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Robert Kroetsch and the erotics of Prairie fiction

Abstract

Literary forms are products of the particular soils in which they have grown and new settings may be expected to germinate new species. At the same time the notion of 'regional' writing frequently elicits a contrary set of expectations: literature which is seen as characteristic of a particular locality habitually evokes the specificity of its landscape and society through modes which are akin to traditional classic realism. The Canadian Prairie novel is clearly, like most New World literary forms, the product of cultural cross-pollination, and yet seminal twentiethcentury examples of the genre, such as Sinclair Ross's *As I Lay Dying* and *My House* and W.O. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Snow* (1947), do little to upset the conventions of classic realism. Their focus is primarily on the small town and, although tension is generated by the exploration of its

relationship to the vast spaces of the Prairie, this focus makes superficial adherence to a fairly traditional fictional form possible. More recent Prairie novels are, however, hybrids of a different kind and many display all the characteristics of post-modernist fabulation, metafiction and deconstruction. As Laurence Ricou puts it, at the beginning of an essay on Robert Kroetsch's *Badlands* (1975) and the American Tom Robbins's *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* (1976):

Did that blade of grass I plucked
as a boy to vibrate with my breath

really burst the air with shrillness?
Or does the sound it may have made

or even the soundlessness really matter?
A remembered world holds a reality

and a truth far stronger than echoes.
In the cupped hands of remembrance

the thin green reed of what we are
trembles with a rare sound that is ours.

JOHN THIEME

Robert Kroetsch and the Erotics of Prairie Fiction¹

Literary forms are products of the particular soils in which they have grown and new settings may be expected to germinate new species. At the same time the notion of 'regional' writing frequently elicits a contrary set of expectations: literature which is seen as characteristic of a particular locality habitually evokes the specificity of its landscape and society through modes which are akin to traditional classic realism. The Canadian Prairie novel is clearly, like most New World literary forms, the product of cultural cross-pollination, and yet seminal twentieth-century examples of the genre, such as Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House* (1941) and W.O. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind* (1947), do little to upset the conventions of classic realism. Their focus is primarily on the small town and, although tension is generated by the exploration of its

relationship to the vast spaces of the Prairie, this focus makes superficial adherence to a fairly traditional fictional form possible. More recent Prairie novels are, however, hybrids of a different kind and many display all the characteristics of post-modernist fabulation, metafiction and deconstruction. As Laurence Ricou puts it, at the beginning of an essay on Robert Kroetsch's *Badlands* (1975) and the American Tom Robbins's *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* (1976):

The West has always been a mystery to the East. Recently, and I'm commenting here in a positive sense, the West has become a mystery to itself. The tracing of that mystery is made possible by the current prominence of whimsy as overt artistic procedure.... The new West according to Kroetsch and Robbins is a West made by women and whimsy, by a peculiarly gentle combination of whim and fantasy.

The world so imagined is neither Horizon nor Dodge City, but somewhere more exotic and magical and other-worldly: it's a place of mystery, at once deceptive yet alluring. In fiction, much of this shift originates in the self-reflexive and comic qualities of the post-modern novel.²

For Robert Kroetsch such a fiction is a natural enough emanation from the Prairie world. Landscapes which allow the eye uninterrupted vision to the horizon, except in those limited instances where humanity has imposed its presence, foreground the fact that apparently secure social and literary structures are no more than the temporary signatures of particular men and women. The conventions of classic realism begin to seem at best an inadequate vehicle for attempting to render the Prairie experience in fiction and at worst a totally irrelevant set of artificial rules, based on discourses of enclosure and regulation originally generated by European social situations.

Kroetsch's novels are concerned with un-naming, un-creating and un-inventing structures, so that habitual modes of perception are collapsed and the ground prepared for a primal encounter with the natural world, in which the writer may assume the role of Adam, the originator of all language.³ Kroetsch's post-modernism is not, however, like the post-modernism of Borges and many of his American followers, an essentially asocial stance, but rather a direct response to the sense that a Prairie literature needs to be remade in an image which bears some relationship to the land. Kroetsch is not, like his Western Canadian contemporary Rudy Wiebe, a moralist, but he shares with Wiebe the desire to deconstruct received versions of Prairie history and replace them with a home-grown rather than a transplanted discourse.

