembered, what the shaman had said: do not eat, lie in your grave, wait for the guide. (B 148)

If the shamanistic character of Dawe's interest in dinosaur bones is understood, more general conclusions about his behaviour may be drawn. An excellent starting

point for such a discussion is Mircea Eliade's description of shamanistic ritual, particularly the pivotal moment when the shaman contemplates his own skeleton:

Such a spiritual exercise implies the "exit from time," for not only is the shaman, by means of an interior vision, anticipating his physical death, but he is finding again what one might call the non-temporal source of Life, the *bone*. Indeed, for the hunting peoples the bone symbolizes the ultimate root of animal Life, the matrix from which the flesh is continually renewed.¹⁸

It is clear from this description that the shamanistic "exit from time" is a preliminary stage in a larger cycle of resurrection and renewal. Eliade is quite unequivocal on this point: he writes that the contemplation of the skeleton is a "symbolico-ritual complex centred in the notion of life as perpetual renewal."¹⁹ The skeleton represents the "essence" of life from which life "will be born anew according to an uninterrupted cycle that constitutes an eternal return."²⁰

Eliade's elucidations help to explain the meaning of Dawe's mission and the ironic nature of his success. Once Dawe's identity as shaman has been established, it becomes easier to understand the contradictory nature of his journey into the prehistoric for a place in history, and the paradox of his search through the bones of the dead to find a meaning in life. However, Dawe perverts the meaning of the shamanistic vision: his search through levels of prehistory for the "non-temporal source of Life" is not an attempt to renew the spirit and the flesh, but a quest for an immortal name that will remove the self from time altogether. The consequences of this betrayal of the shamanistic ideal are particularly noticeable in Dawe's struggles with language. The energy of language plays a vital part in the shamanistic process of transfiguration and renewal; as the shaman divests his body of flesh and blood, he names his body parts in "the special and sacred language of the shamans."²¹ In contrast, Dawe battles against the "enlarging sentence" that might seduce him into "his own unscientific noting of the world" (B 11). "*I despise words*, he wrote; he stared at the sentence, enjoying it. Writing it down had freed him, in some way he did not fully comprehend" (B 34). Later, his greed for the "originating specimen" is accompanied by an image of him "staving off the words that swarmed into his mind" (B 37). Ironically, it is to be Web, his comic antagonist, who will assume the mantle of the shaman and release the bones from their hidden grave. We can observe this ironic transference of responsibility in the scene where Dawe and his crew encounter the snake man, who doubles as the shaman of the badlands:

A peal of laughter came out from behind one of the hoodoos. Then a coyote appeared from behind the sandstone pillar that was the hoodoo's base. Then, as if being led by the young coyote on a leash, a man appeared: a tall, thin, wiry man. And Web noticed immediately, the band on the cowboy hat was the skin of a garter snake, his belt a bullsnake's skin . . . (B 152-53)

The snake, as Dawe recognises, is the sign of "death" and of a descent into the "cave's dark mouth" (B 149). But it is Web who receives the shamanistic call. On the morning of the crew's encounter with the snake man he finds "a horned lizard in his left boot" (B 151); later that night he defeats the snake man in a bout of squaw wrestling. In return, the crew are granted a vision of their first specimen after a suitably shambolic parody of shamanistic rite is observed:

Then all six of them bent away from the fire, crawled out of the cave, slid out into the night. They carried with them pails and small bones, and they pounded now, on the pails, the drunken band, Tune trying to get the other men to sing. They staggered out into the badlands, into the moonlit and cooling night, the snake man with his coyote taking the lead, Dawe humped and walking fast, following, stumbling at his side, the others straggling in two pairs as if they must, all together, lift and carry some invisible burden. They pounded their makeshift drums; they hopped and jigged as they went, through the rocks, the sagebrush, the cacti; they came to a spike of clay, as high as a tipi, white in the light of the orange moon; they danced once around it, twice, again, the snake man passing back a jug of moonshine. (B 157)

It is, as Peter Thomas remarks, shortly after this moment that Web unburdens himself of his "shamanistic 'song,' his tale of the Twister"²² which confirms Dawe's everlasting reputation at the same time as it destroys the closed frame of his historical perspective.

Web, Dawe's anarchic sternsman, is a central figure in *Badlands* because his adventures parody Dawe's search for ultimate historical origins. In his first appearance, his discovery of Yellowbird in a shallow grave marks him out as a burlesque Adam encountering death in the garden for the first time. Later he, not Dawe, is granted a dream of an "upriver trip" to the "hidden and pristine lakes that are the river's source, the sky-high and dazzling glaciers that feed the originating lakes" (B 13). While Yellowbird's vestigial presence continually reminds us of the exclusiveness of Dawe's masculine version of history, with its bluff assertion that there is "no place for women" (B 9) on the journey into the Canadian past, Web's irremediable mythologisation of his own experience exposes the male quest as a story men tell each other to conceal their own loneliness. His phallogocentric discourse of male sexual power is his way of coming to terms with "[a] lifetime of trying to grow free on those open

prairies" (B 66). Whereas Dawe deliberately "enforc[es] the silence" (B 10), Web's exuberant vitality resists all forms of enclosure, even death. He parodies Dawe's obsessional interest in bones with his own phallogocentric interest in "bone-ons." Reflecting upon Yellowbird's premature burial, he tells the crew that they "[w]on't catch me there before I'm hog-tied and hammered in. . . . [b]one-on I'm developing now, it'll take them a week to get the lid down" (B 16). By re-creating the journey downriver towards source in what Anna calls the "western yarn" (B 45) of male sexual prowess, Web challenges Dawe's monological reading of history and opens the past up to the plural interpretations of story. The transgressive logic of Web's relentless verbal myth-making undermines established constructions of self and nation, as Dorothy Seaton acknowledges when she comments that his stories "invariably suggest a barely contained chaos of radical, directionless energy, far from the value-laden order and encompassing system which usually characterise national myths."²³

The real difference between Dawe and Web, as Anna's frame narrative points out, is that the former immerses himself in prehistory for immortality and a "handsome profit" (B 4), while the latter hates the river because it carries the alluvia of history and connects the men with a past whose confinements he rejects. Anna offers a fine image for Web's denial of history when she recounts his response to his familial ties:

[A]nd Web saying he left that day and went back that night, put a match to the shack and left again before he found out if his old man got out dead or alive, and then, his way lighted by the burning shack, headed down the road and kept going. "There is no such thing as a past," Web, his father forgotten, said to mine.

There is nothing else, Web. That you should misunderstand is unfortunate; on that one issue, on that issue only, my father perceived correctly. (B 4)

It is Web's rootlessness, encapsulated in his persistent refusal to address the ambivalence of his identity in historical terms, that attracts Anna's censure. In an important passage later in the novel, she describes how Web's defensive need to obliterate the past and spend himself in the present compels him to reinscribe the dichotomies of patriarchal politics into his own discourse of history:

Web would divide his women into virgins and whores. And yet it was the virgin who seduced him into his fine mockery of virtue; and I suspect he never went to bed with his whore at all.

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

Anna's sardonic analysis of both Web's repression of history and Dawe's desire to establish history as an unconditional ontological category is reinforced by the presence of the photographer Michael Sinnott. As the crew inch their way perilously towards the major bone beds of Deadlodge Canyon they come across Sinnott, his Model-T partly submerged in the river, preparing a photograph of their moment of destiny. Dawe is immediately hostile to Sinnott because the photographer reminds him that history is a discourse: a collection of images, stories, and commentaries that situate the individual moment within a prior history of representation. For Sinnott, 'history' is the history of memory's mediation by narrative. By the simple action of framing a picture, Sinnott hauls the men "through the vanished world of his, of their, creation, the emporium of their sought descent" (B 125). His calculatedly ironic framing actions mock Dawe's voluntarist intentions, expressed in the archaeologist's need to live "by an act of pure will" (B 150). Indeed, Sinnott's theatrical arrangement of images brings out the irony of the earlier picture of Dawe's barge as a "badly managed stage" (B 10). Dawe has no option but to resist Sinnott's aesthetic stance because it threatens to displace his quest into a series of fractured images over which he has no control. The fundamental difference between the two men over the discursive status of history is captured in a key exchange:

Sinnott brushed at his own white beard, adjusted the black patch over his right eye; as if he must now save himself from vanishing. He had already, using Web as his model, adjusted the square bellows camera, set the flap shutter, Taking the rubber bulb in his right hand, he determined that his subject would not only pose but would smile as well. Sinnott announcing: "We are two of a kind, Mr Dawe, you and I. Birds of a feather. You with your bones that are sometimes only mineral replacements of what the living bones were. Me, rescuing positive prints out of the smell of the darkroom.

"I recover the past," Dawe said. Unsmiling. Adjusting his grip on the sweep. "You reduce it."

"I know," Sinnott said. "And yet we are both peddlers."

"You make the world stand still," Dawe said. "I try to make it live again."

"Then let me save you from your inevitable failure," Sinnott said. "Tell me where you might possibly be reached and I'll send you the consolation of my masterpiece: The Charlatan Being Himself." (B 128)

Appropriately, Sinnott is waiting at the scene of Dawe's triumphant return out of the badlands: he photographs Dawe's momentous victory, frames it as a snapshot, and reproduces it as an image among others. His disinclination to award Dawe's story the privilege it demands is expressed in a marvellous comic moment, in which he assimilates Dawe's imperious seizure of the past into the larger narrative of American

frontier expansion: "'Yes, folks. See him in person. Champion Bone Hunter of the Wild West. Hero of a Thousand Close Calls. The Winner.'" Sinnott laughed hugely" (B 246).

Dawe's insistence upon creating his own myth of the land's history from the signatures of the past that he recognises in abandoned fragments of bone is undermined by the descent through time that the crew undertakes. His dream of lifting an archaeological matrix out of time and consecrating it with his own name is shattered by the forceful intrusion of time into his own re-construction of self. As the men progress down the Red Deer River, their journey between different levels of history compels them to slip back down the evolutionary ladder. The simple binary between the temporal and the timeless that obsesses Dawe is unworked as the men concentrate the experiences of prehistory and history into the space of their own lives. McBride is the first to experience this metamorphosis, as he emerges from the river after his encounter with a skunk:

He was a farmer, and maybe didn't think of the mud on his body any more than he thought of his skin and considered it something other than himself. But the lone woman, facing the three odd men, saw the man behind her, the man caked in mud from his feet into his hair, his body like an alligator's; she saw him step from his trough and into the willows. And it was not the smell that came with him that made her hesitate. . . . It was the man himself, coming formless out of the mud. Onto the land. The mud, the grey mud, cold, reptilian, come sliding into the yellow-green flame of the shore's willows. (B 42-43)

This one transfiguring experience is enough for McBride: he abandons the expedition, after transforming the barge into an "ark" (B 50) appropriate to Dawe's attempt to transcend time. Dependent as a farmer upon an intuitive sympathy with the local rhythms of the seasons, he is too much time's creature to embrace immortality. In Anna's summation, McBride is "the only one with the ability to become a hero, the wisdom not to" (B 45). The remainder of the crew continue undeterred their passage towards their evolutionary origins. By the end of the journey they "had become reptilian, had become the creatures of which they would possess the dead bones" (B 240). For Dawe, the penetration into the present of different strata of geological time retains a particularly ironic resonance. Thus his discovery of an outcrop of bone on an exposed butte leads him to overreach himself, fall from the cliff-face, and sustain a near fatal injury. Immortality and temporality are ironically juxtaposed as he slips away from his potentially perfect specimen down through the compressed layers of time:

Dawe felt himself going, had time to reach for the pick, had time to free it, to try to drive it again into the hard, wet clay. But the pick did not penetrate. Tune was shouting; Dawe was sliding, the colours of the layered ridge unravelling under his open eyes; the yellow-grey gravels and silts, the brown of ironstone, the black and grey and white of slate, the ash-grey of bentonite rain-washed into purple and green; and he was falling, down past, down into Cretaceous times; down he fell with the rain, tumbled; a creeping juniper caught his face, twisted him upright: except there was nothing beneath his boots. (B 173)

Dawe's spectacular fall incapacitates him and temporarily removes him from active participation in the expedition. Because his injuries force him to rely upon Web to excavate the remains of the specimen, the dichotomy between the intelligence and the physical body that Dawe has so laboriously constructed disintegrates. Another consequence of his immobility is the burgeoning of his relationship with Yellowbird. Trusting to the perception of Dawe as a shaman in the twilight lands, the Indian girl follows the men into the badlands where, unknown to Dawe, she is sustained by food and bedding provided by his crew. Now, in the shaman's time of emotional crisis, she comes to minister to his wounds, and savant and novice enter into a sexual relationship. By involving Dawe in an emotional bond with another, Yellowbird interrupts his private confrontation with the land and "ma[kes] him lose the past" (B 196). Their love-making exposes the insecurity in Dawe that drives him to rigorously control his environment: "[T]he silence that he could not break with words he broke with a long and whimpering whipped-dog, whipped-little-boy groan of exquisite pain and welcome relief" (B 192). Bewitched by Yellowbird's attentions, Dawe yields "to her passion, her violence, her tenderness; his male sense of surrender surprised and violated and fulfilled" (B 196).

Just as Yellowbird's tipi of dinosaur bones suggests that we live in the spaces history leaves us, her seduction of Dawe symbolises the fact that personal and national identity is constructed in part from a negotiation with cultural alterity. Dawe's inability to understand this lesson, reflected in his compulsion to plunder the land in "an act of male heroic self-construction,"²⁴ reaches its tragic conclusion in the death of Tune. With the introduction of Tune, the Orphic metaphor that lies at the heart of *Badlands* receives full expression. Plucked from the coal mines of Drumheller, Tune is inducted by Dawe into his male myth of self-definition. Trapped between the unappealing alternatives of the mines, the whorehouse where he plays rudimentary piano, Dawe's expedition, and the Canadian Army, Tune's options are gravely limited from the beginning. As he works on the site under the burning sun, his adolescent fat is removed to reveal a hard core of maleness. "Young Tune" is replaced by "the grown

boy if not the young man, muscular now, his arms hardened, his hands hard" (B 214). Although Tune has discovered "his male muscles" he has not, as Anna acknowledges, "found the male instinct that would fling him against my father's possessive will" (B 162). Already a martyr to the men's "fervid need of abasement" (B 226) Tune "would follow Dawe to the ends of the earth, off the map, assisting, uncovering" (B 214). But like Cronos, Dawe's myth of male heroism feeds upon its young. Crouching to prepare an explosive charge, Tune is buried beneath an avalanche of clay. The tune, the magic of Orpheus, is obliterated, leaving Dawe without the renewing "language of love and loss."²⁵ Bereft of voice and the privileged passage from the underworld, Dawe becomes a mute witness as power is transferred to Web, the master of verbal transfigurations.

It is thematically appropriate that Dawe's exclusion of the feminine and Web's hypertrophic celebration of the masculine should bring them into conflict over the site of Yellowbird's body. Following his discovery of Yellowbird's presence, Dawe peremptorily forbids his crew from contact with her. Noting the paradox that men "avoid violent relations with each other by violence," Anna reminds us that since women have the "instinct of community, will share or be shared . . . the avoidance of Anna [Yellowbird] was no idea of Anna's" (B 162). But, in truth, the restrictions that Dawe places around Yellowbird are an attempt to bring his obdurate antagonism to Web to a crisis. Dawe's transgression of his own moral boundaries in his affair with Yellowbird demands recognition: he must "tempt Web into a loss of [his] supreme indifference" (B 198). Yellowbird recognises, however, that "Web's inviolable resistance to Dawe's dream was the inviolable and necessarily violated secret that enabled him, Web, to go each morning unwary and unafraid up the bare butte to the high, open pit" (B 193). Web's dissent from Dawe's story bespeaks the western Canadian's refusal to submit to imposed frameworks of perception. Instead, he appropriates both Yellowbird and the language by which the western experience of history is conveyed. Sent out by Dawe to rescue Yellowbird from the tornado that threatens the landscape, Web returns with his tale of the Twister. Taken up by the tornado, as Web tells it, he is given a momentary glimpse of the source of time. "The air was so cool and thin you could hardly get enough to breathe," he remembers, "and I thought of the mountains: we're up in the mountains I thought to myself, we've come to the headwaters; this is the source . . ." (B 205). This return to temporal origin prepares Web for the shamanistic experience that he is about to undergo. While copulating with Yellowbird in the grave of *Gorgosaurus*, the Orphic and the

shamanistic come together as he uninvents time and redeems the bones of the dead through the visionary powers of story:

"And then the bolt came streaking straight at us, the ball of fire came WHAM - and sweet mother of Christ the blue flames shot out of our ears, off our fingertips, our glowing hair stood on end, my prick was like an exploding torpedo, we glowed and blossomed and bloomed like a flare, like a burning house. Like a house. Burning. We smelled the burning fish in the blue-green flame of the night. My old pecker was like a rock spigot pouring out molten lead, my balls glowed like furnace doors. I could see Anna under me, on top of me: that ball or bolt or bomb of lightning had entered through my asshole, I could tell by God I was scroched [sic] and burned, savaged, a flaming pitchfork rammed out of the luminour air - " Web trying to capture his spouting words. "And the crack of thunder deafened us. The inverted universe and undescended testicles of the divine, the refucking-union with the dead - " (B 206-07)

Set down by the twister on a "white butte," Web realises that he has ripped the bones of Dawe's "perfect *specimen*" from time itself. In contrast to Tune's uneducated disbelief, Dawe recognises the meaning of Web's riotous parody of shamanistic magic. His curt command "[g]et my axe, Tune" signals his acknowledgement that "[e]nds and beginnings, the source and conclusion of the quest, are contained only in story, which releases, in the language of flight, the experience of descent and return."²⁶ Dawe's quest for *Daweosaurus* ends on this ironic note, as the name he sought to redeem from time is conferred upon him in the parodic language of his rival. In the final and most unwarrantable paradox of his story, his monologic search for origin leads him to contemplate "the single preposterous unnatural white butte of Web's impossible and uncontradictable and total victory (B 209).