In a 1979 essay entitled 'The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction: An Erotics of Space'⁴ Kroetsch examines Willa Cather's *My Antonia* (1918) and *As for Me and My House* as paradigm Prairie texts. He suggests that

they are paradigmatic because they 'contain the idea of book', they give us 'a sense of how book and world have intercourse', discover the 'guises' and 'duplicities' of the western plains and 'offer, finally, an erotics of space' ('Fear', p. 47).

Throughout this essay Kroetsch repeatedly asks the question 'How do you make love in a new country?' He does not provide an explicit answer to this question, but he makes it clear that there is a relationship between love-making and story-telling, between actual erotics and textual erotics. Like such European theorists as Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva,⁵ writers with whose work he clearly has more than a nodding acquaintance,⁶ Kroetsch appears to be using erotics as a metaphor for literary creation and in a later essay, 'On Being an Alberta Writer', he comes back to the question 'How do you make love in a new country?' and offers an answer: 'One way to make love is by writing.'⁷ Since the concept of love is itself a linguistic construct — 'without writing,' Kroetsch says, 'I sometimes suspect there would be no such thing as love'⁸ — at this point erotics and writing begin to seem interchangeable. The relationship between the two no longer seems metaphorical, but rather metonymic.

Kroetsch's comments on *My Antonia* and *As for Me and My House* in his 'Fear of Women' essay are centrally concerned with the problematics of Prairie space. Both novels, as he sees it, portray the difficulty of establishing 'any sort of *close* relationship in a landscape — in a physical situation — whose primary characteristic is *distance*' ('Fear', p. 47). One way of containing space, he suggests, is to write a book: 'the literal closedness of the book' ('Fear', p. 47) imposes parameters. So the act of producing a text can be seen as parallel to the attempt to achieve a close relationship.

For Kroetsch, as both theorist and novelist, gender issues are of crucial importance, both in terms of social and literary relations. On the social level he explores stereotypical male and female roles and implies that a new basis for the man-woman relationship needs to be worked out in the Prairies. For the writer there is an analogous problem: the need to invent an appropriate syntax for describing such social relations.

As he sees it, the basic paradigm of the man-woman relationship in Prairie fiction is expressed by the dichotomy 'house: horse', a binary opposition which he paraphrases in various ways: 'To be *on* a horse is to move: motion into distance. To be *in* a house is to be fixed: a centering into stasis. Horse is masculine. House is feminine. Horse: house. Masculine: feminine. On: in. Motion: stasis. A woman ain't supposed to move. Pleasure: duty' ('Fear', p. 49). He also argues that traditionally

the expansiveness of storytelling is male and the closed space of the book is female. So woman comes to be equated with confinement both in the sense that she represents the domestic side of Prairie experience — she is the Penelope who stays home while her Odysseus ventures into the world⁹ — and in the sense that she is a Muse figure for the male, who is frequently a putative artist. Like Margaret Atwood in *Survival* (1972),¹⁰ Kroetsch describes a situation in which the artist is ‘paralysed’ and fails to produce any art at all. Jim Burden, the main narrator of *My Antonia*, is warned off the Middle European and Scandinavian immigrant hired girls of the Nebraska plains. He reads the *Georgics*, dwells on Virgil’s statement ‘I shall be the first, if I live, to bring the Muse into my country’¹¹ and realises that the immigrant hired girls are *his* potential Muses. Yet he deserts them, exhibits the fear of women by fleeing to the East and, by so doing, relinquishes the possibility of a close relationship with the Prairie landscape. On the other hand, the text of *My Antonia* provides just such a consummation, not only by celebrating the fortitude of the hired girls, but also by stubbornly refusing to travel East with Jim Burden and continuing to confine itself to the predicament of Prairie womanhood. The ‘My’ of the title can be read ironically, if we assume it is a product of Jim Burden’s authorial voice: he never has possessed Antonia except in temporary imaginative flights of his own. She is, however, as it were *owned* by the book in the sense that she has been instated as its eponymous heroine and has as good a claim to being regarded as the protagonist of this Western history as Jim Burden.

In *As for Me and My House*, the narrator Mrs Bentley is herself the Muse. Her husband Philip, the newly appointed minister of the symbolically named Prairie town of Horizon is another paralysed artist, obsessed with drawing pictures of Main Streets with their rows of false-fronted stores, a rather obvious metaphor for the hypocrisy of small-town society. Kroetsch comments that Philip Bentley has met and married his Muse, but the irony latent in this remark is immediately apparent to the reader of the novel, since the narrative assumes the form of Mrs Bentley’s diary, and, as Kroetsch notes, she is ‘almost pure talk, pure voice’, while he is almost ‘pure silence’ (‘Fear’, p. 48). Their marriage is a consummated, but sterile union. They have no children, but Philip becomes a father after he sleeps with a younger woman, who conveniently dies in childbirth, leaving the Bentleys to take over the child they have been unable to conceive together.

As for Me and My House is riddled with ironies. These begin with the title. Initially and most obviously, it refers to the sermon which Philip always preaches to new congregations, which is based on the text ‘As For

Me and My House We Will Serve the Lord',¹² but as the novel proceeds it becomes clear that Philip lacks any true sense of religious vocation and a moot point whose house the title is referring to. Kroetsch's 'Fear of Women' essay provides textual illustrations of how the novel's portrayal of the gender divisions of the society conforms to the horse: house dichotomy and ultimately it seems that the house of the title refers most obviously to Mrs Bentley's situation, trapped in her marriage to a feckless, failed artist, who for the most part treats her with indifference. Yet, it could be argued that Philip too is a victim of their situation, since he is a man who has been unhorsed into housedom by virtue of becoming a preacher and who has had his potential role of artist taken over by his Muse. The mode of narration has subverted the stereotypical gender patterns which the novel appears to have constructed on a thematic level, particularly through its association of the heroine with the fixed, claustrophobic house. Kroetsch writes: 'The male who should be artist is overwhelmed. The bride expects to receive as well as give. How do you possess so formidable a woman?' ('Fear', p. 49).

He concludes his essay by suggesting that marriage, the primary metaphor for social and literary relations in the Old World, ceases to have this function in the literature of the Great Plains. European models of gender relationships defy neat translation into this particular New World context:

... We cannot even discover who is protagonist: Antonia or Jim Burden? Philip or Mrs Bentley? Male or female? Muse or writer? Horse or house? Language or silence? Space or book? ... 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 ... 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 radical change. It will be he — already self-christened — and not the woman this time — who must give up the precious and treacherous *name*. ('Fear', p. 55)

In short, Kroetsch is outlining a situation in which traditional European gender roles may appear to obtain — the male is a wandering Odysseus, the female a domestic Penelope (the horse: house dichotomy) — but this is an illusion, for male travelling appears to be more a form of self-evasion than a quest, while women appear to be transcending the role of passive Muse figures, but find no fulfilment, because traditional marriage has broken down and a new ground for union has yet to be

established. In *Survival* Margaret Atwood comments on the absence of the Venus figure in Canadian Literature¹³ and Kroetsch is identifying a similar absence, as he remarks on the young woman's progression from being a bride to being a mother without ever being a wife. The situation will only be remedied when a new syntax is established for Prairie relationships and, as Kroetsch sees it, the male must surrender his notion of autonomous identity — usually a requirement of the female, symbolised by her relinquishing her maiden name on her wedding day — if this is to come about.

I would suggest that Kroetsch's fiction is, among other things, concerned with such redefinition of male identity and that his novels are structures which enact the quest for a new textual erotics. One can see how he both employs and transcends the stereotypes he identifies in his 'Fear of Women' essay by examining his third novel, *The Studhorse Man* (1970).

The Studhorse Man relates the adventures of Hazard Lepage, the eponymous hero, who travels through Alberta desperately trying to find a mare for his stallion Poseidon to cover, so that the breed may be preserved. Hazard's occupation is a dying one, and, on one level, the novel may be read as an elegy for its demise, but at the same time the studhorse quest is fairly clearly related to the problematics of Western erotics that Kroetsch discusses in his 'Fear of Women' essay.