The circumscription of Dawe's story by a quite other discourse of history and identity is repeated at the end of *Badlands* in the epilogue that Anna appends to the novel. Fifty-six years after her father's return with *Daweosaurus*, Anna retraces his footsteps in order to come to terms with his memory and the silence left after his suicide. More than this, however, her pilgrimage to the badlands symbolises her need to retell the story of the west outside the "curious little narrative tricks of a male adventure" (B 27) where every man is "symbolic of another" (B 63) and to resituate the meaning of Dawe's quest in the female medium of "time" (B 256). Her accomplice in this revisionary exercise is Yellowbird, whom she discovers in Gleichen, "that fading and sun-smashed and awful town on the edge of the Blackfoot Reserve" (B 25). Yellowbird has already commenced her own quiet subversion of Dawe's monolithic dream by naming each of her children Billy Crowchild. Her refusal to

distinguish between her sons mocks Dawe's urge to know, name, and conquer. With Yellowbird alongside her, Anna is gradually able to unlock the door to memory and articulate her sense of loss and dispossession. Just as Yellowbird felt most secure with Grizzly, the silent chinaman, so Anna finds in Yellowbird's deliberate incomprehension of her guilt and sense of responsibility the key to her own voice:

And so we drove and talked and sometimes laughed outrageously, that Anna so unthinkingly and absolutely obscene that I could only stop the car and laugh until the tears ran down my cheeks; and then I dared it too, tried those words on my mouth: and glanced at her face and saw she was letting me try in the same way that my father had stopped me - (B 259)

Anna's emancipatory journey from silence to voice is complemented by the women's decision to forsake the trip west to "look for the river's source" (B 257) for the route east to the edge of the badlands. Anna parodies Dawe's obsession with "the still and unmoving source" when she weeps at the sight of the "high peak of a mountain" merely because her "feet were bleeding" (B 266). The absurdity of the male quest is expressed in the image of the air-borne Grizzly, whose struggles in the helicopter's net are "so comically human and male" as "his hind legs swung free in the air, galloped straight at us in the empty air, his sharp claws scratching for the gone earth, his testicles following crazily after" (B 268). It is at this moment, when male hubris is undercut by the technological power that it fails so woefully to control, that Anna is able to reject her father's field-notes. Where Dawe came at last to "the end of words" (B 269), Anna has finally mastered the bitter language of renunciation:

And I took that last field book with the last pompous sentence he ever wrote, the only poem he ever wrote, a love poem, to me, his only daughter, and I threw it into the lake where it too might drown.

And I turned around on my blistered, bloody feet, and I walked out of that place, as I had walked in. Anna and I walked out of there together. We walked through the night, stumbling our way by the light of the stars; we looked at those billion years of light, and Anna looked at the stars and then at me, and she did not mention dinosaurs or men or their discipline or their courage or their goddamned fucking fame or their goddamned fucking death-fucking death. (B 269-270)

Liberated at last from the myth of male heroism that had consigned her to grim years of silence, Anna is able to utter the first words of her own story. *Badlands* ends upon this note of counter-discursive triumph as the women link arms and abandon the site of the masculine adventure. "We walked out of there hand in hand, arm in arm, holding each other" Anna concludes. "We walked all the way out. And we did not once look back, not once, ever."

The final pages of *Badlands*, with their neat inversion of the dominant images of the preceding sections of the novel, provide a paradigmatic example of post-colonial counter-discourse at work. The hegemony of male quest narrative is subverted and female experience is recovered from the margins of Dawe's page. For a moment Penelope slips her bonds and enters into a full share of the Canadian story of self-definition. Recent criticism of *Badlands* has generally commended Anna's dissident reading of Dawe's quest, and the novel has been roundly celebrated as an important 'feminist' critique of the male quest for hierarchical systems of knowledge.²⁷ Such readings of the novel have therefore tended to accommodate the series of distinctions upon which Anna bases her interpretation of the male story: the distinction between the masculine *mythos* of individual destiny and the feminine consciousness of history; the tension between the urge for personal definition and the claims of communal responsibility; and the struggle between the male need for source and origin and the female acceptance of discourse, mediation, and displacement. Consequently Anna's relationship with Yellowbird, her narratorial revision of her father's story, and her escape from his version of the past have been taken to signify a development beyond imperialist and patriarchal representations of gender and history and a rediscovery of the full significance of the Canadian cultural inheritance.

However, accounts of *Badlands* that celebrate Anna's counter-discursive revision of Dawe's story have come to seem simplistic given the problematic status of narrative voice in the novel. Put briefly, for Anna's critique of the male quest to be accepted as a rejection of patriarchy, a degree of interpretative distance must be established between the novel's primary narrative and Anna's ironic interpolations. In the classic counter-discursive reading of *Badlands* this effect is achieved by attributing the central narrative to an omniscient narrator possessing all the qualities of a neutral and ungendered voice. This unattributed third-person discourse is then juxtaposed with Anna's narrative which announces itself as gendered and issuing from a particular point in time and space. In this way a tension is created between the two narratives which Anna exploits to question the relationship between gender, history, and discourse.

The problem with this basic counter-discursive reading is that it takes no account of the various signs present within the novel which indicate that *both*

narratives are in fact the work of Anna Dawe. For in fact there is little evidence within *Badlands* beyond the merely formal division between first and third-person narrative to sustain a distinction between the two discourses on matters either of gender or style. Consequently, modern criticism of *Badlands* rests upon a number of questionable assumptions which, I would argue, are parodied by Kroetsch within the text itself. If the conclusion of *Gone Indian* and Coetzee's strictures upon counter-discourse are kept in mind, the plausibility of Anna's simple dismissal of patriarchy must be placed in doubt. Conversely, a deconstructive reading of *Badlands* can be advanced that identifies both narratives as Anna's, holds them together in ironic tension, and demonstrates how her rewriting of her father's history is in fee to the culturally constructed dichotomies of patriarchal politics. By showing how thoroughly Anna has internalised Dawe's authoritarian stance, a deconstructive reading of her narratives suggests that *Badlands* is an elaborate hoax upon the reader who wishes merely to exchange one closed reading of history for another one cloaked in the rhetoric of political emancipation. The wider political resonance for post-colonial cultures of Kroetsch's subversion of counter-discourses negatively defined against the order they contest is that Anna's unacknowledged capitulation to the routine exclusions of patriarchal discourse dramatises the predicament of any oppressed group which, seeking to overthrow authoritarian power, eventually appropriate that power, and the structure of feeling germane to it, to itself.²⁸

Anna's authorial responsibility for both of the narratives of *Badlands* becomes apparent if the structural relationship and the stylistic similarities between the main body of the novel and her textual commentaries are considered. To begin with matters of structure, scepticism concerning the provenance of the narrative discourse of *Badlands* is increased by the presence of a logical *aporia* within Anna's first person account. As Robert Lecker has demonstrated, Anna's narrative relies upon a crucial falsification.²⁹ In the final sentence of the novel she claims that having thrown Dawe's field notes into the Red Deer River she and Yellowbird walked out of the valley, "[a]nd we did not once look back, not once, ever" (B 270). Clearly a problem arises here: if Anna's statement is true the text of *Badlands* would not exist, since Dawe's notes could not be reproduced within either narrative (there being no suggestion that Anna wrote her account contemporaneously with her journey); conversely, if Anna's statement is untrue and Dawe's notes were preserved, it seems overwhelmingly probable that Dawe's narrative actually represents Anna's reconstruction of her father's history, an impression strengthened by the stylistic similarities between the two narratives.

The contradictions that blight Anna's first-person narrative and open it up to a deconstructive reading emerge unequivocally from those six words "we did not once look back." Because her account of her adventure with Yellowbird is manifestly a recollection of a journey into freedom, it is quite clear that Anna *did* look back in order to tell her story. Everything that issues from her pen, beginning with her nominative declaration "I am Anna Dawe" (B 2) on the novel's opening page, is written after she discovers her voice in the final pages of the text. The realisation that Anna's personal moment of truth in the badlands is predicated upon a deliberate deception precipitates a "grand inversion process"³⁰ in which both of the histories that *Badlands* incorporates are read against each other. By asking us to commence a second reading of the novel at the climactic moment when Anna's discourse violates its own logical principles, Kroetsch ensures that we begin to identify the resemblances between the two narratives. An interpretation of *Badlands* that begins at the novel's conclusion and then returns to its beginning to watch Anna's recollections unfold notes immediately how the central narrative is soaked in Anna's personal style. To take merely one example of this stylistic contamination, the main text describes Dawe's emotional condition following Tune's death in the following terms:

Dawe, furiously, in the outrageous silence of his writing trying to cite or fashion or penetrate or plumb or receive or accomplish or postulate or pretend the absolute truth that would give him his necessary lie . . . (B 239)

However, exactly the same tentative discourse of self-identification, with its numbing catalogue of adjectives, is present in Anna's own initial account of post-colonial alienation from established narratives of history. "God help us," she expostulates, "we are a people raised not on love letters or lyric poems or even cries of rebellion or ecstasy or pain or regret, but rather old hoards of field-notes" (B 2). The two voices are identical; the two narratives are unmistakably Anna's. The irony of the dispossessed daughter's complete discursive control over her father's fragmentary field notes is now inescapable.

The impossibility of positing a lasting distinction between the novel's two discourses is amply demonstrated by recent commentaries upon *Badlands*. In an effort to sustain the classic counter-discursive reading, Connie Harvey argues that Anna's interpolations are "distinctly separated spatially, typographically and stylistically"³¹ from the main narrative. But as the rest of Harvey's reading makes clear, the

distinctions upon which this separation is based continually collapse. Thus she is forced to admit that in Anna's narrative, as well as the the central text, "the desire to describe completely manifests itself in the use of adjectives, particularly gerunds and participles, and clauses, adjectival and adverbial, to qualify the statement." In both narratives, once again, "syntactically incomplete or grammatically incorrect phrases are common." Although Harvey tries to explain Anna's textual ventriloquism as a deliberate parody of the male adventure, it is evident that her counter-discursive approach is unable to account for the interpretative difficulties created by Anna's alleged renunciation of Dawe's field notes.

Once Anna's authorial responsibility has been established, the fraught issue of her mediation of Dawe's story can be resolved. In the opening pages of the novel, Anna comments upon her role as Dawe's archivist and interpreter:

Why it was left to me to mediate the story I don't know: women are not supposed to have stories. We are supposed to sit at home, Penelopes to their wars and their sex. As my mother did. As I was doing. (B 3)

The ambiguity of Anna's "mediation" of her father's life has led to an uncertain critical response. Thus John Moss, attempting to enforce a distinction between the two narratives of *Badlands*, writes:

In the structure of *Badlands*, wherein Dawe makes field notes which through his daughter blossom into narrative, while Anna tells a story of herself, with another Anna, in which her father's notes are something of a talisman and ultimately as ephemeral, two distinctly separate versions of reality are held simultaneously present.³²

Leaving aside the question of how far Moss's reading, by reinscribing woman as the principle of passivity and regeneration through which the male story "blossoms" into narrative, is complicit with the patriarchal order that Kroetsch subverts, this formulation is clearly unsatisfactory because it makes no effort to address the issue of narrative voice. What is interesting about Moss's analysis, though, is its implicit acceptance of Anna's premise that two "separate versions of reality" co-exist in the novel. But if we discount this distinction between narratives as Anna's novelistic illusion, and approach *Badlands* as a unified counter-discourse that creates its own version of the male quest and then pulls it open for critical examination, we find that Anna's text reproduces the hierarchical structure of meaning that she identifies in masculine discourse. In short, Anna's counter-discourse, for all its rhetoric of emancipation, is still a discourse of

exclusion that perpetuates itself by inverting and reinscribing the hierarchised binary dualisms of patriarchal culture.

The importance of hierarchised binary dualisms to patriarchal discourse can be established by brief reference to contemporary French feminist thought. In her influential article "Sorties" Helene Cixous argues that logocentric and patriarchal thought work by means of a system of *hierarchised* oppositions. Thus a binary relationship is set up in which one term is valorised over the other (the valorised terms being those of "masculinity" and of "activity") and where the principle of hierarchisation "subjects the entire conceptual organization to man."³³ Having made this analysis, Cixous organises the hierarchised oppositions of patriarchy into tabular form:

Where is she?

Activity / passivity,
Sun / Moon,
Culture / Nature,
Day / Night,

Father / Mother,
Head / heart,
Intelligible / sensitive,
Logos / Pathos.

Form, convex, step, advance, seed, progress.
Matter, concave, ground - which supports the step, receptacle.

Man

Woman³⁴

The idea of Anna's indebtedness to the hierarchised oppositions of patriarchal thought may seem strange considering her frequent criticisms of the culturally constructed dualisms of masculine discourse. After all, she has sharp words for the form, as well as the content, of the "male adventure," with its patchwork of illusion and contrivance that generates plots of romance, combat, and suspense:

And I assumed the occasion would demand of her a formal telling, would sponsor the curious little narrative tricks of a male adventure: the lies that enable the lovers to meet, the mystery of who did the killing, the suspense before victory. As if we didn't know all the answers long before they asked their absurd questions . . . (B 27)

Yet the noticeable feature of this condemnation of male quest narrative is that it depends upon the same narrow binary logic as the form she criticises. In this case, Anna introduces a distinction between the spatial and the temporal imagination that governs the rest of the text. Thus men seek, by their very nature, "open spaces" that they "translate" into a "fabled hunting," whereas women, with "only time to survive in . . . live and then die in time." Her critique, which ties men inexorably by gender to male "mythologies of the flesh" (B 94), depends upon an essentialist division between masculinity and femininity which holds that there is a female 'essence' prior to social inscription waiting to be redeemed.³⁵ She has no interest in deconstructing conventional representations of masculinity and femininity or examining gender not simply as an effect of biology but as a consequence of the subject's position within the power structure of society.³⁶ The complete reliance of her counter-patriarchal discourse upon the gender divisions that she inverts inevitably leads her to reinscribe their force. A particularly notorious example is her remark that Grizzly's quiet sexual confidence confirms him as "too much the male my father wanted to be" (B 162). Elsewhere, the crudity of her analysis of patriarchal thought serves merely to focus attention upon her absolute textual control over the characters in the novel. While it may be true that Web "divide[d] his women into virgins and whores," it is Anna, not the sternsman, who has the "omniscience" of a "male author" (B 76) and who orders the representations of gender that we receive.

Anna's enforced distinction between the spatial and temporal imagination has serious consequences for her analysis of Dawe's quest. In particular, it seduces her into a complete misreading of Dawe's motives and experiences. Half-way through the novel, Anna offers the following extended meditation upon the meaning of her father's journey into the crucible of history:

But I was left always with the mystery of his own first season. For in the summer of 1916, in the Badlands of the Red Deer river, discovering the Mesozoic era, with all of Europe filling the earth with the bones of its own young - he removed himself from time.

Whatever the desperate reason that had taken him into that far place, he came back delivered of most of the impulses we like to think of as human. He could survive any weather, any diet, any deprivation. And that was necessary to a man whose back bore on it a hump larger than any of us could see. But somewhere in the course of that first journey that was his own - somewhere, somehow, he shook himself free of any need to share even his sufferings with another human being. His field notes, after that summer, were less and less concerned with his crew, his dangers, his days of futile prospecting, his moments of discovery, his weariness, his ambitions, his frustrations. They

became scientific descriptions of the size and location of bones, of the composition of the matrix, of the methods of extraction and preservation . . .

And I had to visit those badlands where his success began. Because, there, in that beautiful and nightmare season - he ceased to dare to love. (B 139)

This passage makes three main charges: Dawe's search for historical origin removes him from time; it forces upon him an impersonal and dehumanised language of scientific objectivity; and it immures him from the terror of human relationships. But if we step for a moment outside Anna's schematic presentation of the evidence and attend to the story that she actually tells, a radically different interpretation of Dawe's quest becomes available that questions her confident assumptions about the relationship between language, history, and gender. This subaltern reading of *Badlands* suggests that the "strange" disconnection between "[a]ction and voice" (B 45) that so perplexes her in Dawe's field notes is precisely what his story is about. Far from recording the signs of his deliberate and stubborn silence, Dawe's notes testify to the impossibility of preserving the absolute limits of the individual self within the collective exchange of language. His encounters with Web, Yellowbird, and Sinnott do not signify the construction of a myth of male heroism; they precipitate the deconstruction of the totalising myth of male identity. Indeed the tautologies, elisions, and paradoxes of Dawe's journal entries represent the private, scripted agony of a man forced to reconcile himself to the discursive status of history, compelled to acknowledge the irreducibility of the relationship with the desired "other," and resigned to the impossibility of closing identity in upon itself.

The effect upon Dawe of his recognition of the implicit textuality of the male story is shown after Web's unlikely discovery of *Daweosaurus*. Web is, as I have noted, the archetypal product of discourse: a character who continually constructs himself in words. He is a 'web' of different discursive effects: a compendium of jokes, tall-tales, and failed one-liners. In Tune's words, Web is "a natural-born bullshit artist" (B 137). His fascination with the polymorphous possibilities of language increases after the departure of McBride, the symbol of domestic order, when he is pictured "elaborating his lie, delighting in the ambiguity of his discovery" (B 56). The ambiguity of Web's comic language is important because it underlines the carnivalesque nature of his role. Far from coveting the "omniscience" of a "male author," Web's egalitarian outpourings incorporate a space for dissent and disbelief in their basic narrative structure. Equally, his playful parodic inversion of Dawe's enlightenment discourse exposes the archaeologist's imperialistic appropriation of

history. In Web's "inverted universe" where "the divine, the refucking-union with the dead" is an imaginative possibility, the "upright bone" of Dawe's specimen is liberated by the shaman's "aching balls" (B 207). Alienated by Web's comic narrative from the object of his own desire, Dawe is forced to look away from the headwaters "far downriver" (B 209) to the site of Web's triumph. Web's insistence upon telling the undisclosed story of the badlands in western oral narrative receives its due reward when *Daweosaurus* becomes, for a moment, *his* "conquest, his mistress, his love" (B 248). Meanwhile, the central narrative moves to its conclusion with Web's marvellous parody of the phallic imperatives of Dawe's quest. Here, in an idiom stuffed full of puns, obscenities, and sexual braggadocio, Web breaks down Dawe's distinction between the mental and the corporeal and reconciles the discourse of history to the needs of the sensual body:

The ferryman puffing, shouting, explaining, directing: he'd never found a rattler this far upriver. Unbelievable. Fantastic. Unique in the history of the place. He needed the trophy, just to prove it: the rattles, the skin. Do or die.

And Web, then, following, staying close to the invisible snake, staying out of its way, too, had visions of a whole new splendid costume. For the snake man. No, for Dawe himself. Raiments never before imagined. Send old Dawe back east with his hump covered in tanned snakehide. Must be as old as dinosaurs, those snakes. Hundreds of years. Here in this muck and mud, looking for skin for his bones, old Dawe. Hump on his back celebrating its millionth birthday. Need some gladrags myself, vest made of the skins of sixteen gigantic rattlesnakes, all of them captured, strangled and skinned with my bare hands. Row of fangs worn round my neck: had to bite them out of those skulls with my own teeth. A brave man and true, yes, by God, a jockstrap made out of the whitest bellies of nine deadly females, the rattles of four males tied to my prick when I get into town. Bone-on I had last night, didn't have enough skin left over to close my eyes . . . (B 253)

The shock inflicted upon Dawe by Web's oral reclamation of western history is reflected in his field notes. His entries following Web's shamanistic apotheosis show him searching for a way of expressing his sense of displacement in language. At first, this leads him to develop an equivocal idiom of counterpoise and reversals in which two directly opposed meanings come together in a single statement. In this spirit he writes "quietly and almost daintily what he had been thinking to and of himself: *Dawe, cured of nothing but death, of everything but death*" (B 211). Soon, however, he begins to disorder his notes by repeating the same sentence with "careful randomness" (B 212). He is "puzzled apparently by his own repetition of these simple and obvious remarks" (B 213) because the disconnected words on his page describe a world which he cannot control by entering, appropriating, and naming its contents. Dawe's helpless

awareness of his position in a world where experience is defined and mediated by language is expressed most forcefully by his attempt to record the fact of Tune's death:

Dawe, unmoving, unmoved, on the box amidst writing: *It was an unfortunate accident. Dawe crossing out the word, unfortunate. Starting again: No doubt the boy was. Careless. Didn't follow.* He, Dawe, smashing the period down onto the page as if he would pierce it, penetrate, nail the book to the box. (B 241)

It is somehow moving that the final sentence of Dawe's life "I have come to the end of words" is as deceptive as Anna's claim to have discarded his field notes. For Dawe's silence, his brooding unhappiness, and his eventual suicide all speak of his unwilling position at the *beginning* of words, a place in which 'history' is the history of our discursive engagement with the world, and where it is no longer possible to salvage identity by personal *fiat* or the recuperative rhetoric of a nameless and wordless origin.