Hazard has been engaged to Martha Proudfoot for thirteen years. Martha is the owner of five mares that would seem to offer the solution to his problems, but instead of marrying her and settling down, Hazard roams the Prairies in quest of adventures, which mainly take the form of erotic interludes with other women. The novel is a post-Joycean comic Odyssey — the structure is actually patterned on Homer¹⁴ — but the main effect of the epic analogy is to draw attention to the metamorphosis which the traditional heroic quest pattern has undergone in the Western Plains. Hazard's grail, the survival of the Lepage breed of stallion, would be comparatively easy to attain, if he were to sacrifice the values of 'horse' to those of 'house', and, with marriage having ceased to function as the primary metaphor for social relations, he eschews this in favour of a wandering picaresque career, in which he shows little respect for civil or social institutions. Indeed, he seems to epitomise the asocial, Rabelaisian world-view which Kroetsch, taking over the terminology of the Russian formalist critic Mikhail Bakhtin, elsewhere refers to as the 'carnival-esque'.¹⁵

Hazard is, of course, also the embodiment of the fear of women syndrome. This comes out clearly through the association of the mare

symbol with its French homonym, *la mer*. During World War I he has been told by a fortune-teller encountered on a battlefield, '*«La mer sera votre meutrière»*'¹⁶ ('The sea shall be your murderess'). As he journeys around Alberta, it becomes clear that 'mare' and 'mer' have become fused in his mind. Anything more than a casual encounter with a woman is feared by him as tantamount to death.

This can be seen in a scene where his virtue is assailed — and found wanting — by one of a number of predatory women whom he encounters on his travels. In Edmonton he is taken to bed in the provincial museum by a lady supposedly named P. Cockburn, an assistant curator who specialises in making 'life-sized wax figures' of 'illustrious Albertans' (p. 31) for the museum. He has been carried there while unconscious and awakens to find himself in a replica of the bedroom of the chief factor of the Hudson's Bay Company post from which the city grew. P. Cockburn says she must make a model of Hazard; he replies by whispering '*«Make my horse live»*' (p. 33). Terrified of history, he opposes it with sexuality. And it seems he wins, though, as on many other occasions, the first-person narrator finds it impossible to provide us with precise details, since his only source of information is, he tells us, the sparse, phallogocentric account which Hazard has given him. So it would seem that Hazard's lovemaking defeats P. Cockburn's desire to immortalise him in art *and* the narrator's attempt to provide a comprehensive and reliable chronicle of what has happened. Just before this, Hazard's horse Poseidon has engaged in a battle with a bronze statue of a horse and throughout the novel the same conflict, between raw kinetic energy and the supposed stasis of the work of art, is being enacted on a formal level, as the narrator strives, with little success, to write the definitive biography of Hazard's life. 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. Phallic energy is the central metaphor of this subversiveness, but it is treated ambivalently, since Hazard's evasions obviate the possibility of his fulfilling his quest. Moreover, the narrator, Demeter Proudfoot, presents an alternative viewpoint.

Demeter acts as a foil to Hazard and, although he is his faithful biographer, is as far removed from him as Nick Carraway is from Jay Gatsby. At first Demeter is a rather shadowy figure, but he is clearly not at all like Hazard. His voice is far less obviously Western than Hazard's. He mediates Hazard's 'vulgar' (p. 37) speech, making it more literary. After

telling the reader in the second chapter, 'the scent of spring was in that yeasty wind, the high raw odor of mares and spring' (p. 12), he pulls himself up and says: 'Hazard did not say «mares and spring». We were chatting together on the ranch where finally I caught up with him and he said in his crude way, «That raw bitch of a wind was full of crocuses and snatch»' (p. 12).