Dawe's enforced silence is therefore the consequence of his inability to reconcile his voluntarist demand for source with his experience of the duplicities of language. His field notes do not disengage themselves from his "moments of discovery"; the alterity of language *is* what he discovers. Neither does he remove himself from time. As Anna very well knows, the significance of her father's relationship with Yellowbird is that it brings him into contact with someone for whom 'history' is not a neutral empirical category but a material process of marginalisation and erasure. The only way that Anna can escape contradiction by her own narrative is to interpret her own writing for us so that we do not fail to read Dawe's encounter with Yellowbird as a physical expression of his desire to colonise the past:

It was the moment of descent that came to obsess him. The hot, cascading instant when, in which, she eased her body down onto his. The secret opening, the perfect mass of her cunthair yielding its secret gate, forcing his entrance; at that split second of penetration he must, he would, raise up with him into that underworld of his rampaging need the knowledge of all his life; into that sought darkness, that exquisite inundation, he would carry in his mind, in his head, the memory of wife and home, his driving ambitions that had swept him into this canyon, the furious desire and dream that had brought him here to these badlands, to these burnt prairies and scalded buttes; conquer, he told himself, conquer; and out of that blasting sun, into the darkness of her body he must, rising, plunge . . . (B 194-5)

This florid, overwritten passage bears all the hallmarks of the apprentice novelist.³⁷ Anna's defensive need to impose the absurd overstatement "conquer, he told himself, conquer" and the remarkable contention that "all the fury of [Dawe's] body needed,

spent, to swim him back, down, to the memory of the civilised east, his home and his wife" (BL 195) upon this scene make a mockery of her famous relativising statement that "[t]here are no truths, only correspondences" (B 45). As Lecker comments, "[a]re these the thoughts of a man who has any memories, or are they the product of a narrator who would provide her absent father with memory at any cost, any contradiction?"³⁸

Ironically, the limits of Anna's counter-discursive approach become most obvious in the brief coda she appends to Dawe's story, the section of text most commonly hailed as the scene of her ultimate liberation. By dismissing Dawe from the text and returning with Yellowbird to the site of his ambiguous victory, Anna clearly intends to substitute a feminine discourse of self-registration for the hubristic assumptions of the male story. But the unintended irony of her position is that her account of her journey west to the Rocky Mountains reveals her enthusiastic acceptance of the conventions of male quest fiction. Consequently, her entry into her own road-movie, as she drinks, drives, and lusts her way through the badlands, rests uneasily alongside her strictures against the "fabled hunting" of the men with their need for "open spaces." It also becomes difficult to reconcile her contempt for the crew's "little ceremony of success" (B 256) at the Loveland ferry with her own ceremonial 'abandonment' of Dawe's notebooks in the novel's closing scene. The thematic difficulties engendered by the narrowing of identificatory space between male and female quest narrative are intensified in the case of Sinnott. Sinnott is, as we have seen, the character employed by Anna to underscore the textual context of all historical knowledge. But if Sinnott's narrative frames insist upon the historicity of historical discourse, what becomes of Anna's binomial distinction between female temporality and the male *mythos* of presence? Anna has no solution to this dilemma; her compromise proposal, which converts the photographer into a pornographer, has the whiff of panic about it. All she can do is restate the binary structure of her vision in the grotesque image of the defecating Grizzly, "his prick and testicles hung over us like a handful of dead-ripe berries." The casual way in which Anna writes the male experience off the map of Canadian history suggests that she has indeed taken "the wrong turn into Deception Pass" (B 266) and reproduced in her own narrative the exclusivist presuppositions of the male story. In the most withering irony of the novel, the voice that she eventually discovers is the voice she heard at her father's knee. Living proof of Kroetsch's "insistence upon the tyranny of narrative models,"³⁹

Anna's destiny is to transform the male story into the "other" of the female quest for self-definition, and therefore repeat male history a second time as farce.

In *Badlands*, Kroetsch presents his most potent vision of the limitations of a counter-discourse negatively defined against hegemonic narratives of history and identity. Peter Thomas has claimed that *Badlands* is "arguably the most perfectly conceived novel Kroetsch has written"⁴⁰; a statement that commands assent if the faultless inverse symmetry of the novel's structure is taken into account. Some measure of Kroetsch's skill in mapping his narratives against each other may be gained by the fact that *Badlands* can perfectly easily be interpreted as the counter-discursive parody that Anna claims it to be. It is only at the very end, when we are confronted by the contradictions that her curiously timeless myth of female historicism imposes upon her story, that we are offered the chance to begin a deconstructive reading of Canadian history in the space opened by the disjunction between her two narratives. Contrary to Anna's intentions, as she marches out of the badlands with the undeclared aim of obliterating her father's memory, this deconstructive reading would begin with Dawe, the man broken by language and compelled at the last to search for a way of contriving authentic origins in an alien language. It would therefore accept as its point of departure the double strategy of un naming and uninventing historical constructions of identity and place outlined in Kroetsch's essay "The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction":

This is a new country. Here on the plains we confront the hopeless and necessary hope of originality: constantly we experience the need to begin. And we do - by initiating beginnings. We contrive authentic origins. From the denied Indians. From the false fronts of the little towns. From the diaries and the reminiscences and the travel accounts. From our displaced ancestors.

Here the bride, so often, without being wife, turns into mother. The male cannot enter into what is traditionally thought of as marriage - and possibly nor can the female. The male, certainly, to make his radical beginning, takes on the role of orphan or cowboy or outlaw. He approaches the female. He approaches the garden. He approaches the house . . .

And only then does he realize he has defined himself out of all entering. If he enters into this marriage - and into this place - it will be he - contrary to the tradition of the past - who must make the radical change. It will be he - already self-christened - and not the woman this time - who must give up the precious and treacherous *name*.⁴¹

Kroetsch's fiction after *Badlands* continues to search for a mode of inscribing the paradoxical identity of a post-colonial people that accepts its conclusions as provisional, possibly paradoxical in form, certainly open to change. Interviewed in 1981, he gave a tantalising glimpse into this area of his thought. Commenting upon his

own interpretation of the notion of "quest" he suggests that quest is really "sexual, it's looking for that fulfilment; so I made it comic quite often. . . . I think carnival is a way to let the secret slip out."⁴² This coupling of carnival and quest fiction is particularly revealing. Carnavalesque thought is attractive to Kroetsch because its subversion of hierarchical attitudes and discourses of historical order is enacted in a controlled space; it therefore retains an awareness of the borders, divisions, and frontiers that exist elsewhere beyond its improvised parameters. The narrative strategies of carnival therefore provide exactly the provisional, metafictional approach to the disunited narratives of Canadian self-registration that is so sorely lacking in Anna's alternative history of the west. In order to gauge the potential of this development in Kroetsch's work, we must, in Anna's words, make ourselves "ready for real laughter" (B 264) and enter the carnivalesque world of *What the Crow Said*.

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- 1 J. M. Coetzee, *In the Heart of the Country* (Harmondworth: Penguin, 1982) 84.
 - 2 Coetzee 37.
 - 3 Coetzee, *In the Heart of the Country* 97.
 - 4 Coetzee 59.
 - 5 Coetzee, *In the Heart of the Country* 133.
 - 6 Helen Tiffin, "Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourses," *Kunapipi* 9. 3 (1987): 28.
 - 7 Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse* 56-57.
 - 8 Tiffin, "Post-Colonial Literatures," 32.
 - 9 Sherrill E. Grace, "Wastelands and Badlands: The Legacies of Pynchon and Kroetsch," *Mosaic* 14. 2 (1981): 29.
 - 10 Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths of Voice* 170.
 - 11 Robert Kroetsch, *Badlands* (1982; Toronto: General Paperbacks, 1983) 2. Future references to this edition will be marked by the abbreviation "B" and incorporated into the main body of the text.
 - 12 John Moss, "Himmler's Got the King: An Essay On *Badlands* and *Burning Water*," *Re-visions of Canadian Literature*, ed. Shirley Chew (Leeds: University of Leeds Institute of Bibliography and Textual Criticism, 1984) 98.
 - 13 Dorothy Seaton, "The Post-Colonial as Deconstruction: Land and Language in Kroetsch's 'Badlands'," *Canadian Literature* 128 (1991): 78-79.
 - 14 Seaton, "The Post-Colonial as Deconstruction," 80.
 - 15 John Thieme, "Beyond History: Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and Robert Kroetsch's *Badlands*," *Re-visions of Canadian Literature* 81.
 - 16 Foucault, "The Discourse on Language," 230.
 - 17 Thomas, *Robert Kroetsch* 82.
 - 18 Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries: The Encounter Between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Reality*, trans. Philip Mairet (London: Collins, 1968) 83.
 - 19 Eliade 82.
 - 20 Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries* 83.
 - 21 Eliade 83.
 - 22 Thomas, *Robert Kroetsch* 90.
 - 23 Seaton, "The Post-Colonial as Deconstruction," 82.
 - 24 Seaton 78.
 - 25 Thomas, *Robert Kroetsch* 88.

²⁶ Thomas 93.

²⁷ See for example Dorothy Seaton's recent article which paraphrases Dawe's quest in the following terms: "The archaeological expedition as the reconstruction and retrieval of history, as an act of male heroic self-construction, as a journey in search of sources and origins (and so on), is also a journey of the loss and deconstruction of history, of the subversion of such male heroic myths as Dawe is entered upon, and of a movement away from sources. The land becomes the place where such oppositions, rather than being arranged hierarchically in order to structure meaning and value, are instead brought together and made at once to interact endlessly and undecideably, and eventually to collapse entirely into one another." "The Post-Colonial as Deconstruction," 78.

²⁸ Kroetsch therefore engages with the problematic discussed by Julia Kristeva, in her essay "Women's Time" regarding the valorisation of a "counter-society" of the feminine that would fulfil all those characteristics which are "other" to a masculine discourse: "If the archetype of the belief in a good and pure substance, that of utopias, is the belief in the omnipotence of an archaic, full, total englobing mother with no frustration, no separation, with no break-producing symbolism (with no castration, in other words), then it becomes evident that we will never be able to defuse the violences mobilized through the counter-investment necessary to carrying out this phantasm, unless one challenges precisely this myth of the archaic mother." Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time," *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) 205.

²⁹ Lecker, *Robert Kroetsch* 81.

³⁰ Lecker 81.

³¹ Connie Harvey, "Tear-Glazed Vision of Laughter," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 11 (1978): 31.

³² Moss, "Himmler's Got the King," 93.

³³ Helene Cixous, "Sorties," *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtrivon (1981; Sussex: Harvester Press, 1986) 91.

³⁴ Cixous 90.

³⁵ For a critique of essentialism see Toril Moi, *Sexual Textual Politics* (1985; London: Methuen, 1986) 135-143.

³⁶ A Lacanian reading of gender would insist upon precisely this distinction. According to Lacan, the subject is initially differentiated and enters the realm of gender through a system of language which directs biological difference towards the signifiers "male" or "female." There is, therefore, no possibility of a self-identical or essential

concept of masculinity or femininity. It is always a question of the subject's entry into the symbolic order. See Jacques Lacan, "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud," *Ecrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977) 146-178. Lacan's concept of gender construction has been appropriated by feminists from both the Anglo-American and Continental traditions. See, for example, Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975) and Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez, ed. Leon S. Roudiez (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984).

³⁷ In his efforts to convey the bookish quality of Anna's novelistic imagination Kroetsch draws on a wide range of literary allusions. Behind the textual world of *Badlands* Sherrill E. Grace hears echoes of "Greek myth and native Indian legend, of Joseph Conrad, T.S. Eliot, perhaps James Dickey, certainly Sheila Watson and Margaret Atwood." ["Wastelands and Badlands", 22] While agreeing with Grace's list of influences I would wish to emphasise the importance of one, and add another. Missing from Grace's account is Patrick White's *Voss*, which employs a revising female narrator to comment upon Voss's expedition into the post-colonial space of the Australian interior. Meanwhile James Dickey's *Deliverance* contains, in the character of Lewis, a social outsider with strong affinities with Dawe: "Lewis wanted to be immortal. He had everything that life could give, and he couldn't make it work. And he couldn't bear to give it up or see age take it away from him, either, because in the meantime he might be able to find what it was he wanted, the thing that must be there, and that must be subject to the will. He was the kind of man who tries by any means - weight lifting, diet, exercise, self-help manuals from taxidermy to modern art - to hold on to his body and mind and improve them, to rise above time." James Dickey, *Deliverance* (London: Sphere Books, 1989) 17.

³⁸ Lecker 91.

³⁹ Thomas, *Robert Kroetsch* 85.

⁴⁰ Thomas 81.

⁴¹ Robert Kroetsch, "The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction," *The Lovely Treachery of Words* 82-83.

⁴² Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths of Voice* 23.

Chapter Seven

The Word Turned Upside-Down:
Carnavalesque Subversion in *What the Crow Said*

By introducing the *status of the word* as a minimal structural unit, Bakhtin situates the text within history and society, which are then seen as texts read by the writer, and into which he inserts himself by rewriting them. Diachrony is transformed into synchrony, and in light of this transformation, *linear* history appears as abstraction. The only way a writer can participate in history is by transgressing this abstraction through a process of reading-writing; that is, through the practice of a signifying structure in relation or opposition to another structure. History and morality are written and read within the infrastructure of texts. The poetic word, polyvalent and multi-determined, adheres to a logic exceeding that of codified discourse and fully comes into being only in the margins of recognised culture. Bakhtin was the first to study this logic, and he looked for its roots in *carnival*. Carnavalesque discourse breaks through the laws of a language censored by grammar and semantics and, at the same time, is a social and political protest. There is no equivalence, but rather, identity between challenging official linguistic codes and challenging official law.¹

With the publication of *What the Crow Said* in 1978 Kroetsch's exploration of a culture divorced from a coherent sense of historical origin and divided between Old and New World discourse takes a fresh turn. In each of his five previous novels, the perilous negotiation between the constrictions of a history that denies the ambivalence of post-colonial experience and a naive identification with the rhetoric of totalising narrative systems has impelled Kroetsch's characters toward silence, erasure, and death: Hazard's dismemberment, Sadness's ambiguous disappearance, and the memory of Backstrom's private Calvary bear eloquent testimony to the toll exacted by the binary schisms of Canadian life. By the final pages of *Badlands*, Peter Guy's liberating alienation from source has been transformed into Anna Dawe's grotesque replication of colonialist cultural discourse. Collectively, these texts constitute a tragicomic allegory of the constraints placed upon the Canadian subject by his or her ambiguous position within an alien language and an alien history. The subtle inverse logic of *Badlands*, which unexpectedly reveals the circumscription of the male quest within a female discourse of enlightenment, justice, and freedom brings this process full circle. In the bleak light of Kroetsch's ironic vision coloniser exchanges places with colonised in a transaction that mutates history into farce and leaves the rhetoric of colonialism undisturbed.

The success of *Gone Indian* and *Badlands* in portraying the limitations placed upon Canadian discourses of self-identification by the opposed codes of post-colonial

discourse is not unproblematic. One difficulty with these novels is that by moving so concertedly toward a system of dual narratives Kroetsch unwittingly reinforces the binary tensions that he seeks to expose. By developing in *Badlands* what I have referred to as a third hermeneutic space exterior to the dialectic between "same" and "other" he signals his desire to find new ways of exploring the "binary opposition within language that has its roots in the process of either transporting a language to a new land or imposing a foreign language on an indigenous population."² At the same time an increasing discrepancy becomes evident between Kroetsch's novelistic irony and the tenor of his cultural criticism; it is difficult to reconcile the renewing vision of "Unhiding the Hidden" and "The Canadian Writer and the American Literary Tradition" with the bitter comedy of Madham's delusions or the circular logic of Anna Dawe's hubris. In this chapter I will argue that Kroetsch's response to these two related problems was to develop a discursive mode, heavily indebted to the genre of "Magic Realism" and the subversive cultural logic of the "Carnavalesque," which foregrounds the tension between opposed cultural, historical and cognitive codes within the space of a single narrative. The decision to make the transition from the critical stance of postmodern parody to a hybrid form that enacts, as well as describes, a "metamorphosis in perception and in things perceived,"³ enables Kroetsch to present a Canadian landscape caught in the flux of becoming, where the interplay of gender, idiom and culture undermines fixed borders between different forms of experience and ascribes a positive value to the post-colonial position between different versions of linguistic, cultural and historical identity.

Although Kroetsch had been excited by the possibilities of South American fabular fiction since the late 1960's, *Crow* is the first of his novels to demonstrate a sustained engagement with magic realism.⁴ In an acute comment on this topos Stephen Slemon has written:

The term "Magic Realism" is an oxymoron, one that suggests a binary opposition between the representational code of realism and that, roughly, of fantasy. In the language of narration in a magic realist text, a battle between two oppositional systems takes place, each working toward the creation of a different kind of fictional world from the other. Since the ground rules of these two worlds are incompatible, neither one can fully come into being, and each remains suspended, locked in a continuous dialectic with the "other," a situation which creates disjunction within each of the separate discursive systems, rending them with gaps, absences, and silences.⁵

The seductive appeal of magic realism for Kroetsch emerges forcefully from Slemon's description. In particular, the promise of a narrative mode that enforces a "continuous

dialectic" between "incompatible" narrative worlds is clear given Kroetsch's commitment to highlighting the divisions and exclusions imposed upon a people denied an independent signifying relationship between language and place. Equally, a method of narrative "disjunction" that rends each discursive system with "gaps, absences and silences" helps Kroetsch to recuperate the lost and marginalised voices of Canadian history occluded by the narrow denominative positions offered by the rhetoric of colonialism.

The emphasis of magic realism upon disjunction, bivalency, and narrative contraries is also a staple feature of carnivalesque discourse. Julia Kristeva, in words that serve as epigraph to this chapter, identifies a moment in literary and cultural development when the revision and destabilisation of hegemonic political discourse was pursued through ritual and textual disruption of representations of historical order. She attributes this insight to the Russian formalist critic Mikhail Bakhtin, and follows him in naming this process "carnavalesque." Her description of carnival's transgression of socially "codified discourse" and its renewal of "the margins of recognised culture" holds a peculiar resonance for the subjects of a marginalised culture; it is as if Bakhtin's theoretical writings and Kroetsch's fiction had travelled parallel paths without finding a moment of common expression. In order to underline the importance to *Crow* of carnivalesque discourse I intend to dwell briefly on three aspects of the carnivalesque that find expressive form in Kroetsch's text: the interactive and participatory principle of "dialogism"; the pervasive importance to carnival of ambivalence, undefined forms, and the suspension of hierarchies; and the carnivalesque use of the cosmic or universal body to symbolise both the natural rhythm of decay and transfiguration and the potential for collective social and cultural renewal.