So the novel is concerned with the relationship between two kinds of discourse, with Demeter's voice attempting to make something more conventionally literary out of the Western vernacular and thereby implicitly foregrounding the problem of writing about the Prairie world. He also represents the ordering impulses of the artist, who tries to impose system on the contingent nature of his subject — it is no coincidence that this subject is named 'Hazard'. Demeter is a self-styled biographer and has the Boswellian obsession with comprehensiveness, but finds himself constantly defeated in his endeavour to give an exhaustive account, since he writes of a situation, where, as Kroetsch sees it, there is no firm basis for a relationship between man and woman, between storytelling and book, between writer and reader. Consequently the text which he produces is one which corresponds to the model of non-consummation. Despite his meticulous research and his longing for comprehensiveness, his biography is elliptical and incomplete. There are narrative lacunae, accounts of episodes where he has been forced to speculate and even a reference to an omitted chapter which was to have contained some of his own theorising.¹⁷ He tells his readers that he is giving them an 'extremely objective account of the life of one good man' (p. 145), but finally succeeds in conveying exactly the opposite impression.

The reader tends to arrive at this impression, not only because the palpable inadequacy of the source material foregrounds the fact that the biography is a very partial construction, but also because it transpires that Demeter is a madman, who is writing his narrative while sitting naked in a bathtub. So, if at first Hazard seems to be a wildly hyperbolic character, whose abnormalities verge on insanity, the reader now has to consider the possibility that he is the norm of sanity, compared with whom someone like Demeter is insane. Certainly this casts an interesting light on the role of the conventional biographer and the implication appears to be that Demeter's desire for completeness is an insane ideal in this context. The whole thrust of the novel is towards incompleteness, and when he tells us of the missing chapter, in which he intended to propound his theory of nakedness, it is as if one is in the world of *Tristram Shandy*, where all is false starts, digressions and regressions, and the mode of the novel comes to constitute a parody of linear narrative. *Tristram*

Shandy is, of course, the paradigm of novels which use erotics as a metaphor for textual progress — or rather lack of progress, since, after the first page where the hero is conceived (and a botched conception it is) there is no consummation or climax to be found in the novel, and there are numerous instances of the theme of sex as unfinished business. If, like Victor Shklovsky, one takes the view that *Tristram Shandy* is the ‘most typical novel of world literature’,¹⁸ then the problems which Tristram confronts as narrator are the problems of all novelists and biographers. From here it is, of course, but a short step to reappraising Demeter’s madness, as the insanity common to all novelists in their endeavour to capture the ungraspable ‘realities’ of an external world in language. So, while there can be little doubt that a parodic element is at work in the presentation of the novel’s narrator, it may be a mistake to see Demeter as simply the butt of authorial satire. In an interview Kroetsch has confessed to feeling sympathetic towards him¹⁹ and it may even be that there is a degree of self-projection²⁰ in the character of Demeter.

Demeter is also a foil to Hazard in terms of the more specific erotics of the novel. Given the name of a female goddess at birth, he is an androgynous figure who represents a sharp contrast to Hazard’s assertive manhood. Since he is eighteen and Hazard is fifty-one, it is possible that Kroetsch is suggesting that the stereotype of the tough Westerner has been eroded with the passage of time. Be this as it may, in the latter stages of the novel it becomes increasingly clear that he is Hazard’s rival for possession of Martha, symbol of both Prairie womanhood and the Western world more generally.

After his various peregrinations, Hazard arrives in the vicinity of Martha’s home, only to be caught in a fire and apparently burnt alive. Martha comes to visit his naked body, which has been placed in the icehouse of the local beer parlour while awaiting the arrival of the undertaker; she caresses its every part, sexually arouses him and a consummation takes place. Demeter decides that his duty as biographer means he must visit the icehouse:

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 into 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. (p. 152)

He comes upon Martha and Hazard, and the shock of what he sees seems to propel him into madness. He now takes over Hazard’s role as studhorse man and brings about the union of Poseidon and Martha’s

mares. Having done this, he barricades himself in Hazard's house, like a Western hero making his last stand. It is a house which from the opening of the novel has represented a curious expression of the horse-house dichotomy, since Hazard keeps horses inside it, and now as Demeter identifies Martha as his Muse and she comes to him, apparently willing to let him make love to her, another kind of resolution appears to be about to take place. But they are interrupted by a wild cry, which sounds centaur-like — half horse, half man. The binary oppositions of Prairie life — horse: house, human: animal, man: woman — all appear to be breaking down and at this moment Poseidon's hind hoofs smash a hole in the patterned wallpaper of the house's dining-room. It is unclear whether the cry has come from Hazard or Poseidon — at this moment the two seem to be fused together — and a further collapse of separate identities appears to have occurred with the smashing of the wall, since its pattern depicts lions and fleurs-de-lis. This is presumably suggestive of the two solitudes of Anglophone and Francophone Canada²¹ (Hazard is himself of French extraction) and so another Canadian duality is breaking down. So at this point, very close to the end of the novel, a number of received dualities, including those of conventional gender stereotyping, seem to be falling apart and the potential for a new identity emerging.

The actual ending is, however, more ambivalent. Poseidon kills Hazard and Demeter is taken away by the police without having consummated his love for Martha. The future of the Lepage stallion is assured, but only thanks to a means which represents a repudiation of the organic Prairie world, which Hazard has typified. Eugene Utter, a confidence-man who has appeared earlier in the novel, ensures the survival of the Lepage stallion, since he takes over Poseidon for the purpose of servicing mares, so that they will provide quantities of estrogen for a Montana firm with which he has made a deal. Estrogen, Demeter explains, comes from PMU, or Pregnant Mares' Urine. So one has the irony that the perpetuation of the breed for which Hazard has struggled so manfully is achieved with Poseidon becoming the lynch-pin of a contraception industry! And worse still, though not inappropriately in the context of the novel, the PMU is supplied to an American firm.

In the final chapter Demeter presents himself as having contributed to the saving of the Lepage stallion and supplies the reader with a detailed analysis of the economic basis of producing Pregnant Mares' Urine:

Surely those PMU farms that dot the plains of Alberta are memorial enough to my foresight and courage. Each barn contains an average of fifty mares, standing in two neat rows that face each other, harnessed with an ingenious device not unlike a

cornucopia so that their urine might run through long clear sterilized tubes under their bellies, then be collected in neat square one-gallon plastic containers.

One mare yields from two-thirds to three-quarters of a gallon of urine per day. The farmer sells that product at approximately a dollar ninety-five per gallon, depending of course on the nature of his contract and immediate market conditions. A mare might in one season produce enough to gross the farmer three hundred and fifty dollars. He will have to buy ten dollars' worth of straw and forty dollars' worth of oats. He will have to lay out a little money for mineral supplement (seaweed kelp), for the mare is allowed no salt and little protein. And each mare, let me repeat, *must be pregnant*. (pp. 172-3)

The precise detail given here echoes the economic arithmetic of Swift's 'A Modest Proposal',²² and two paragraphs further on Demeter makes a point of stressing his own 'modesty'. Though Swift's use of the language of animal husbandry for his narrator's proposal that Irish children should be eaten for the good of the nation is more shocking, the use of the same kind of terminology in *The Studhorse Man* emerges as far from coincidental once one appreciates the extent to which human and animal — Hazard and Poseidon — have been fused. Moreover, Demeter's whole persona has a distinctively Swiftian quality about it: the biographer who writes from an insane asylum would seem to be a first cousin of such Swiftian authors as the figure who writes 'A Digression concerning the Original, the Use, and Improvement of Madness in a Commonwealth',²³ from Bedlam. Yet Kroetsch stops short of Swift's monstrous parody. Arguably this is because Demeter emerges as a type of the author, whose attempts to provide total coherence are doomed. On another level, it may be that the explanation for this lies in the Western cultural context: he is as much a victim of the conflict between energy and stasis, between Establishment and Carnavalesque values as Hazard. And as an androgynous figure he is a victim of the erotic paradigm described in the 'Fear of Women' essay and prominent throughout the novel.