Bakhtin's term "dialogism" retains a range of applications: it denotes a principle of philosophical anthropology; refers to the social conventions that precede and determine the meaning of particular historical situations; and describes a relationship between individual utterances that reflects the linguistic stratification of society. Perhaps the best summation of dialogism as an epistemological mode is provided by Michael Holquist, who writes:

Dialogism is the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia. Everything means, is understood, as part of a greater whole - there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others. Which will affect the other, how it will do so and in

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what degree is actually settled at the moment of utterance. This dialogic imperative, mandated by the pre-existence of the language world relative to any of its current inhabitants, insures there can be no actual monologue. One may, like a primitive tribe, be deluded into thinking there is one language, or one may, as grammarians, certain political figures and normative framers of "literary language" do, seek in a sophisticated way to achieve a unitary language. In both cases the unitariness is relative to the overpowering force of heteroglossia, and thus dialogism.⁶

I want to focus here on two particular aspects of the dialogical: Bakhtin's insight that, in Todorov's words, the most important feature of the individual utterance is its "intertextual dimension" which insists that "all discourse is in dialogue with prior discourse on the same subject" and which defines culture in terms of "the discourses retained by collective memory"⁷; and his belief that individual and collective cultural identity was based not on "decadent and idealist (individualistic) culture" but on a reciprocal relation with alterity through which "the role of the other person was revealed, in whose sole light could any word about oneself be constructed."⁸ If these two features of the dialogical principle are assessed in the context of Holquist's remarks concerning "a world dominated by heteroglossia" which is hostile to the construction of a "unitary language," striking parallels emerge between dialogism and Kroetsch's critical thought. Clearly, the dialogical emphasis upon "the overpowering force of heteroglossia" offers a sophisticated interpretative model for a nation divided by language and cultural tradition, while its hostility to monologic individualism and its recuperation of the "other" is pertinent to a country historically defined as "other" to the imperial imagination. Kroetsch employs the dialogical principle to good effect in *Crow* by using the inherent heteroglossia of western Canadian oral culture to bring a range of cultural oppositions together within a common linguistic space. By working in a decentred form outside the normative frame of realist meta-narrative, he is able to present the multiple borders of Canadian culture as evidence of a renewing clash of "codes of recognition"⁹ that prevents Canada's re-assimilation into American and European discursive stratagems. Kroetsch similarly emphasises Canada's borderline status by showing in the figure of Gus Liebhaber, the typesetter who can "remember the future" but struggles to retain details of the past and present, that the collective memory that defines the Canadian cultural heritage is irremediably split between the country's oral and graphic traditions.

The dialogical promotion of polyvalency and contraries at the expense of monologism and the claims of a unitary language takes on concrete form in the hierarchically inverted world of carnival. Bakhtin has written of the "undestroyable

nonofficial nature" of carnival images, which are "opposed to all that is finished and polished, to all pomposity, to every ready-made solution in the sphere of thought and world outlook."¹⁰ Instead carnival exists alongside "official" ceremonies, thereby creating a "two world condition," a "second life outside officialdom" in which "all medieval people participated more or less."¹¹ Three characteristics of this second world on the margins of official cultural discourse are particularly notable. In contrast to the delimitations of rank during an official feast, carnival "celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions."¹² Hostile to all that was "immortalized and completed" carnival became "the feast of becoming, change, and renewal."¹³ Secondly, the suspension of hierarchical precedence during carnival time "led to the creation of special forms of marketplace speech and gesture" which permitted "no distance between those who came in contact with each other" and liberated participants "from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times."¹⁴ Finally, the dialectical tension between the "official" world and its carnivalesque double is encapsulated in a spirit of ambivalence that relativises the established order and questions religious, moral, and political values. In a famous passage, Bakhtin expresses this ambivalence in the form of carnival laughter:

Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people. Second, it is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants. The entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity. Third, this laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. Such is the laughter of carnival.¹⁵

Each of these features of the unofficial world of carnival recurs in *Crow*. Bakhtin's emphasis upon the suspension and reversal of hierarchies is particularly relevant to a discussion of the Lang farm, which provides a microcosmic inversion of hegemonic social and gender relations. Equally Vera Lang, Liebhaber, and the eponymous Crow all employ a variant of marketplace speech to disturb the familiar rhythms of provincial life. Meanwhile, Kroetsch exploits the ambivalence of carnivalesque discourse to bring into juxtaposition oral and print culture and re-examine the relationship between language, desire, and subjectivity. In *Crow*, however, discursive ambivalence is also linked to the transfiguring qualities of the carnivalesque body.

Within the signifying system of carnival the bodily element is epitomised "by events and activities in which boundaries between bodies, and between bodies and the world, are at their most obscured and eroded."¹⁶ Consequently, carnivalesque discourse gives prominence to acts of birth, death, eating, copulation and defecation. The significance of these acts is that they show the body in a state of metamorphosis: it becomes a living symbol for the transit between conditions of being. Given that the metamorphic carnival body is not private or individualised but "universal, representing all the people"¹⁷ its potential as a symbol for the transgression of established codes of recognition becomes obvious. Bakhtin captures the body's simultaneous process of death-and-renewal in the image of "senile pregnant hags" who symbolise "pregnant death, a death that gives birth."¹⁸ In a somewhat different spirit Vera Lang's transfiguration in the opening scene of *Crow* suggests not simply individual metamorphosis but dramatises rather a mutation in "the collective ancestral body of all the people."¹⁹

As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have shown, the radical ambivalence of carnivalesque discourse survives the recent political attack on carnival as a licensed safety-valve which is complicit with social order.²⁰ These assaults, as Stallybrass and White remark, tend to essentialise carnival; if the 'doubled' and relational side of Bakhtin's analysis is preserved, carnival "may often act as *catalyst* and *site of actual and symbolic struggle*"²¹ in which political action is coupled with the legitimisation of desire as a force disruptive of established categories of social and cultural behaviour. The ambivalence of carnival may therefore be seen to retain a potential political force.

Kroetsch has not remained oblivious to the imaginative possibilities suggested by Bakhtin's work on carnival. In a paper entitled "Carnival and Violence: A Meditation" he examines the opportunity for a renaissance in Canadian cultural autonomy afforded by the carnivalesque subversion of discourses of social order. Having reflected upon carnival's ambivalence and suspension of hierarchies he postulates that "carnivalistic challenges" to "the official codes, the official laws" mean that "[f]olk speech itself becomes a form of violence."²² This recognition prompts him to consider the political potential of a confrontation between post-colonial culture and the discourse of colonialism in terms of North America's subversion of imperialist historiography:

The promise of the carnivalesque is a promise of renewal by destruction. ²⁷³ One of the forces that accounts for the radical development of literature in nineteenth-century North America is the encounter with the renewing energies of the carnivalesque. I am here looking at prose; I could as well look at the poetry of Whitman against that of Longfellow and Isabella Crawford. The writers in North America confronted a carnivalesque world in which hierarchies were collapsing, boundaries disappearing or shifting, opposites uniting or dissolving or changing face. Actor and audience were no longer separate. Everything was in a state of becoming, not of being. Violence was at once metaphor and reality; that distinction, too, collapsed. Violence was no longer a page-turner, a novelist's trick, a philosophic proposition. Perhaps North American culture itself became a kind of carnivalesque response to the 'authority' of European cultures and European versions of history.²³

In *Crow*, Kroetsch creates "a carnivalesque world in which hierarchies [a]re collapsing, boundaries disappearing or shifting, opposites uniting or dissolving or changing face." The importance to the novel of the metamorphic movement between contraries is evident from its opening scene, where Vera Lang is seduced and impregnated by a swarm of bees:

Vera, alone at the edge of the valley, lifted her body against the pressing bees. Her not daring to resist became the excuse, the cause of her slow yielding. She lifted her hips against the pressing, her long pale legs spreading to the weight of the bees, the slow surging of the bees. Her body joined their urgency. The drones, bigger, slower, moving with a hot deliberation, seeking always the hiving queen. Vera herself, swarmed into a new being. Her body singing like a telephone wire. Her nipples swelling and throbbing to the kiss of wing and leg, her belly tightening to the push and rub of her myriad unthinking lovers. She was enveloped. Her eyelids wore each a bee. Her armpits opened to the nuzzling bees. They found the spaces between her fingers, between her toes. Her body was not hers now, it moved with the surge of grass in the wind, a field of green oats, a flowering of clover. Her moving crushed the blue-purple petals of the crocus bed, broke the hairy stalks, the blossoms, into the dizzying sweetness of her own desire. The hum of wings melded earth and sky into the thickness of her skin. She had no mind left for thinking, no fear, no dream, no memory. The bees had closed her mouth, her ears. The bees found the swollen lips between her thighs; she felt their intrusive weight and spread farther her legs.²⁴

Motifs from both carnivalesque discourse and magic realism characterise this passage. Kroetsch's portrayal of Vera's "swelling and throbbing" nipples, the "swollen lips between her thighs," and her admission into "the dizzying sweetness of her own desire" introduce the leading themes of carnivalesque images of bodily life, which Bakhtin notes as "fertility, growth, and a brimming-over abundance"²⁵; similarly her loss of "memory" and her entry into "a new being" symbolise the birth of a new identity from the ashes of the old self. Kroetsch underlines the significance of the

transition between states of existence by using the pathetic fallacy to describe the bees "hot deliberation" while Vera is pictured "swarm[ing] into a new being." Enveloped within the discursive paradoxes of carnival, Vera now inhabits her "world-old virgin body" (C 12) while her "cry" (C 11), which hangs over the community like the annunciation of a new beginning, is "lament and song in one" (C 12). In keeping with the tradition of carnival imagery, Vera's rebirth is symbolised by her pregnancy: her son, raised by coyotes and known simply as Vera's boy, later becomes an emblem of the difficult passage between two opposed worlds.

The influence of magic realism on this scene is no less profound. In particular, magic realism's yoking and juxtaposition of opposites, which repeats in its own narrative movement the struggle between different idioms, cultures, and perceptions of the world, informs Kroetsch's startling interpenetration of mythic and natural imagery. Equally he adopts the refrain "years later" (C 7) from Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and uses it as a structuring device for his own novel. These two words mediate between narrative and event by opening a space through which the secret histories of communal life recorded in gossip, folklore, and the rituals of popular belief and aspiration can be reincorporated into Canadian cultural discourse. Referring back to a period that evaded contemporary documentation, Marquez's refrain wryly notes the varieties of human experience neglected by the narrow generic boundaries of realism. In *The Crow Journals*, Kroetsch's self-reflexive account of the artistic process that yielded *Crow*, he declares that Marquez has "cracked the problem of how to tell a story in third person again." For the magic realist "[v]oice" entails a "calm distancing" which, with its conflation of different discursive worlds, "enables him to forget the conventions of realism."²⁶

If we return for a moment to the interpenetration of natural and mythic imagery with which *Crow* commences, we can gain an important clue to the novel's formal structure. Kroetsch's description of Vera's bestial seduction is startling because it superimposes the ontological rules of mythic discourse onto a lush evocation of a prairie valley; in fact, the story of Vera's transfiguration is a contemporary re-creation of Jove's conquest of Danae. Indeed, Kroetsch makes a semantic link between the two narratives by transposing the burnish of Jove's appearance in a "gold shower"²⁷ onto the swarming presence of the "gold" (C 9) bees. Robert Wilson has noted that Kroetsch's juxtaposition of narrative codes from different discursive worlds creates the

effect of "spatial folding" where "one world, bearing with it its own distinct laws, appears or erupts into [an] other world."²⁸ The collision of the "two systems of possibility"²⁹ represented here by human and apiarian life provokes a series of incompatibilities simply ignored by the narrator's neutral tone. Why the bees choose Vera as their target; where they come from; how it is possible for a woman to conceive from such a union - no response to these questions can be provided without violating the laws of cause and effect intrinsic to one or other of the opposed fictional worlds. Consequently, we are continually unsure about which set of discursive conventions to use to assimilate the text's information. Kroetsch compounds our interpretative difficulties by structuring his story around the quick-fire division and multiplication of narrative units. Thus the first three chapters, which rapidly intercut Vera's seduction, a visit to the Lang farm, and our introduction to Liebhaber in his newspaper office, yoke together three environments that must be read in three different ways. Kroetsch has remarked upon the initial resistance he experienced from readers wrong-footed by the novel's disjunctive narrative grammar:

When *What the Crow Said* first came out, two very good readers told me, the book's way too short. They wanted the elaboration visible in front of their eyes; whereas I knew after a quarter of a page that they really knew the story, you see? And why tell it all? What are the pleasures in reading a long novel that just lays everything out?³⁰

Kroetsch's uneasiness at calls for his novel to include more visible "elaboration" is best understood as an attempt to frustrate the logic of realist epistemology. Conversely, his elliptical and fragmentary style reincorporates into a portrait of a provincial Canadian community the gaps and absences that characterise the post-colonial narrative of history. A comparison may fairly be drawn between the reader's embattled search for meaning amid the welter of correspondences Kroetsch institutes between *Crow* and the texts of several literary cultures and the Canadian quest for self-recognition outside a unitary narrative of cultural identity. Interestingly, given the provenance of the story of Jove's seduction of Danae, Kroetsch has linked his attention to the "surfaces" and "edges"³¹ of each narrative unit with the metonymic strategies of Ovidian poetics:

Ovid is much more metonymic and much more inclined to let myths be, to let them do their own thing, than the highly interpretive psychoanalytic schools. Most of us have been trained to do something else. We have been trained to coerce the material, and it's very hard not to do that.³²

Comparing the *Metamorphoses* and the *Aeneid* E. J. Kenney identifies the structural significance of elision and discontinuity in Ovid's work, which resists an internal hierarchy of narratives and lends itself to the transgression of discourses of social and cultural order:

The essential difference from the *Aeneid* is that the structure of the *Metamorphoses* is serial, cutting right across the divisions between the books. These are indeed ingeniously exploited by the poet - for Ovid never misses a technical trick - but in a purely 'local' way, to provide immediate surprise or drama, and to whet the readers expectations.³³

It is along this ambiguous border between different imaginative geographies that Kroetsch develops his "mythic/epic/comic/telltale of the family/town/west of this version of man."³⁴ In the period that follows Vera's admission that she "just now walked over from the other side" (C 30), Big Indian is not so much a "world without order"³⁵ as an environment in which rules of natural and cultural behaviour have been reversed. Changes in the natural world are particularly noticeable: the common belief that "[s]omething had gone awry in the district since the afternoon of the bee swarm" (C 15) receives support from the return of cold weather in April and the onset of a year long winter. Meanwhile, the retardation of the laws of seasonal progression leads Tiddy Lang to transgress the mores of provincial society by interrupting her husband's carousing despite the fact that it was "against the laws of the municipality for a woman to enter the beer parlour" (C 18). The dramatic consequence of the remorseless winter and Tiddy's unsanctioned invasion of a private male space arrives when Martin Lang freezes to death on his drunken return from town, adrift between his instinctive need of masculine society and his responsibility to his wife and daughters.

The death of Martin Lang is a pivotal moment in the novel. His disappearance punches a hole in the community's ordered expectations and compels the townspeople to confront a world in which unpredictable and inexplicable events utterly transform the local landscape. The distinction between the male and female response to Lang's demise also introduces one of the key binary conflicts of the novel. For the men Lang's death imposes an "absence" (C 34) in their daily lives; when the snow continues to fall in August they turn their thoughts regretfully to the loss of his body. But for the Lang women his absence enables them to take control of their own existence without the restraint of patriarchal supervision. With the cessation of Lang's paternal role, the Lang household becomes a carnivalesque second world where women take control of land management and men are introduced for momentary use during the

process of conception. In contrast to the masculine imperative to impose an external order on the world, the women's cthonic life puts faith in the transfiguring power of seasonal renewal:

Sometimes the cows mooded. Sometimes they didn't. Sometimes the chickens laid. Sometimes they needed oyster shells. Sometimes the thistles or the pigweeds grew faster than the wheat. Sometimes hail fell instead of rain. Sometimes the dust blew through closed windows. Tiddy, with her hardheaded radiance, held together the past and the future. Her daughters went on maturing. Her mother grew older, more wrinkled, forever clutching her ball of sorrow in a pocket of her apron. JG was more work than all the others, all the other connundrums of the world, put together. He grew larger. He said nothing. Tiddy accepted his existence as she accepted the stinkweeds, the grasshoppers, the green grass in spring, the sun. (C 68-69)

The schism between the men's search for the lost male body and the women's acceptance of change, growth and renewal is personified in the figure of Gus Liebhaber. Liebhaber, the typesetter for the *Big Indian Signal*, oscillates between identification with the masculine search for redemption from the chaos of mundane existence and involvement in the Lang women's persistent effort to redefine their social and cultural position. His ambivalence is remarked by Kathleen Wall, who suggests that Liebhaber "doesn't quite fit in the male category, largely I suspect because his relationship to language and order . . . is more problematic."³⁶ The complexity of Liebhaber's relationship to language is confirmed by his occupation - for a typesetter the connection between the lexical shape of words and the textual production of meaning is a matter of habitual concern. Isolated by his activity in the print room, Liebhaber is trapped between the belief that his physical manipulation of words enables him to create a stable linguistic order and the lingering suspicion that his own identity is merely an effect of the general movement of language. This hermeneutic dilemma forces him to question the transcendent dream of the male quest and alerts him to the possibility that the printed word might transform, as well as consolidate, conventional representations of gender, culture, and society.

Writing on *Crow*, Linda Hutcheon has noted the gender implications of Liebhaber's obsession with the typographic process. It is, she argues, Kroetsch's "men who are print-oriented, who are therefore maimed and destroyed by their need to imprint themselves in a visual manner on their place and time," while his female characters, "earthy and fecund, exist in another world, one closer to the natural yet ritualized continuity of folk traditions."³⁷ Liebhaber's experiences bring him to the

interface of these two modes of perceiving the world. His initial appearance "playing pocket pool" (C 15) suggests that he, unlike Vera, represents the private self-enclosed body of modern individualism. Kroetsch's most recent fiction insistently links sexual desire with the transgression of outworn modes of perception: Liebhaber's onanistic dependence upon his own body therefore bespeaks a refusal to make that empathetic connection between self and world which is reflected in his fear of language.³⁸

Stephen Slemon has pointed out that "[p]rint, in obliterating the need for memory, inevitably contains and fixes the past as dead record of the monuments of achievement, but it also creates marginal spaces in which the silenced voices of totalizing systems can speak."³⁹ Liebhaber's discomfiture, which begins immediately after Vera's transfiguration, gradually reveals to him that the emphasis of Gutenberg's innovation on visual and linear modes of perception excludes what Marshall McLuhan calls the "audile-tactile"⁴⁰ experience of a predominantly oral culture. Consequently, Liebhaber's attempt to discover a way of representing Big Indian that reincorporates the narrative forms of oral popular culture may be seen as symbolic of Kroetsch's more widespread effort to recuperate the marginalised "other" of totalising cultural discourse. For the typesetter to bridge the gap between oral and graphic culture he must develop a mode of writing that reflects and repeats the transgressive logic of desire. Accordingly, the connection between language and the body is made early in the novel. Here we find Liebhaber striving to "lock up the form" (C 16); in this instance, as elsewhere, Liebhaber's involvement in the physical act of typesetting becomes symbolic of his general disposition to narrative closure. Yet his sudden realisation that he cannot "finish the story" (C 16) makes him focus on the realm of tactile life excluded by the mechanical reproduction of experience: "Liebhaber watched his fingers as if, abruptly, they were not his own" (C 15-16). It is at this moment, when the illusion of the autonomous individual self is momentarily suspended, that he "remember[s] the future" (C 15) and makes his first break with the linear trajectory of typographic culture.