The Studhorse Man does not, however, end on a pessimistic note. Demeter's final paragraphs tell us that Martha has given birth to a daughter, whom he believes to be Hazard's child. She is called Demeter Lepage and so she seems to represent a fusion of the two main characters. Demeter clearly finds this namesake sympathetic — she has 'grown up to be something of a lover of the horse' (p. 175) — and 'as a kind of fatherly advice' he dedicates his 'portentous volume' (p. 175) to her. This new Demeter is, then, at least metaphorically speaking, daughter of both Hazard Lepage and Demeter Proudfoot and emerges as the true inheritor of the Prairie earth. In the Eleusinian mysteries the goddess Demeter is the centre of a cult of seasonal renewal and so the ending

suggests the promise of a new rebirth for gender relations in the Prairies, in which the female takes over 'the precious and treacherous *name[s]*' of the male.

NOTES

1. This is a revised and enlarged version of a paper given at the British Association of Canadian Studies Conference, University of Birmingham, April 1984.
2. 'Field Notes and Notes in a Field: Forms of the West in Robert Kroetsch and Tom Robbins', *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 17, 3 (Fall 1982), 117.
3. *Genesis*, II, 19-20.
4. *Robert Kroetsch: Essays*, eds. Frank Davey and b p Nichol, *Open Letter*, 5, 4 (Spring 1983), 47-55. Subsequent references to this article are included in the text and cite 'Fear'.
5. See particularly Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973) and Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (1980).
6. There are numerous references to both in *Labyrinths of Voice: Conversations with Robert Kroetsch*, eds. Shirley Neuman and Robert Wilson (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1982).
7. *Robert Kroetsch: Essays*, p. 70.
8. Ibid.
9. In *The Studhorse Man* Hazard Lepage is a latter day Odysseus, while Martha Proudfoot is his waiting Penelope. Cf. *Badlands* (Toronto: new press, 1975), p. 3, where Anna Dawe writes: '...women are not supposed to have stories. We are supposed to sit at home, Penelopes to their wars and their sex.'
10. See Ch. 9 of *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972).
11. *My Antonia* (1918; London: Virago, 1980), p. 264. Quoted by Kroetsch, 'Fear', p. 48.
12. *Joshua*, XXIV, 15.
13. See Ch. 10 of *Survival*.
14. For two differing accounts of the *Odyssey* parallels, see Russell M. Brown, 'Odyssean Quest', *Canadian Literature*, 45 (1970), 88-90, and W.H. New, *Articulating West: essays on purpose and form in modern Canadian literature* (Toronto: new press, 1972), pp. 179-86.
15. See particularly *Robert Kroetsch: Essays*, pp. 111-22, and *Labyrinths of Voice*, pp. 35-7.
16. *The Studhorse Man* (1969; Markham: Paperjacks, 1977), p. 12. Subsequent references are to this edition and are included in the text.
17. Cf. similar references in *A Tale of a Tub* and *Tristram Shandy*.
18. 'A Parodying Novel: Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*', *Sterne: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. John Traugott (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 89.
19. See *Labyrinths of Voice*, p. 124.
20. Demeter is 18, the same age as Kroetsch was in 1945, the year in which the novel is set. See also *Labyrinths of Voice*, p. 21: 'I had allergies so that I couldn't do a lot of the male work.... And the one place where I found a kind of open field was the garden because a garden is ambiguous on a farm. It involves women's work but often the men help.... All this has to do with my wrestling with this notion of erotics right now in my writing.' Cf. 'On Being an Alberta Writer', *Robert Kroetsch: Essays*, p. 73.

21. W.H. New, *Articulating West*, p. 186.
22. See particularly the section beginning in the sixth paragraph of the work, where Swift's proposer computes the economic basis of his project.
23. Section IX of *A Tale of a Tub*.

Rienzi Cruz

A TOUCH OF VINEGAR

A horizon
is dancing towards me.
Scrub-grass wake from their poverty,
clap hands as if lush green, bow-tie audience.
A cow bellows at something
it knows is coming.
The sky stains.
Sun will soon catch spear-points of rain.

Moving,
moving all the time,
my wheels spit out miles like grape-seed.
Behind green holocaust
horizon torched with kerosene.
This other now coming,
coming closer with the sweet eyes
of new promises,
or green lies?