Liebhaber's apprehension of the "marginal spaces" through which folk memory and oral popular culture intrude upon the typographic world is formed by his experiences at the Lang farm following Martin Lang's death. The name "Lang," with its phonic proximity to "langue" (the index of linguistic possibilities which, in Saussure's theory of language, forms the pre-condition for individual acts of communication), is significant because it suggests that the reintegration of Liebhaber's

personality hinges upon his recognition that meaning and identity are dependent upon the structural space between different nominative codes. It is through this differential space, comically illustrated by Vera's effort to make Liebhaber include the dissonant phrase "[m]en are a bunch of useless bastards" (C 19) in the public text of the *Big Indian Signal*, that oral modes and sensibilities gradually modify his exclusivist print consciousness. Kroetsch repeatedly puns upon character names to portray Liebhaber's encounter with oral narrative forms such as the "extended anecdote"⁴¹ of Big Indian's beer-parlour mythologisers: Eli Wurtz (words), John Skandl (scandal), and the undertaker Aardt (art) show this process at work. At the Lang farm the distinction between typographic and oral culture is made by the juxtaposition of Liebhaber (symbolic representative of the printed body), the blank erasure of snow, and the white margin of the printed page. Lying by Martin Lang's corpse, Liebhaber discovers that "[e]verything was erased, blanked into nothing by snow" (C 28). As Tiddy rubs Liebhaber with snow to revive his frozen body we are reminded of her staring at the "blank space, the absence of words" (C 27) at the margin of Liebhaber's type-set page. This attention to the margins of recorded social experience is extended when Liebhaber, in an image that recalls Vera's encounter with the renewing and energising force of desire, sees "the bee-like swarming of the flakes of snow" covering his "parted legs" (C 28). The white blanket of snow and the typographic margin unsettle Liebhaber's post-Gutenberg sensibility because they register the fact of difference and spacing by which language is able to produce meaning. Similarly, women are endlessly attracted to the albino skin of Zike, Liebhaber's pressman, because his white body offers an unwritten space that resists the linear logic of print culture:

Women went to bed easily with Zike. It didn't count, they said; he was an albino. It didn't count with Zike, who lived in the basement under the newspaper office, while Liebhaber lived in the flat above. It didn't count with Zike, his bed there close to the furnace, the crumbling cement walls hung with calendars, with every type and year of calendar he had ever printed, the basement divided into rooms by boxes of calendars that hadn't sold. He never tore the month of January off a calendar pad. (C 21)

Kroetsch has observed that the inhabitants of the Canadian west had to "invent a new concept of self and a new concept of society" for a culture wiped "down to zero" by the Depression.⁴² Liebhaber's task is no less radical: he must choose between his hitherto passive role in the production of meaning, which leads him to identify with Fust, Gutenberg's coadjutor, who was "condemned merely to fulfil what Gutenberg had ordained" (C 197), or active participation in the process of oral culture where "we are literally in a new world telling ourselves about it, making each other up, inventing

each other in this new world."⁴³ In *Crow* this bifurcation is presented in stark terms: Liebhaver "must see for himself, either the snow or the beacon" (C 40). As we have seen, "snow" is associated in the novel with the cleansing and renewing female space of the Lang farm; the "beacon" meanwhile offers an appropriately thrusting symbol for the phallogocentric self and its spokesman, John Skandl.

Skandl's decision to build a lighthouse "out of blocks of perfect ice" (C 45) may be seen as an extreme masculine response to the carnivalesque disruption of traditional rural experience. His project embodies an "erotic dream" (C 46) of male transcendence in which the phallus represents a masculine order prior to language and history. The exclusiveness of his vision, which deliberately marginalises "those muttering few, wives and mothers, who saw the tower as a kind of tomb or monument" (C 47), foreshadows the narrow cultural nationalism that characterises his subsequent political career. In his search for the "fixed point" (C 33) of pure phallic identity, Skandl is transformed into the "giver of light" (C 49); his actions, meanwhile, have all the men in the "snow-buried town" dreaming of "[a] center. A beacon. A guide" (C 41). In his climatic speech before his "rising creation" Skandl gives full vent to his idiosyncratic phallic narcissism:

Some days he spoke of the Bishop Rock Lighthouse, occupying the most exposed situation in all the oceans of the world; he praised the Skerryvore Lighthouse, its profile a hyperbolic curve from the hard rock to the lantern base. He reminded his men of the hazards of building a lighthouse on the dangerous shores of Brittany, on the Fastnet Rock off the Irish coast. He told them of the Rothersand Lighthouse and the difficulties of its erection. He spoke confusedly of the lights of Ravenna and Messina, of the ancient tower that was the Pillar of Hercules. And all the while he ordered the blocks of ice hoisted higher, stacked, positioned. He had them sprayed with water that froze and welded them together. He surveyed his rising creation and ordered another round of blocks, another layer, another reaching at the rim. (C 46-47)

If Skandl espouses nothing more than a narrow discourse of male self-definition, his rhetoric is nevertheless embraced by his followers as evidence of a transcendent release from the experience of cultural marginalisation. By "building their tower of ice to heaven"⁴⁴ the men demonstrate their need for a definitive creation myth that will assert the primacy of male reason before the fact of linguistic and cultural difference. Yet *Crow*, like all Kroetsch's previous fiction, rigorously contests the attempt to substitute a transcendent myth of origin for the experience of social and linguistic alienation. It does so chiefly by employing the myth of Daedalus and Icarus to show the penalty reserved for those who dismiss this world for the redemptive

promise of another. Consequently *Crow* bulges with stories of failed flights and inexplicable falls from grace. Thus Joe Lightning is killed by his fall from the beak of an eagle; one of the husbands of the Lang sisters' is killed by slipping into a bag of drilling mud, another falls into a threshing machine while "raging at the sky" (C 140), and a third hooks himself to a windmill and dies "spinning and spinning" (C 177); Jerry Lepanne, a convict who repeatedly escapes prison to express in person his response to Rita Lang's erotic letters, crashes into the CN bridge in a doomed attempt to save Vera's life; while JG, the silent child whose "pre-cultural muteness"⁴⁵ is a visible rebuke to the various discourses that enclose him, falls to his death from a tree, thereby demonstrating the perils awaiting those "free of language" who try "to enter heaven."⁴⁶ Equally, Skandl's premature death on a return aeroplane journey from the outside world shows that, in contrast to his plan for an independent and segregated Alberta, it is as impossible to secede from history as it is from language. Instead it is left to Tiddy, a woman whose stance is "always in the world,"⁴⁷ to recognise that "in their desperate confusion" (C 50) the men have reconstructed the tower of Babel. The significance of the myth of Babel in Kroetsch's work is that its assertion of the polymorphous possibilities of story accords with Canada's position between different narratives of cultural identity. Not suprisingly, this postlapsarian emphasis upon linguistic difference primarily affects Tiddy, excluded by gender from Skandl's monolithic phallic creation myth, and Liebhaber, whose suspension between the masculine and feminine worlds increasingly subverts his faith in the natural order of language.

After the inevitable collapse of Skandl's lighthouse, Liebhaber is left to come to terms with the legacy of Babel: the narrative disunity that characterises modern Canadian identity. Initially his linguistic positivism leads him to construct a "single copy" (C 68) of the world in print. But his disorientating experience of remembering the future alerts him to the inadequacy of recording the inverse world of Big Indian in the linear mode of narrative realism. Alive to the rhythms of folk memory and popular mythology, Liebhaber realises that "it was Gutenberg," with his printed representations of the past, "who'd made all memory of the past irrelevant" (C 68). In order to articulate his own position on the border between oral and print culture, he needs to escape "Gutenberg's curse" (C 163) - to retreat, in Lecker's words, "from any form of syntax that concludes."⁴⁸ His increasing powerlessness within a discursive order that does not represent his own schismatic experience is shown by his awareness that at the end of a night's work "he was himself hardly more than a mere tray of alphabet,

awaiting the insistence of an ordering hand" (C 68). Consequently, Liebhaber attempts to free himself from the "tyranny of rote" by rejecting the "recited order" of the typographic alphabet:

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

Liebhaber's response to the discrepancy he observes between the "chaos" (C 50) outside and the artificial order of his own print script is to develop a carnivalesque discourse capable of expressing the metamorphic principle of oral culture. The first signs of his new discursive strategy appears during Skandl's speech at the lighthouse:

In the babble and chaos of voices, Liebhaber, wildly, tried to undercut Skandl by arguing perversely in his favour. He pictured the tall lighthouse white against a black sky, its finger of light touching out, beckoning the very birds that no longer came to the municipality, bringing down from the high night the geese, the ducks, the robins, the crows, the meadowlarks, the orioles. Liebhaber, recklessly, in the endless winter, invented a spring. (C 49)

Next, he resolves to uninvent outworn narrative structures by constructing "a sequence of illogical sentences" (C 55) that play with the phonic shape of language. Here we might make a connection between *Crow* and *Alibi* because Liebhaber, in his attention to the restrictions placed on the subject by the historical sedimentation of language, reveals himself to be, like Dorf, a type of the Barthesian subject. Significantly the Barthesian subject is threatened not, as in Sartrean ontology, by the monitoring and annihilating gaze of the "other" but rather by its entrapment within a discourse or *doxa* that precedes it. As Barthes is aware, the subject cannot resist its prior situation within closed discursive formations simply by developing a personal code of identification. Instead it seeks to open up conventional forms of representation by developing a linguistic stance that Barthes calls writing "through the body."⁴⁹ Ann Jefferson has described this practice:

In this practice the body's relation to language is altered from being the object of its representation to becoming the support and condition of a certain linguistic activity. . . . When the body sides with the subject, then it becomes possible to

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counter the finished and static representations of the *doxa*, a discourse which Barthes describes as being without a body, even if it takes the body as its object. A *doxa* is no longer a *doxa* if it is no longer finished and complete, if its structures are opened up.⁵⁰

Liebhaber's first sustained effort to define himself outside the *doxa* is the game of schmier which lasts for 151 days and represents the male response to "the inadequacy of truth" (C 76). The card game constitutes an alternative order with its own conventions of behaviour: the players create, in Kathleen Wall's words, "a culture, an organization of human beings governed by shared values and established rules."⁵¹ Kroetsch has spoken of the tension in games between free play and rule-bound discourse. In an important remark he extends this insight by linking "game," "language," and the redefinition of the self in a manner that sheds light on Liebhaber's predicament:

I play on the edge of convention; I suppose that's one place where I bend the rules. I think I also take the risk of falling right into language: the danger of language taking over. There is an anxiety about language being separate from reality or being its own reality. I think a kind of erasure of self goes in fiction-making. Its interesting that we *play* the *game*, isn't it? There's a double thing that goes on even in the statement which is very fascinating to me. The two words contradict each other in a signifying way. *Play* resists the necessary rules of the *game*.⁵²

The ambivalence in games between order and redefinition is reminiscent of the second-world environment of carnivalesque play. Interestingly, the conjunction of the sacred and the profane worlds in the game of schmier played in the Church of the Final Virgin, and the introduction into the church basement of the grotesque figure of Marvin Straw, the prison hangman, incorporate key motifs of carnivalesque discourse. Following the discovery of Martin Lang's body in the church basement the latent spirit of carnivalesque disorder bursts forth from the schmier players to engulf the whole community:

The dispossessed men, drunk, shouting, farting, whining, hollering, cursing, belching, swearing, puking, spitting, were forced out of the beer parlor, into the street. Some of them collapsed into the arms of waiting wives. Some of them crawled into cars and immediately fell asleep. Some of them, their joy turned to rage, began to fight in the streets, smashing senselessly at each other's bodies while still others cheered them on. There were thirteen minor car accidents in the vicinity of Big Indian in less than twenty-four minutes. One driver drove through his own garage wall and into the potato patch behind it. Another, unable to change gears, tried to back all the way home, and two miles south of town hit a dugout; fortunately the car was waterproof and floated until

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next morning. Another, mistaking the railway for a hayrack, turned to avoid it and drove into the Bigknife River. (C 115)

However, Liebhaber's escape into the closed world of the schmier game proves ultimately unsatisfactory because it embodies an exclusively *masculine* practice that denies the metamorphic promise of the feminine. Tiddy is accordingly "content to let them go on with their game of schmier" confident that "the women were running the world better than had the men" (C 85). When she eventually comes to rescue the starved men, whose obsession with the ordered ritual of schmier has prevented them finding food, she discovers Liebhaber "ahead in the game, about to win a few nails and some pieces of broken glass and a pile of round stones they'd dug up from the frozen riverbed with their bare hands" (C 126). Unable to bring order to bear at a time when "there was no meaning anywhere in the world" (C 94) the men embark upon their absurd War Against the Sky. Only two individuals stand out against the general chaos. One is Joe Lightning, whose Indian background teaches him the futility of the men's search for absolute control over the elements. Significantly, Lightning is cast as an initiate in the ways of carnival: his death, which comes when he is dropped to earth from an eagle's beak, transforms the male dream of transcendence into the redefining ambivalence of carnival laughter. His "holy laugh" is therefore "a simple laugh of pleasure and yet it was a kind of scream too, a scream of release" (C 159). The other dissident is Liebhaber, who sees in the war a way of contesting the "death of the world" (C 182) imposed by the closed narrative structures that he labours to deconstitute. His action in firing Vera's bees from a cannon into the sky may therefore be seen as an act of reconciliation that unites the earthly and the supramundane through the agency of desire. Liebhaber's success, moreover, in overcoming conventional gender divisions by shooting the bees into "the one androgynous moment of heaven and earth" (C 216) is crowned by the coming of rain to the parched land.

Liebhaber's final warning of the dangers inherent in the male vision of transcendence occurs when, in bewilderment at the onslaught of rain his action has unleashed, he begins to build an ark. Like Noah, he "worked quickly, angrily, almost in despair at the folly of his fellow citizens" (C 197). But Liebhaber never completes the symbolic journey back to origin and source suggested by the image of Noah's ark. Indeed, his failure to resolve his sense of social and cultural alienation in the epistemological security of providential narrative is symptomatic of Kroetsch's more general dislocation and juxtaposition of discrete narrative units. In order to illustrate this point we might note that *Crow* is littered with spiritual motifs that Kroetsch refuses

to order into one coherent narrative. Any analysis of Kroetsch's decentred narrative structure must consider the meaning of Rose's repeated religious ceremonies of burial; the symbolic significance of the birth of Vera's boy in December beneath the "strange beacon" (C 50) in the sky; the collocation of the "white and lifted host in the priest's right hand" and the "absolute of Tiddy's breasts" (C 74); Kroetsch's juxtaposition of an allusion to the wolves "final feast" (C 112) with a parodic image of the last supper as thirteen men play schmier in the basement of the Church of the Final Virgin; the revelatory violence of the "everlasting wind" (C 148); and the confusion of Liebhaber with Christ in the phrases "the first and final male, horny to die" and "the having lover, thirty-three minutes in one best trial" (C 216).

By aligning language and meaning in a series of rural epiphanies, this chain of imagery attempts to transcend the social and cultural fragmentation of Big Indian society. But *Crow's* radical narrative displacements ceaselessly juxtapose individual mythemes to create an over-determined semantic field that frustrates a unitary reading of the text's multiple stories. Consequently the reader is never in a position to choose between the myths of Eden, Babel, or Daedalus and Icarus; instead they impinge upon each other to develop the indeterminate imaginative landscape of magic realism. Kroetsch's emphasis in *Crow* is therefore upon the possibility of a continual act of becoming, which receives symbolic expression in the founding mythology of Romulus and Remus introduced by the story of the rearing of Vera's boy by a band of coyotes. In *The Crow Journals* Kroetsch links his interest in the "myth of the founding of the city" with the tension between "origins" and "[d]e/construction."⁵³ Liebhaber's captivity within this unresolvable dialectic is comically revealed when he is imprisoned under his capsized ark. Trapped beneath the boat's hull, in absolute isolation from the typographic world, he is finally able to enter into an intuitive and sensual relationship with language:

Liebhaber, trapped in the absolute darkness under the boat, trapped into death, hit on the realization that he had escaped. He hung onto a rib, in the cold water, trying to remember a life he hadn't lived. Without Gutenberg's curse; yes, that was it; without Gutenberg and moveable type, he would have lived another life. And finally he was free of Gutenberg. *I perish*, he imagined, *but only in a dream*. No, that wouldn't do for an opening. Yes, he was writing his own story, at last. He tried again, working with furious intent: *Enough would be enough*. He liked that. He could account for events, announce the presence of design, under the apparent chaos. *Enough*. That one, sufficient word, so neatly balanced against itself. He had no idea how long he'd been under the hull. Perhaps it was night now. Surely someone would miss him. All night he would set type; everything set, everything forgotten. But now he had escaped; he had recovered the night, and dream, and memory. He would compose a

novel one sentence long, a novel that anyone could memorize. *You in my arms*. Yes, that would do it. He tested for revision, recited the four words . . . (C 163-64) 286

Kroetsch's remark that *Crow* "is full of balances and halves which we have to put together"⁵⁴ provides a clue to the central image of the novel's final pages. At the end of their protracted period of estrangement, Kroetsch pictures Tiddy and Liebhaber together at last in the mutual space of the bedroom:

And Tiddy, asleep. She, with no imagination at all, dreaming the world. Liebhaber, finally, understands. She only dreams what she has dreamed. But she is dreaming. He knows now. Gutenberg, too, was only a scribe. Liebhaber, turned end for end in the old bed, his head to the foot, like printers of old, always, reading backwards, reading upside down. They lay, he and Tiddy, together, in the naked circle of everything. His tongue finds the warmth, the heat of her skin, the first small hairs. He sees now the bees. The bees come in at the torn screen. The ball hits the wall. It must be morning. Young Theodora is out in the rain. The bees touch the dreaming woman, touch gold and black her closed thighs. Rita is writing. She flings the words across the page: he is dying, she writes. He is dying in the next room. He is always dying in the next room. She, bent to her tablet, her fingers tight on the ball-point pen; alone. Alone. All one. A lone . . . (C 216)

This scene, with its image of Liebhaber "turned end for end in the old bed," illustrates perfectly the inverse logic of carnival. Here in the "naked circle of everything" male and female come together as the sensibilities of oral and typographic culture enter into productive dialogue. Liebhaber's progression beyond emotional and social isolation is shown as "alone" modulates gently into "[a]ll one" and the lovers slowly blur into one another. Able at last to "break his self-inflicted definition of maleness"⁵⁵ Liebhaber, the "having lover," embraces the marginalised cultural experience of the oral community "where the story in the act of retelling is always responsive to individuals, to the place, to invention."⁵⁶ His rebirth is reflected in Kroetsch's prose, which develops from a distanced third-person commentary to an immediate present tense third-person voice. Appropriately Kroetsch, at the very last, liberates his characters into their own story as they begin to construct their new world fresh from the mutual interaction of opposites.

In conclusion, I want to suggest that the creative interaction between oral and typographic culture symbolised by the reconciliation of Tiddy and Liebhaber has a broader thematic significance for Kroetsch's work. To demonstrate this proposition, I intend to draw upon a series of remarks Kroetsch makes in his essay "The Moment of

the Discovery of America Continues" concerning his early life on the Albertan prairies. Here he speaks of prairie society as historically without representation. "My sense of the gap between me and history was growing," he remarks of his early years "History as I knew it did not account for the world I lived in. Present here in this landscape, I was taking my first lesson in the idea of absence."⁵⁷ Aware that "authorized history, the given definition of history, was betraying us on those prairies," Kroetsch was "on [his] way to embracing the model of archaeology, against that of history."⁵⁸ Because Canada's "inherited literature, the literature of our European past and of eastern North America, is emphatically the literature of a people who have not lived on prairies"⁵⁹ he turned to the continually evolving narratives of Alberta's oral storytelling tradition to document the "beer-talk of our daily lives, the shape of our living."⁶⁰ But by repeatedly dissolving western experience into the exuberant presence of voice, oral history "is not likely to go back more than two generations . . . with huge consequences for our sense of history."⁶¹ Kroetsch therefore arrives at the strange paradox by which the oral tradition simultaneously inscribes and erases the unrepresented prairie experience from the Canadian historical record.

The solution to this paradox arrives for Kroetsch when the "oral tradition" recognises itself as a "literary tradition" which "points us back to our own landscape, our recent ancestors, and the characteristic expressions and modes of our own speech."⁶² It is only after western oral culture engages fully with the referential status of its own discourse - conceives itself, that is, as a carnivalesque second world that transgresses the boundaries of official cultural discourse - that it can properly articulate its challenge to the linguistic codes of European and American imperialism. Commenting on Canada's curious position between different narratives of self-identification, Kroetsch detects this culture of opposition in the "pattern of contraries" that inform western discourse:

The effect of perceptual models on what we see is now the concern of social and literary critics. . . . I was living outside of Alberta (and outside of Canada) while writing most of my fiction and poetry. Perhaps for that reason I was constantly aware that we both, and at once, record and invent these new places called Alberta and Saskatchewan. That pattern of contraries, all the possibilities implied in *record* and *event*, for me finds its focus in the model suggested by the phrase: a local pride.⁶³

If we consider this remark within the context of Tiddy and Liebhaber's reconciliation, we recognise that the rapprochement of the newspaperman (record) and the rural matriarch (who symbolises the metamorphic event of oral performance) revises

traditional narratives of western Canadian cultural identity. By deliberately violating the borders of each other's world the lovers "uncreate themselves into existence"⁶⁴ in a carnivalesque space that renews itself through "the inevitable splits and tensions"⁶⁵ of post-colonial discourse.

In a general comment upon the politics of post-colonial writing, Kroetsch argues that Canadians must "resist endings, violently" by doing "violence" to traditional forms that force "resolution" upon their unresolved and hybridized narratives of self.⁶⁶ With *Crow* he not only conducts his own "personal struggle with the temptation of meaning"⁶⁷ but comes to a "Bakhtinian version of the dialogic, in which the possibility of a single or privileged voice announcing the *right* version of the narrative is talked away."⁶⁸ The decentred form and shifting narrative surfaces of his novel therefore reflect the multiple borders of post-colonial cultural discourse where national unity is created "by the very debate that seems to threaten the unity."⁶⁹ Consequently, the polyphonic world of *Big Indian* is best understood if, in John Thieme's phrase, we put "the emphasis on *process* rather than a concept of achieved national identity".⁷⁰ Kroetsch has spoken of the way the "postmodern impulse in its radical resistance to a governing narrative" might allow him to "politicize the aesthetic question."⁷¹ In *Crow*, where the nostalgic desire for a single or privileged voice is answered only by the crow's babble, he has politicised the border between oral and graphic culture to develop a fictive model of a community that celebrates its postmodern difference from a unifying narrative of national cultural identity.

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- ¹ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez, ed. Leon S. Roudiez (1981; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984) 65.
- ² Stephen Slemon, "Magic Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse," *Canadian Literature* 116 (1988): 12.
- ³ Fredric Jameson, "On Magic Realism in Film," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1986): 301.
- ⁴ Interviewed in *Labyrinths of Voice*, Kroetsch remarks: "What had happened to me just then: when I was in England writing *The Studhorse Man*, I was having my first encounter with South American fiction, picking it up in the bookstores there. I was reading people like Borges and they were just overwhelming me (of course Marquez who rescues us - if that's what happens - hadn't appeared yet) and I was working with all this wild possibility in fiction. What a shock, that you can *do* this with *fiction!*" Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths of Voice* 177.
- ⁵ Slemon, "Magic Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse," 10-11.
- ⁶ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 426.
- ⁷ Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, trans. Wlad Godzich. *Theory and History of Literature* 13 (Manchester: Manchester University Press; Minnesota: Minnesota University Press, 1984) x.
- ⁸ M. M. Bakhtin, "Towards a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book," *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, *Theory and History of Literature*, vol. 8, trans. and ed. Caryl Emerson, introduction by Wayne C. Booth (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984) 287-89.
- ⁹ Coral Ann Howells, "Re-Visions Of Prairie Indian History In Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* and *My Lovely Enemy*," *Re-visions of Canadian Literature* ed. Shirley Chew (Leeds: Institute of Bibliography and Textual Criticism, 1985) 62.
- ¹⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass: M.I.T. Press, 1968) 3.
- ¹¹ Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 6.
- ¹² Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 10.
- ¹³ Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 10.
- ¹⁴ Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 10.
- ¹⁵ Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 11-12.

- 16 Ann Jefferson, "Body matters: Self and Other in Bakhtin, Sartre and Barthes," *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory* ed. Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989) 166.
- 17 Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 19.
- 18 Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 25.
- 19 Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 19.
- 20 Terry Eagleton's remarks on carnival offer one example of this type of attack: "Bakhtin's utopia, by contrast, could not be more bulging with positive life. Indeed carnival is so vivaciously celebrated that the necessary political criticism is almost too obvious to make. Carnival, after all, is a *licensed* affair in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow-off as disturbing and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art. As Shakespeare's Olivia remarks, there is no slander in an allowed fool." Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism*, (London: NLB, 1981) 148.
- 21 Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, (London: Methuen, 1986) 14.
- 22 Kroetsch, "Carnival and Violence: A Meditation," *The Lovely Treachery of Words* 102.
- 23 Kroetsch, "Carnival and Violence," 104.
- 24 Robert Kroetsch, *What the Crow Said* (Toronto: General Paperbacks, 1983) 10-11. Future references to this edition will be marked by the abbreviation "C" and incorporated into the main body of the text.
- 25 Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 19.
- 26 Kroetsch, *The Crow Journals* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1980) 29.
- 27 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville, ed. E. J. Kenney (1986; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) bk. 4, 612.
- 28 Robert R. Wilson, "The Metamorphoses of Space: Magic Realism," *Magic Realism and Canadian Literature: Essays and Stories*, ed. Peter Hinchcliffe and Ed Jewinski (Ontario: University of Waterloo Press, 1986) 71.
- 29 Robert R. Wilson 71.
- 30 Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths of Voice* 162.
- 31 Neuman and Wilson 131.
- 32 Neuman and Wilson 113.
- 33 E.J. Kenney, editor's introduction, *Metamorphoses*, by Ovid xx-xxi.
- 34 Kroetsch, *The Crow Journals* 11.

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- 35 Kathleen Wall, "What Kroetsch Said: The Problem of Meaning and Language in "What the Crow Said," *Canadian Literature* 128 (1991): 90.
- 36 Wall, "What Kroetsch Said," 93-94.
- 37 Linda Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction* 54.
- 38 Interviewed by Russell M. Brown, Kroetsch remarks: "But it [sex] becomes highly metaphoric in my work; the whole process of creation and the life-force are represented most explicitly by the sex urge. And I suppose I also connect the act of writing itself with some version of the sex urge - the two seem related in some peculiar way. . . . they're both acts of creation. And . . . both fail as well as succeed, are unpredictable. I guess that unpredictability is part of the excitement in each." Brown, "An Interview with Robert Kroetsch," 11.
- 39 Slemon, "Magic Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse," 18.
- 40 Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962; London: Routledge, 1971) 28.
- 41 Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths of Voice* 39.
- 42 Alan Twigg, "Male," *For Openers: Conversations With 24 Canadian Writers* (Madeira Park: Harbour, 1981) 115.
- 43 Neuman and Wilson 39.
- 44 Twigg, "Male," 111.
- 45 John Thieme, "'A Sanctioned Babel': Myth And Language In Robert Kroetsch's *What The Crow Said*," *British Journal Of Canadian Studies* 6. 1 (1991): 125.
- 46 Kroetsch, *The Crow Journals* 30.
- 47 Kroetsch, *The Crow Journals* 23.
- 48 Lecker, *Robert Kroetsch* 102.
- 49 Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard (1977; London: Macmillan, 1988) 80.
- 50 Jefferson, "Bodymatters," 170-71.
- 51 Wall, "What Kroetsch Said," 97.
- 52 Neuman and Wilson 50.
- 53 Kroetsch, *The Crow Journals* 69.
- 54 Twigg, "Male," 111.
- 55 Twigg 112.
- 56 Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths of Voice* 13.
- 57 Kroetsch, "The Moment of the Discovery of America Continues," 1-2.
- 58 Kroetsch, "The Moment of the Discovery," 2.

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- 59 Kroetsch, "The Moment of the Discovery," 5.
- 60 Kroetsch, "The Moment of the Discovery," 17.
- 61 Kroetsch, "The Moment of the Discovery," 6.
- 62 Kroetsch, "The Moment of the Discovery," 7.
- 63 Kroetsch, "The Moment of the Discovery," 5-6.
- 64 Kroetsch, "Unhiding the Hidden," 63.
- 65 Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern* 174.
- 66 Kroetsch, "The Eploding Porcupine," *The Lovely Treachery of Words* 108.
- 67 Neuman and Wilson 15.
- 68 Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," 25.
- 69 Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," 25.
- 70 John Thieme, "A Sanctioned Babel," 126.
- 71 Kroetsch, "My Book is Bigger Than Yours," *The Lovely Treachery of Words* 199.

Chapter Eight
A Life Without Alibis:
Narrative and the Erotic Body in *Alibi*

Texts of pleasure. Pleasure in pieces; language in pieces; culture in pieces. Such texts are perverse in that they are outside any imaginable finality. . . . No alibi stands up, nothing is reconstituted, nothing recuperated.¹

Is it that the human being is secretly nothing without the others?²

What the Crow Said closes a chapter of Kroetsch's fiction. It marks that rare point of confluence where a postmodern theory of discourse and a fictive investigation of place combine to produce a new version of cultural history and identity. Paradoxically, the success of *What the Crow Said* in forging an artistic vision of the postmodern narratives of Canadian life has proved problematic for Kroetsch's writing since it apparently exhausted the reserves of his artistic and critical ambition. Everything else in the two decades of Kroetsch's career seems to lead up to *What the Crow Said*: the scope of its achievement threatened to leave him without voice, purpose or direction.

Alibi, Kroetsch's latest novel, can be read as an attempt to move beyond this exhaustion of theory and practice. As such, it occupies a curious place in the Kroetsch canon; the dearth of critical attention paid to the novel in the eight years since its publication testifies to the unease it generates. Yet much of this unease is dissipated if we resituate the text's technical virtuosity within the developmental progression of Kroetsch's previous work. I have argued that Kroetsch's fiction is most profitably read as a sustained attempt to re-examine the interdicted and marginalised narrative of post-colonial Canadian experience: the series of transitions he has made between anti-mimesis, pastiche, parody, and the carnivalesque reveal a growing awareness that Canadian cultural identity cannot be redefined in a neutral political space; it must acknowledge the ineradicable distance between being and meaning opened by the inscription of "Canada" within foreign discourses of historical and cultural value. The carnivalesque world of *What the Crow Said*, with its suspension and reversal of hierarchised oppositions, brings this novelistic quest to fulfilment by rehabilitating occluded narratives of Canadian history within a discourse self-consciously aware of its implication within the representational tradition of Western culture.

Kroetsch returns, in *Alibi*, to the carnivalesque ambivalence of *What the Crow Said* and transforms it into an elaborate meditation on the textual production of meaning. Indeed Kroetsch's text, with its doublings, scattered clues, and teasing omissions, offers a narrative about the nature of narrative. By developing an erotic grammar of delay, in which the reader's desire for resolution, closure, and meaning is frustrated by the writer's insistence upon story, polyphony, and difference, Kroetsch focuses attention upon the process by which narratives of personal and cultural identity are constructed. *Alibi* flirts with the reader: it reveals and deceives, multiplying narrative codes in an exhilarating passage through the semiotic labyrinth of Dorf's world. In a transaction crucial to Kroetsch's purposes, our desire to assimilate the signs *Alibi* disseminates is exacerbated by the knowledge that no sign will ever be enough to unravel the textual maze that encloses us. The desire for meaning imposes a "state of loss"³ that can only be assuaged by the intermittent fulfilment of narrative. Kroetsch has linked the interplay of presence, absence, and desire fundamental to any system of signification with the ambiguous position of the Canadian displaced from cultural and linguistic origin:

There is a labyrinth of love. Desire itself is desiring a way through the labyrinth, out of entrapment. And into entrapment. Canadians are so goddamned frightened of the labyrinth they have created out of the need to have a labyrinth. The immensity of love's entrapment is replaced by familial bickering and bourgeois rivalries. I agree that culture itself is a kind of labyrinthine godgame; we have come to a potential and a mystery so huge that it makes us hesitate.⁴

The progressive importance to Kroetsch's work in the last decade of the critical nexus represented by the terms presence, absence, and desire is testimony to the influence upon his writing of the textual erotics of Roland Barthes. Amid the welter of intertexts that impinge upon Kroetsch's words in *Labyrinths Of Voice* the work of Barthes is a persistent presence. Certainly Barthes's conception of the text as a "sanctioned babel" where "the subject gains access to bliss by the cohabitation of languages *working side by side*,"⁵ his celebration of the text's transference of value to the "sumptuous rank of the signifier,"⁶ and his vision of culture as an "edge" produced by different "seam[s]"⁷ of discourse possess an indisputable relevance for Kroetsch's later fiction. However, the real significance of Barthes's thought for an understanding of Kroetsch's work lies in the connection Barthes makes between the constitution of the subject and the literary text, and the distinction he discerns between texts of pleasure and texts of bliss.

In *The Pleasure of the Text* Barthes names this correspondence between subject and text hyphology:

Text means *Tissue*; but whereas hitherto we have always taken this tissue as a product, a ready-made veil, behind which lies, more or less hidden, meaning (truth), we are now emphasising, in the tissue, the generative idea that the text is made, is worked out in a perpetual interweaving; lost in this tissue - this texture - the subject unmakes himself, like a spider dissolving in the constructive secretions of its web. Were we fond of neologisms, we might define the theory of the text as an *hyphology* (*hyphos* is the tissue and the spider's web).⁸

The unmaking of the subject is therefore a consequence of the reader's exposure to the different discursive registers that constitute his or her experience of the world. Significantly, Barthes suggests that a counterpart to the dissolution of the organic text is, in human terms, the recovery of the "erotic body" obscured by our daily accretion of habit and convention. He carries over the tension between convention and revaluation into his division between texts of pleasure and bliss:

Text of pleasure: the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a *comfortable* practice of reading. Text of bliss: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language.⁹

I am suggesting that by the logic of Barthes's analysis *Alibi* is a text of bliss. Or, more accurately, it resides, like the Barthesian subject, in that incommunicable space between satiation and disintegration that marks the fault-line between pleasure and bliss. By personifying this intermittence in the form of the "split subject, who simultaneously enjoys, through the text, the consistency of his selfhood and its collapse, its fall"¹⁰ Barthes gives a plausible sketch of Dorf, the registering consciousness of *Alibi*, whose career we shall follow in some detail. Dorf's quest, which takes him to Britain, Portugal, Greece, and across the Canadian west in search of the perfect spa deemed by his employer, the millionaire oil baron and collector Jack Deemer, can be understood as a comic parable about the Canadian subject's necessary acceptance of its ambivalent position between Old and New world narratives of historical identity. Yet although Dorf's journey towards self-revelation repeats in several details Peter Guy's experience of alienation and division, *Alibi* advances far beyond Kroetsch's realist fiction in its analysis of narrative, desire, and alterity.

Indeed, Dorf's gradual realisation that the ambiguities and multiplicities of language and sexual desire offer him an escape from Deemer's authoritarian narrative of cultural order suggests that the erotic intermittence of the postmodern text subverts those meta-narratives that have appropriated and codified post-colonial experience. In *Alibi* Kroetsch consequently develops an aesthetics of desire in which the radical incompleteness of the text attempts to dispel the "illusion of a unity" promulgated by classical realism and replace it with "the theater of society in which we stage our plural."¹¹ Concomitantly, Dorf's relationship with Dr. Medeiros, his metamorphosis into an agent of Julie Magnuson's "total desire,"¹² and his instruction in the textuality of historical discourse at the hands of Karen Strike express his ex-centricity from traditional narratives of selfhood and confirm him as a protagonist in the radical disunities of the Canadian story.

These introductory remarks concerning Dorf's dispersal within the flux of language and desire can be developed by momentary recourse to Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. In Chapter Two it was seen that the emphasis of Lacan's work is upon the ineluctability of the intersubjective relation: the subject is driven continually towards the "other" in a futile attempt to retrieve the security of primordial unity shattered by the alienating division enforced between the subject and the ego by the acquisition of language, and by the damage done to infantile self-identity by the spectral doublings of the mirror stage. Here the latinized root of the title *Alibi* becomes significant: it comes from *alius*, or the sense of displacement implicit in the idea of the "elsewhere." Dorf's entanglements with Julie, Karen, and Medeiros, which provoke him to meditate upon the nature of desire, language, and historical representation, comes to symbolise the engagement with alterity characteristic of alienated humanity. However, his self-conscious recognition that intersubjective "reachings to each other" (A 153) are all that constitute the subject frees him from the grip of Deemer's paranoid subordination of world to self. After this revelatory moment Dorf begins to explore the contours of desire outside the "space of alibis (reality, morality, likelihood, readability, truth, etc)"¹³ imposed by Deemer's imperialist reading of history.

Another aspect of Lacan's teaching pertinent to a reading of *Alibi* is the importance it attaches to the act of naming. In Lacan's schema, the pivotal moment at which the illusion of unity is transformed into an experience of otherness occurs when the act of naming propels the subject into the symbolic order of language. With the

accession to the symbolic order the subject apprehends its identity to be a consequence of its position within a network of signs. At this point it first begins to grasp its decentred status within the movement of the signifying chain. Anika Lemaire has highlighted this aspect of the symbolic order:

In general terms, the symbolic order establishes mediate relationships between things; the relationship between man and man, between self and other is mediated, that is, by a symbol. It is not immediate, direct and without an intermediary.

It is the existence of the mediator which allows everyone to register himself in his distinct subjectivity. In an immediate relationship, on the other hand, the distinction between self and other is not clear.¹⁴

Alibi attaches great importance to the act of naming. Dorf, Kroetsch's protagonist, is a man with a name twice doubled: Billy Billy Dorfendorf. As he explains:

I'd had two grandfathers by the first name of William, both with the same first name, and my parents, farming people northeast of Calgary in the Battle River country, in a futile hope that I might receive at least one inheritance, named me after both of them. Billy Billy Dorfendorf. And all I got from my ancestors, it turned out, was the conviction that I needed two of everything: two cars, two university degrees, two bank accounts, two addresses, two mailboxes. For sure, two kicks at the cat. Two lives, possibly. (A 13)

This early sign of Dorf's double nature is the first indication that the novel will be concerned with the disorientations that attend his implication within a system of difference. Indeed, the tension between the terms 'system' and 'difference' is fundamental to the plot of *Alibi*, which pivots around the confrontation between Dorf, figure of the desiring self, who crosses the Atlantic to discover the real meaning of his own divided personality, and Jack Deemer, his employer, who silently orders the world into a private collection that he alone can control. Dorf considers the relationship between his own "discontinuity" and Deemer's inhuman "coherence" when he speaks of his role within his employer's "silent manipulation" of the world:

The story had no doubt been dictated by Jack Deemer himself. I was beginning to understand the plot that connives the world into visible being; the necessary plot that makes us seek each other, if only to do violence to the meeting. Deemer thinks he can take the law into his own hands, and that just because he's managed to collect a trace of the discarded world into his warehouses; he thinks it's his money and his silent manipulation that makes the collection. Too bad for him is all I can say; it's my scrounging and my snooping and my talking, talking, talking that make his famous collection. Money is cheap. I'm the poor fool who must go out and dicker and plead and lie and cheat and swindle and count and pack and ship. The collection itself only confirms the

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discontinuity of this scattered world; it's my talk that puts it together. I rave the world into coherence for Deemer; he sits there on his little hill called a mountain, Mount Royal; he sits there, silent, and now by God he wants to collect the law too. (A 195)

The antagonism between Dorf and Deemer is most usefully understood as the struggle between unitary and plural narratives of cultural identity. Deemer is the archetypal representative of the autonomous self; he deems the world around him into an ordered copy of his private fantasies and desires. By dedicating his life to the establishment of a limitless collection of global cultural artefacts he constructs a meta-narrative of individual and cultural history that effaces everything beyond the boundaries of the taxonomical imagination. He is reportedly "[c]ollecting the world" (A 25); this verb characterises all his dealings with external reality. As Dorf remarks, Deemer "simply collects" (A 13). Significantly, Deemer's difference from Dorf is brought out by the act of naming. While Dorf's ambiguous identity is conveyed by the fact that he is "a man given two names, but both of them exactly the same" (A 70), Deemer's rigid authoritarian attitude is suggested by his uncompromising univocity: he is "simply a name" (A 13).

Dorf's quest in *Alibi* is to overcome his helplessness within Deemer's arcane narrative system in order to give expression to the dislocation he feels from any coherent sense of historical origins. His impression of his own powerlessness within Deemer's sphere of influence is established at the outset:

I might explain that I have never once met Jack Deemer, at least not face to face; he's a great one for sending messages. His minions live in a kind of dread of memos or post cards or, for that matter, scraps of toilet paper scrawled with instructions for which there is no explanation, no place to seek clarification. My calamity differed only in arriving as a yellow, pasted-up CNCP telegram, waiting like a bomb in my mailbox when I flew in from Sicily with a collection of twenty-eight sets of dominoes. (A 7)

The conflict between Deemer's hubristic desire to assimilate the diversity of a myriad different cultures into his own private myth and Dorf's need to come to terms with the self-estrangement brought on by his double naming is dramatised by Deemer's instruction that Dorf should acquire the perfect spa for his collection. For Deemer, the spa functions as a transcendental signified: it is a source of value that will order all other values. Because of its symbolic properties as a centre of recuperation and renewal, the spa offers Deemer respite from time, the one force that escapes his repressive regulation. As Fish, one of Dorf's itinerant companions, remarks, "[t]he only solution

for Deemer . . . is to go on living forever" (A 57). In an important insight Dorf recognises that even more than his battle with time, Deemer "wants to collect, possess, some special and immovable part of the earth itself" to offset the sheer "randomness" (A 58) of creation.

But as Kroetsch has made plain elsewhere, "[d]ifference might be the basis of erotics, sameness a version of death."¹⁵ In accordance with this distinction, Dorf's search for Deemer's perfect spa leads him not to a transcendent sense of origin but rather to an awareness of the imbrication of the question of identity in the reciprocal relation with the "other." His formative encounter with alterity occurs in the spa at Sulphur Mountain, where, surrounded by the disembodied heads of other bathers, he experiences a sudden crisis of self-recognition:

Just heads, just floating. Like that. Motionless. Heads and more heads, planted there, and growing. They weren't the least bit troubled at not having bodies, there in that yellowish light, under the lid of fog. Nobody seemed worried. Shit, I thought, this is okay. I wanted to tell Karen, wanted to say, you've got to use this in your documentary, get a camera in here, and only then did I realise I couldn't see her anywhere. And I'd loafed on purpose in the change-room, waiting for her to get to the pool ahead of me; I panicked a little.

I don't mean I panicked, I just felt strange. Because I knew, looking at all those heads, floating there, on the water, under the fog, that I'd never be quite the same again. One has those occasions, those recognitions. Just as I knew I had changed slightly, forever, when I levelled a gun at my wife's frightened, absurd, scrawny lover and realised I could pull the trigger. (A 10)

Immersed in the spa-waters where "heaven and earth had got themselves upset" (A 10) Dorf is gradually introduced to the transgressive logic of desire. His aquatic sexual encounter with Julie Magnuson, which leaves him disorientated and "crying a little" (A 15), is of primary importance because she is the spectral "other" woman who leads him into the "secret connivance of figure and letter and sign" (A 15). Her threat to kill Dorf if he discovers Deemer's spa underlines the danger to his newly awakened self of Deemer's passion for source, origin, and "sameness." Instead Dorf, with the key to his former life tied "around [his] slightly aroused member" (A 12), is to be prepared for the erotic revelation of his emotional and cultural alienation.

Following his unsettling experience with Julie, which tips him "over the edge into a slow, long, delicate flooding" that leaves him "aware of everything, and nothing too" (A 15), Dorf begins to recognise that only the death of his garrisoned self can

provide a cure for his lonely disengagement from the world around him. Against Deemer's voluntarist progression beyond the "merely human" (A 25), Dorf realises that his own sense of self is based on a "dream" of the "other" (A 28). His gesture beyond the unitary confines of the self is also accompanied by a disturbance of ascribed pronoun positions: "I cross out *I am* and write in *He is . . . He . . . I . . .* What does it matter?" (A 51) he muses, suspended between two different experiences of being. Stirred subsequently by a glimpse of Estuary's underwear he acknowledges that to find "the woman I was looking for with a dream of being healed" (A 35) he must accept the loss of self demanded by the engagement with alterity. His admission that "[w]e cannot have what we want and we hurt" (A 35) testifies to the dangerous fragmentation of personality that precedes his vision of self-renewal.

The brief scene between Dorf and Karen Strike in The Banff Springs Hotel highlights the perilous route that awaits the collector's agent on his journey to a new identity. Enmeshed by Karen ever more tightly in "desire and guilt and the old hunger to connect" (A 23) Dorf is given a comic warning about the duplicity of desire and language:

I was taking off my clothes as she spoke. I quite simply undressed. Said nothing. Karen was holding a boot in her hands. I undressed right down to my skin.

The words HOT and COLD, it turned out, were on the wrong taps over the deep white tub. I gave a cry, leapt from behind the curtain, slipped on the floor, caught myself.

Karen burst in at the bathroom door, I already, trying to touch myself with both large hands, and I do have large, awkward hands, trying to touch my burn.

"Kiss it better," I said, almost shouting. (A 21)

Scalded by his desire for Karen and unable to consummate their physical union, Dorf discovers in the process of storytelling another way to re-invent the self. "We talked that night," Dorf confides, "[w]e told each other stories. Perhaps that is what changed our relationship" (A 22). If Julie's role in *Alibi* is to persuade Dorf of the futility of the effort to get "free of the everlastingly nagging sexual needs of one's body" into a "religious concept" of "potential escape" (A 56), Karen, with her hunger for facts and her delight in the mechanics of film-making, provides him with a valuable lesson in the radical ambiguity of historical reconstructions of the self. Indeed, the power of Karen's impact upon Dorf is due, in large measure, to her contradictory attitude to representation, form, and historical experience. Introduced as "a lunatic on

the subject of history" (A 8) who spends her time "making notes on the goddamned world" (A 16), Karen's naive belief in the historian's ability to create "the perfect replica of a dismissed life" (A 17) resembles Deemer's piecemeal construction of his own myth. Yet if in the early part of the novel Karen is depicted as the daunting "keeper" of those "human rules" (A 24) from which Dorf must seek his alibi, it is only through her continual emphasis on the *process* of historical representation that Dorf accepts the impossibility of recreating a version of the self outside historical and social inscription. "No man can live in a paradise," he admits at the close of the novel, because "[t]he world will not allow it" (A 236). In return for his instruction in the historically conditioned character of cultural experience, Dorf offers Karen some advice of his own. Thus his injunction to her to "[f]orget history," "[s]peak our language" and "[m]ake do" (A 102) entreats her to abandon her residual positivism and compose the record of those figures marginalised by the grand narratives of contemporary history.

Karen's influence on Dorf with "her cameras, with her notebooks" (A 102) is revealed by his decision to transfer to her structural responsibility for his story. In a terse note in his diary "Dorfendorf's Journal," Dorf declares that he has entrusted Karen with the duty of inserting "some chapter titles to trap the unwary eye and lure the customer; she with her gift for compromise" (A 231). As Robert Lecker has pointed out, Dorf's revelation that his story will only be published after Karen has provided it with a suitable narrative order divides *Alibi* into three sections: Dorf's reconstructed journal, which constitutes the main body of the novel; Karen's playful chapter-headings, which provide ludic introductions to the central narrative; and the novel's final segment, "Dorfendorf's Journal," which offers itself as the last word on Dorf's adventures.¹⁶ The tension between the first two categories spills over to destabilise the third since Karen's titles, by setting up what Lecker calls "their own interplay . . . between expectation and disappointment"¹⁷ ironise and deconstruct Dorf's quest. Titles such as "Notes Toward A Transitional Chapter" (A 104) and "The Archaeology Of Hope: And These The Shards From A Journal That William William Dorfен Kept But Did Not Keep" (A 168) highlight the uncertain location of Dorf's account between different discursive registers. Similarly, Karen's repeated use of the term "negative" to circumscribe Dorf's text suggests that it may be read backwards as well as forwards (a "negative" being the mirror-image of a photographic representation).

To come to terms with his dislocation within Deemer's secretly plotted world, then, Dorf must uphold Karen's insistence upon the textuality of historical discourse while exposing the implausibility of her claim to align being and meaning in a moment of supreme narrative co-incidence. Accordingly, most of the central narrative presents Dorf's gradual attunement to the narrative construction of reality. His instruction to Karen to "[f]ake the real" (A 52) shows him beginning the hyphological process of rediscovering self through the dissolutions and reconstitutions of narrative. Watching Dorf complete an entry in his journal Karen remarks, "[y]ou invent yourself, each time you sit down to make an entry, and I feel envy" (A 61). Later she pictures him composing "these real 'takes' on this Dorf guy that you're trying to put together" (A 62). Lying buried in a cocoon of snow following his unwitting appearance before an avalanche (possibly begun by the mysterious Julie Magnuson) Dorf reflects upon the "abrupt and unexpected changes of role" that have befallen him:

Strangely enough, dead as I was, and I believed for certain I was a dead duck, I found some small comfort in the recognition that I, the hunter, had become the hunted, the collector's agent made part of a collection. I was big enough to admit that in some small way I deserved my fate. We live and die by such distinctions, such abrupt and unexpected changes of role. I had been bundled up and carted off. In a fashion. I was into the old alabaster after all, and this a translucent white that allowed me to recognise my losses and my gains. I was gone from the mere world. (A 68)

The crucial word in this quotation is the adjective "mere." By this stage in the text, Dorf has begun to make a connection between his own alienation from "the source itself" (A 52) and his position within Deemer's private collection of cultural phenomena. Like Oedipa Maas, that other representative of displacement within the narrative network of an absent storyteller, Dorf cannot begin to understand his predicament until he traces the outline of the "plotted world" (A 97) that encompasses him. Significantly, his attempt to unravel the meaning of Deemer's closed cultural order takes him on a chaotic journey back to the heart of Europe, source and interpreter of the post-colonial condition. On a plane above the Atlantic Dorf sees that Deemer's calculated assimilation of the heterogeneity of world culture to construct a single assertion of self marks him out as an atavar of the imperial imagination:

Europe is a dream too. But not of silk and spice. Maybe, I thought, maybe Deemer's mad collecting is just that, and that only a calling up of ghosts from a million ancestral pasts. It is only that, a hailing and a hollering too, a head in the rain barrel listening to its own echo, a lost voice hearing a voice from the far cliff. The cry that comes banging back from the barn wall. The creaking sound from the attic. (A 74)

Dorf's journey through Britain in the company of his sister Sylvia Thorn is a brief interlude before the major disorientations visited upon him by his experiences in Portugal and Greece. But his return to the historical site of imperial ambition alerts him once more to the moral corruption of Deemer's cultural colonialism. Kroetsch finds a fine ironic image for the moral darkness of the colonial enterprise in Dorf's visit to the healing spa at Bath, where the illusion of national vigour is replaced by the language of desuetude and decay:

We had found and we had entered the sacred place of healing. And all I could see, anywhere and everywhere, was evidence of ruin. The Roman Empire itself turned into a collection of broken stones and a warming system, a hypocaust system that doesn't any longer work. (A 87-88)

Gazing at the Royal Crescent, that "architectural triumph of aristocratic lunacy based on the bleeding of an entire empire," Dorf remarks drily that "even Jack Deemer, with all his money, would have to settle for something less" (A 85). His estrangement from Deemer's dream of empire is also symbolised by his aversion to European narrative conventions. In contrast to his sister, who unproblematically "regard[s] herself as the guardian of truth and language, as if there was, somehow, a connection between the two" (A 86) and accepts worldly benevolence as "the glass she holds to her eyes" (A 81), Dorf abandons mimesis for that "deliberate tilting of the mirror" (A 86) that characterises the deconstructive activity of Hazard Lepage and Jeremy Sadness.

Dorf's similarity to Sadness, in particular, becomes evident in his dream of uninvention that follows the telephone call he receives from Julie Magnuson at Llandrindod Wells.¹⁸ In a passage that recalls Sadness's vision of the cataclysmic meeting of east and west on the Great Central Plains of North America, Dorf imagines a silence that redefines the horizon of past and present:

And I remember, indeed: out of my dream of trains that meet and blur together and separate, came the voice of Julie Magnuson. She was in London, on her way to Portugal. Because she was going there, to a spa.

She invited me to join her.

My dream. Two trains, one east-bound, one west-bound; they are about to meet; I can't look away; they meet, they blur together. They separate again. They open a wide, blank space. A silent space on the horizon. Good God, the silence. The silence of horizons. (A 100)

The drama of decreation symbolised by Dorf's dream is acted out during his sojourn in Luso, a place-name that suggestively combines connotations of the loss of self, the ludic, and the illusory or fantastic through which desire speaks. Here Dorf is purged of his residual belief in a wholly autonomous self by Julie and the mysterious Dr. Manuel de Medeiros whose surname anagrammatically 'contains' desire itself. In his newly discovered role as "the comic imitator of what [Deemer] proposes in earnest" (A 108) Dorf has to learn that the self can only be understood in its reciprocal relation with others. Thus the story of Deemer's relationship with Julie, which consolidated his financial success and led him to refuse any emotional relationship with the outside world, is undercut by Dorf, whose affair with the same woman initiates him into the displacements of desire:

We were lying together on her bed, all three of us, in such a tangle of arms and legs that I could not recognize my own limbs let alone identify the this of her this. Manny had, in his passion, bit her [Julie] violently on her right thigh, and I was kissing it better, warming the bruise with my breath. And when I inhaled, breathing deeply in so as again to blow gently onto her bruise, I filled my head with the heat of her desire, rankly sweet, like iron newly lifted from a bog.

"I will show my journal to no one, fear not," I said. "Not even to the likes of Jack Deemer himself, collect what he might." I breathed warmly onto Julie's blue bruise. "And I begin to wonder if this is not the spa he most seeks in the wide world." (A 135)

Medeiros's belief that "the cure is always, finally, in the acceptance . . . of desire" (A 125) acts in the text simultaneously as a metaphor for personal and cultural displacement. At a personal level, Dorf's entry into a ternary sexual relationship with Medeiros and Julie shows him that individual identity is constituted not by Deemer's exclusivist vision of self but rather through a continual negotiation between first and third person subject positions:

It was the marvelous possibilities of our little triangle that gave me no rest from desire. I felt not the slightest touch of jealousy. Indeed, by pretending just slightly that Manny was Karen, with his head of perfect blond hair, I was able to add a further dimension to our already outrageous joy. I truly felt no jealousy. I was able to write in my journal exactly on each day those two blind words: he . . . I. And what did it matter, the slightest difference? We were together and as one. We were two as one and three as one and each of us, one as three, isosceles in our splendor. We were our own geometry and arithmetic too; we could add and subtract with perfect abandon. (A 130)

Dorf's hesitation here between the boundaries of "I" and "he" is amplified by Julie's remark "We all live by our alibis, don't we, Dorf?" (A 125) which interprets Dorf's search for an alibi as the quest for *another* reading of an *other* self. Attuned at last to

his status as a desired and desiring subject, Dorf is able to renounce the centre or "[o]mphalos" (A 128) and admit that "the nature of love is such that to be happy is, paradoxically, to know suffering" (A 134). Equally, the decentring of the phallogocentric self which prefigures Dorf's apprehension of the sexual "other" and precipitates his desire to be "twice myself" (A 142) leads him to contest Deemer's urge to impose masculine order on the randomness of existence. Dorf's opposition to Deemer's continual assimilation and homogenisation of cultural difference is recounted most fully in his journey to Greece, the cradle of epic and empire. Indeed, Dorf's presence in Greece represents a reversal of major political significance since here Kroetsch positions Greece as the "other" of the colonised sensibility within a dialectic that momentarily redefines both cultures.

Wandering through Greece Dorf concentrates his experience of personal and cultural estrangement into a remark that underlines the consistency of Kroetsch's exploration of post-colonial alienation: "We are all exiles," he declares, "sometimes even from our own hands" (A 151). In contrast to Deemer's refusal to come to terms with Canada's ambivalent status within colonialist narratives of cultural identity, Dorf's re-engagement with European civilisation exploits this ambivalence to forge a new vision of the subject in which the decentred narratives of post-colonial life mirror the endless displacements of the self within the chain of desire. Gazing at the prone body of an octopus, Dorf experiences an epiphany in which the "holdings" of the past are reinterpreted in terms of the "octopus-embrace" of the self in its relationship with others:

Is not life itself our own vexed adhesion to what we do not comprehend? Perhaps I did not sit there long, but in the long-seeming and cool and fast embrace of that octopus I had time to count arms, so to speak, the holdings I thought had plagued me: Deemer, Julie, de Medeiros, Karen perhaps, my sisters, my children, my devotion to work. And I realised the octopus-embrace of that troubled being was all I had. It was all I was. Those reachings to each other, tremulous, confused, mistaken, are as much the divine intimacies of nature as were the infinite small kisses of that octopus. (A 153)

Dorf's belief that a communal re-definition of self can be achieved by an erotic acceptance of cultural alterity receives powerful support from his experiences in the village of Lapsi. In the mud-spa there presided over by the androgynous figure of the mud-(wo)man he transforms the lack of a settled identity into a vehicle for his own symbolic rebirth:

The man facing me took in each hand a handful of mud. He raised both of his hands to my head. Again, he put the mud on my head. I held still. Again he raised up mud and put it on my head. He was not only placing the mud there, he was somehow shaping it. He took my two hands, then, out of the mud, and with his hands he raised mine, made me touch the top of my head.

He had made a dunce cap on my head, that man. A pointed cap of good, rich mud. He spoke a word. In Greek, of course. You have never heard such a cheer as the one I got from those men. They accepted me. I was joined with them. I drew a mask on my face. A simple mask. Circles around my eyes. Circles around my ears. A happy smile around my mouth. Some of the men raised up their muddy hands out of the thick mud and ponderously and slowly they clapped, laughing at the same time. I had drawn my mask and I was one of the floating heads.

We were floating heads, all of us, joined in the mud, joined to the mud. In that mud, there, up to my neck, to my chin, I realised, for the first time in my life, my mud self. I was in touch with the world. My heart was warm inside me; the world was my body. My whole body became a heart, a heart beating in the mud world. I dabbed two mud tears, one under each real eye, inside each eye's circle. That was my weeping. My body was deep in the mud and yet afloat, buoyed into its being of mud by the mud of being, under the hot Greek sun in the mud it shared with the other bodies. (A 167)

Dorf's mature recognition that identity is constituted by the intersubjective relationship with others is splendidly encapsulated in his comic interplay with the disembodied heads of the mud-covered villagers; his ritual acceptance of alterity puts him "back in touch with the world." The transformation of his attitudes may be gleaned by a comparison with his early encounter with Julie in the spa-waters, where the bodiless heads of other bathers reflected his own fractured personality, leaving him alienated and confused. With his realisation that, as Kroetsch says elsewhere, "[t]he other is the not-me that is me,"¹⁹ Dorf achieves an individual expression of the "abundance that is diversity and difference"²⁰ that characterises (post)modern Canadian identity. After viewing the ruins of the European colonialist adventure and experiencing the transfiguration of his "mud-self," Dorf is ready to return to his own home place and present an alibi for his other self denied expression by Deemer's insistence upon univocity, closure, and narrative resolution.

Following Dorf's acquisition of the spa at Deadman Springs - a name that offers a symbolic reprise of his own evolution from confinement to freedom - a brief scene takes place that illustrates the text's negotiation between unitary and plural narratives of cultural identity. Approached by a stranger who bears no name, Dorf is compelled to reflect upon his own double naming and his own double nature. His realisation that he can afford to give away one of his forenames is of signal importance because it shows

that the subject does not need the external confirmation of a second name to comprehend the multiplicity of its basic character. As Dorf acknowledges, "I am a man who, in the mystery of what self is, can give away a name and still have it" (A 206). Deemer's dependence upon the unitary self is therefore challenged by the dissolution of the subject into the flux of language and desire. Dorf's assertion that love is "[t]he confirmation into being that is the destruction too" (A 218) embodies the deconstructive edge of his insight and lends clarity to the subtle formulation of his intention to "relax, not to be myself but to let myself be" (A 181).

Dorf's final revelation at Deadman Springs of the interrelationship of language, subjectivity, and desire prepares us perfectly for Deemer's non-appearance at his perfect spa. Deemer's absence is crucial to Kroetsch's intentions since his presence at the spa would bring the text's transcendental signified into alignment with one of its prime signifiers and thereby effect the epistemological closure Kroetsch is committed to prevent. Instead the failure of light (and, by extension, source and origination) within the spa-passage precipitates each character's entry into the "lovely maze of our naming" which unmakes and reinvents identity according to the dictates of desire:

I heard names. I could hear names. I heard the cave's sweet namings. Joe. Arnie. Kay. Pat. And the laughter of the findings. Yes. The bodies, bumping bodies. Carol. David. Yes. Dennis. Diane. Trojan. Esterhazy. Yes. Jock. Yes. Mandel. Yes. Mick. Fat Annie. Estienne. The rub and caress, the fingers, finding an arm, a face, a breast. Pete. Yes. Hjartarson. Yes. Lorne. Doris. Ricou. Garbonzo. Yes. Gerry. Lou. Jane. The surprise of hips touching hips in the unseeable dark. And the waiting. And the turning. Yes. The hand to the belly's sudden gasp. The lovely maze of our naming. And the wet, invisible embrace. Cook. Vermeer. Pausanias. Pauline. Our naming ourselves into new names. Vasco da Gama. And the yes and the yes. And Karen, no doubt, somewhere in the cave, locked in hot intercourse with anonymous arms. But we named our strangeness away. (A 226-27)

This passage, which brings the novel's central narrative to conclusion, is Kroetsch's most developed fictional expression of Canada's position as a labyrinth of voice in which the radical disunity of its various narrative traditions paradoxically holds the Canadian story together. Cultural identity in *Alibi*, as in Canada, is defined by Dorf's position between different modes of self-registration. But as Kroetsch knows, it is not possible for the post-colonial subject simply to name its strangeness away: the pressure of an alien language and history enforces a division between discourse and experience that instils strangeness in the act of naming itself. In the last pages of *Alibi*

Kroetsch moves to reinforce our perception of this cultural contradiction. If the final chapter of Dorf's text asks us to follow the trajectory of desire from stasis through "ecstasy" to "ekstasis," the scant pages entitled "Dorfendorf's Journal" reassert the binary structure of Kroetsch's artistic vision. Dorf's journal therefore brings the various codes of the novel into a state of unresolved tension; the erotics of the text, as Kroetsch is aware, inhere in its radical incompleteness. Thus Karen, the artificer, and Deemer, symbol of order and detachment, come together and swap roles as she structures her history of the collector's momentous 'arrival' while he approaches again and again like "an actor, thrilled at the marvelous task of playing himself" (A 231). Meanwhile Medeiros, the "Magellan" (A 235) of desire, is implicated by Dorf, the desirer, in the ultimate closure of death. In a momentary aside Dorf offers us an interpretative model of the text he has presented couched in a hermeneutics of reversals, inversions, and doubleness:

I type all and everything onto legal size rag paper, not dropping so much as a letter; I happen to be something of a fanatic at a typewriter and it shows to good cause as the manuscript grows in this cardboard box to the left of my typewriter and the open journal; the heaped pages; each carefully numbered, each proofread for the merest error, then slipped carefully over its predecessor so that all I must do, when the manuscript is complete, is reverse the order of the pages, make the top sheet the bottom, the bottom the top. (A 231)

The radical doubleness of *Alibi*, which encompasses both Dorf's deconstruction of his former self and his heliotropic need to find "our way back to the source of all desire, the sun itself" (A 137) continues to the last and finds an appropriate image in the journey of the ospreys to the sun. The baby osprey's development is an important symbol for Dorf; their movement into flight marks the beginning of a new life for him. Considering his "oracular birds" (A 234) he confides he has decided "that when the baby ospreys either fly or drown, then I too will know what to do" (A 230). The novel's concluding image of the birds lifting into flight and tearing "the sadness from [Dorf's] heart" (A 239) is perfectly pitched: the two birds, with their counterpointed cry "*Gwan-Gwan*," inscribe the duplicity of being and desire as they arc towards the sun, source of life itself. And this is where Kroetsch's text leaves us, in that disquieting balance between oppositions and contraries where self blends into "other" and an alibi prepares to moonlight for the illusion of truth itself.

If we return, in conclusion, to the Barthesian distinction between texts of pleasure and bliss with which this chapter commenced, it becomes clear that in *Alibi*

Kroetsch has managed to channel the textual erotics of Dorf's quest for personal and cultural identity in such a way as to unsettle "the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories" and to bring "to a crisis his relation with language." Like Demeter Proudfoot and Mark Madham, Jack Deemer fulfils the role of an encyclopaedic realist novelist; his desire to corral the diversity of existence into a single narrative denies voice to the Canadian subject who necessarily exists between stories, plots, and versions of identity. Dorf's quest, which takes him to the ruined site of European imperialist culture, replaces the Old World form of classical realism with a discourse of self-identification based upon the politics of the erotic body. Drawing a direct comparison between the transfigurations of language and desire Dorf tells us that "[t]o touch is to talk" while "[i]ntimacy is, finally, an intimacy of telling" (A 136). Unlike the boundless verbal play of *The Sad Phoenician*, which invoked the politics of desire to express the over-determination of narratives of post-colonial identity, the intricately plotted world of *Alibi* continually restates the binary divisions that characterise post-colonial cultural discourse. As Dorf demands closure and source he is confronted with a multitude of narrative possibilities; as he prepares to lose himself in the protean world of Lapsi he is reminded by Karen, and his dualistic daughters Jinn and Jan, of the binary tensions that inform the surrounding world. Eventually Dorf finds, like Kroetsch, that it is only through the process of narrative that system and difference can be held in tension; the insistence of Dorf's alibi upon the continual re-invention of the border between truth and illusion accounts for his "corrosive sense of style" (A 196). Talking his way through the story of his own desire for story Dorf comes to embody the axiomatic insight of all Kroetsch's postmodern fiction; estranged from origin and alienated from source, it is his sense of the multiplicity of the world's labyrinthine plots that finally brings him home.

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- 1 Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 51-52.
 - 2 Martin Amis, *Time's Arrow: Or, The Nature of the Offence* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991) 71.
 - 3 Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* 14.
 - 4 Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths of Voice* 80.
 - 5 Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* 4.
 - 6 Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* 65.
 - 7 Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* 7.
 - 8 Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* 64.
 - 9 Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* 14.
 - 10 Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* 21.
 - 11 Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* 62.
 - 12 Robert Kroetsch, *Alibi* (Toronto: General Paperbacks, 1984) 131. Future references to this edition will be marked by the abbreviation "A" and incorporated into the main body of the text.
 - 13 Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* 56.
 - 14 Anika Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan* 7.
 - 15 Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths of Voice* 129.
 - 16 Lecker, *Robert Kroetsch* 115.
 - 17 Lecker 117.
 - 18 Stanley Fogel has made an interesting connection between *Gone Indian* and *Alibi*, noting Dorf's fascination with the colour-codes of women's underwear as a sign of the play of the signifier and comparing it to Sadness's association with a "lexical playfield" symbolised by "libraries, literature, or the printed word." Stanley Fogel, "'I see England, I see France': Robert Kroetsch's *Alibi*," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 9 (1984): 234.
 - 19 Kroetsch, "*Hear Us O Lord* and the Orpheus Occasion," *The Lovely Treachery of Words* 168.
 - 20 Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," 23.

Conclusion

The critic invited to conclude a study of Robert Kroetsch is immediately conscious of an overwhelming irony. For Kroetsch is, perhaps, the example *par excellence* of the postmodern writer who resists closure, shifts backwards and forwards between different identities, and insists that the dialectic between story and form is played out in a multiplicity of ways. His stubborn refusal to conclude his exploration of identity and alterity is signalled by his fascination with the doubled figures of the *doppelgänger* and trickster, as well as by the binary structures in which his characters find themselves enclosed. Kroetsch's unconcealed hostility to endings is also captured by the metaphor of the quest which runs through his fiction, linking each of his novels without resolving or effacing the differences between them. This predisposition towards an unbounded process of self-discovery marks him out as a writer who searches for identity and meaning in "the continuing poem: not the having written, but the writing. The poem as long as a life. The lifelost poem."¹

Yet if the idea of conclusion is problematic with regard to the multiple openings of Kroetsch's texts, it is possible to advance a broad statement about their fundamental aims and concerns. I have argued that the core concern of Kroetsch's work is the examination and politicisation of the relationship between identity and difference. He therefore returns repeatedly to the problem of representing 'Canada' within the constraints of a "mandarin language" that effaces, marginalises, or excludes the colonial experience of history. In retrospect, his writing may be seen to revolve around the conundrum that he discusses in the provocatively entitled essay "No Name Is My Name":

The Canadian writer in English must speak a new culture not with new names but with an abundance of names inherited from Britain and the United States. And that predicament is in turn doubled - by the writing done in the French language in Canada.

The problem then is not so much that of knowing one's identity as it is of how to relate that newly evolving identity to its inherited or 'given' names. And the first technique might be simply to hold those names in suspension, to let the identity speak itself out of a willed namelessness.²

In this study I have attempted to establish the different ways in which Kroetsch tries to hold the "given" names "in suspension" in order to "let the identity speak itself out of a willed namelessness." I began with a reading of his poetry because it presents

in microcosmic form the influence upon his work of the discourses of phenomenology, post-structuralism, and postmodernism. Kroetsch's poetry, in common with certain dominant strains of post-colonial thought, evolves from the desire to eradicate the sense of alienation visited upon the Canadian subject by the cultural codes of Old World discourse. It yearns for an experience of identity uncontaminated by difference. The reciprocal and constitutive connection that phenomenology identifies between world and consciousness appeared to offer Kroetsch an opportunity to surmount the obstacle of alterity and to overcome the alienating distance imposed by language. His early poetry therefore records his quest for a phenomenological poetics capable of exploring the relationship between the intending subject and the lost origins of colonial history.

Kroetsch's poetry subsequent to "Stone Hammer Poem" is born out of the contradictions implicit in his phenomenological poetics. For his recognition that the status of language as a system of difference is inimical to the phenomenological incorporation of the "other" into the "same" inaugurates the deconstructive strategies of his major poems. From this point Kroetsch exploits the radical alterity of language to uncover the dialectic between "same" and "other" inscribed within the documents of colonial history. In *The Ledger* he deconstitutes the closed book of the pioneer experience to recover the lost and marginalised voices excluded from the narrative of nineteenth-century nationhood; while in *Seed Catalogue* he deconstructs the metaphors of closure that underwrite the 'organic' cultural totality. The success of these poems is founded upon the connection Kroetsch manages to establish between the play of the signifier and what Derrida calls "the play of the world." I have also pointed out in my readings of *The Sad Phoenician* and *Labyrinths of Voice* the difficulties that beset Kroetsch's work when the tension between identity and difference is sacrificed to the relativising discourse of textual 'play.'

The same desire to explore the dialectical relationship between identity and difference suffuses Kroetsch's prose fiction. His first novel, *But We Are Exiles*, deals with the paradox of articulating post-colonial identity in the discourse of the "same" by challenging the capacity of mimesis to represent the radically "other." The idea of exile or displacement from historical origin that haunts *Exiles* is given a human context in *The Words of My Roaring*, Kroetsch's second novel. Here he internalises the contradictions and tensions of post-colonial discourse in the comic figure of Johnnie Backstrom. *Words* offers an excellent example of the allegorical power of Kroetsch's

fiction, since Backstrom's urge to unite the binary divisions of post-colonial culture in his own providential narrative denies the experience of difference that constitutes the post-colonial condition, and leaves him bereft of voice or purpose. *Words* also introduces one of the key themes of Kroetsch's work: the use of the patriarchal relationship as a metaphor for the relationship between the imperial 'father' and the post-colonial exile. This metaphor recurs, with various local adjustments, in *The Studhorse Man*, *Gone Indian*, and *Badlands*.

Between the publication of *Words* and the completion of *The Studhorse Man* Kroetsch's work comes under the influence of both American postmodern fiction and Latin American 'magic realism.' I have suggested that an important tension exists in Kroetsch's theory of postmodernism between a Lyotardian celebration of language games and a Jamesonian concern with the political and cultural implications of 'difference.' The problem with the first of these positions, which enforces a separation between meaning and the historical context in which it is engendered, is demonstrated in *The Studhorse Man*. By shifting in *Gone Indian* from pastiche to the mode of postmodern parody Kroetsch is able to establish a concrete connection between the institutional sites from which hegemonic discourses are produced and the sanctioned images of colonial history. Meanwhile, his glorious parody of Anna Dawe's revision of patriarchal history in *Badlands* enables him to move beyond the limitations of Sadness's counter-discourse and develop a deconstructive form that simultaneously inscribes and displaces the binary codes of the Canadian cultural "paradigm."

The transition from a counter-discursive to a deconstructive position brings Kroetsch's fiction into creative tension with with his critical writing. These two sides of his work interact in *What the Crow Said* to produce a vision of modern Canada united by the "bewildering multitude of fragments"³ that constitute the Canadian story. In contrast to the assimilative and homogenising cultural model offered by the American 'melting pot,' *Crow* keeps the dialectic between identity and difference alive. Along the multiple borders of Kroetsch's text, identity is challenged and affirmed by the tensions between east and west, male and female, tradition and innovation, oral culture and the post-Gutenberg typographic revolution. Fittingly, *Alibi*, the most recent of Kroetsch's novels, advances beyond the postmodern cultural vision of *Crow* by returning to the basic question of narrative. His elaboration of a new form of quest-fiction indebted to the textual erotics of Barthesian criticism is at once a literary and

political gesture, since it asks us to rewrite the narrative of our own lives in that postmodern space in which the Author can no longer impose order upon a docile world.

The ultimate importance of Kroetsch's work is his insistence upon examining the question of post-colonial identity "without recourse to an easy vision of national definition, and without easy recourse to old vocabularies."⁴ Kroetsch is able to progress from the "old vocabularies" enforced by the imperial word towards the "recognition of difference"⁵ by continually conceiving identity in dialectical relation to the discourse of the "same." The range and power of his meditation upon the nature of alterity makes his corpus an essential document for those wishing to understand the status of post-colonial culture today. Moreover, Kroetsch's constant critical engagement with the theoretical and philosophical implications of the literary work has played a crucial role in introducing the discourses of post-structuralism and postmodernism to the field of post-colonial studies. The interdependence of the literary and philosophical interest in 'difference' does not, therefore, act as a prologue to Kroetsch's work alone, but rather characterises the wider post-colonial desire for identity and voice:

Canadian writing takes place between the vastness of (closed) cosmologies and the fragments found in the (open) field of the archaeological site. It is a literature of dangerous middles. It is a literature that, compulsively seeking its own story (and to be prophetic after all: this will still be the case a century from now) comes compulsively to a genealogy that refuses origin, to a genealogy that speaks instead, and anxiously, and with a generous reticence, the nightmare and the welcome dream of Babel.⁶

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- 1 Robert Kroetsch, "The Moment of the Discovery of America Continues," 8.
 - 2 Robert Kroetsch, "No Name Is My Name," *The Lovely Treachery of Words* 50-51.
 - 3 Robert Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity," 31.
 - 4 Robert Kroetsch, "Beyond Nationalism," 66.
 - 5 Robert Kroetsch, "Beyond Nationalism," 66.
 - 6 Robert Kroetsch, "Beyond Nationalism," 71.

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