

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

1994

The Studhorse Man: Translating the Boundries of Text

Carol L. Beran

Saint Mary's College of California

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Beran, Carol L., "The Studhorse Man: Translating the Boundries of Text" (1994). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 830.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/830>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

THE STUDHORSE MAN

TRANSLATING THE BOUNDARIES OF TEXT

CAROL L. BERAN

“The voice. The voice.” Robert Kroetsch wrote the phrase over and over as he planned his novel *The Studhorse Man* (1969). “Try: limited third and interior first.”¹

Early drafts of *The Studhorse Man* begin,

Strangely enough, I am never more sane than when confined by the authorities to this droll institution. The manured fields, the manicured gardens, the peace and quiet of locked doors, the reassuring presence of uniformed nurses and muscular attendants, the quaintly distressed inmates—all conspire to flood my gaunt middle-aged body to bursting with love for my poor dear fellow men.

Carol L. Beran is associate professor of English at Saint Mary's College of California. She is the author of Living over the Abyss: Margaret Atwood's Life Before Man (1993) and of numerous archival and intertextual studies of Canadian literature.

Why then I should want to tell so violent a story, I hardly know: but as a young man I proposed to write a novel.²

This opening calls readers' attention to the question of the rationality of the narrative voice in a context that emphasizes the speaker's feeling of safety and sanity when his world—like the world a novelist creates—is entirely controlled by human beings: nature has been dominated by gardeners and farmers, uniforms reduce women to clearly defined non-threatening roles, and “muscular attendants” and “the authorities” eliminate problems of choice, enabling him to feel love. His motive for writing, like the question of his mental state, contains a paradox. What was to have been a novel becomes a biography of the studhorse man, Hazard Lepage, because the material the narrator, Demeter Proudfoot, has collected seems more appropriately presented in that form: “The mere truth will suffice, I discovered, and discovering this, I, ever so humbly, elected to become his Plutarch and his Boswell.”³ The relationships between truth and fiction, sanity and insanity, and safety and

[GPQ 14 (Summer 1994): 185-94]

freedom are the starting point for narrator-writer Demeter Proudfoot's biography and author Robert Kroetsch's novel at this stage of the writing process.

In March 1969, however, correspondence between Andrew Pennycook of Macdonald and Company, Publishers, and Kroetsch led to a revised opening chapter. Pennycook suggested opening with Hazard to get the reader immediately into the action and allow a gradual realization of Demeter's mental state. Kroetsch embraced the suggestion: "Your suggestion about the opening—cutting the first three paragraphs—begins to sound like a stroke of genius. So cut away. It changes the whole experience for the reader—and makes it much richer, I believe. A great insight."⁴ Thus the published form of the novel begins not with the narrator's self-revelation but with statements about the subject of his narrative, which, because it does not begin with birth and childhood, does not immediately seem like a (fictional) biography: "Hazard had to get hold of a mare."⁵ Hazard and his motives replace Demeter and his concerns as the initial focus of Kroetsch's story.

The novel in its published form becomes first not the story of Demeter Proudfoot and his problems as a writer but the tale of Hazard Lepage, a man who has a stallion, Poseidon, that he wants desperately to breed. In his quest for a mare, Hazard traverses Alberta, having absurd adventures that keep diverting him from his goal. Again and again Hazard meets women who take him to bed, but he fails to breed the stallion. Finally the wily Hazard apparently dies, but Martha Proudfoot, to whom he has been engaged for thirteen years, revives him. A happy ending seems assured until Poseidon kills his master. Eugene Utter, Hazard's former sidekick, marries Martha and they prosper by breeding horses for Pregnant Mares' Urine, from which scientists extract estrogen to use, ironically, in birth control pills.

The immediate questions the published version of the novel raises are about Hazard and his quest. Will he find a mare to breed

with his stallion, Poseidon? Why have Hazard and Martha been engaged for thirteen years? Will he return to marry Martha soon? How will he extricate himself from each of the Odysseus-like scrapes in which he finds himself? Suspense and humor propel readers onward through the text.

QUESTIONS OF GENRE

Yet Kroetsch's novel is not simply a tall tale set in Alberta about a twentieth-century Odysseus. Part of the genre convention of the novel includes authors' attempts to make readers read as if the story is true by using certain devices that pretend to establish the verisimilitude of the characters and the story outside the pages of the book. Kroetsch locates his novel in this tradition by having the narrator insist that the story he tells is biography rather than fiction; however, Kroetsch goes beyond the usual boundaries of such deception by having Demeter problematize the narrative he tells, first by vacillating about its purported genre and then by impugning his own trustworthiness as teller. This labyrinth of author pretending he is not there, character pretending he is a real person and the author who insists his work is history and biography while the reader seems, in addition, to be reading the narrator's autobiography in the author's novel, blurs traditional generic distinctions in a way that is particularly postmodern.

To this complexity, Kroetsch adds an additional complication: the narrator of the story is insane, although readers do not learn this for certain until Chapter 12. Demeter acknowledges, "Yes, dear reader, I am by profession quite out of my mind" and mentions undergoing "special treatment in this institution."⁶ By this point, astute readers will have already made the diagnosis. Similarly, by the time Demeter speaks overtly of the notion of Hazard's biography metamorphosing into novel and back again, the careful reader has been for some time questioning the genre of the text Demeter is apparently creating.

Peter Thomas speaks of “a fundamental confusion” about whether *The Studhorse Man* is “a biography (or ‘history’) of Hazard, as Demeter claims it to be, or something else,” noting the passage in Chapter 24 in which Demeter informs Hazard that he had “conceived the notion that I would write a few years hence a novel. Hazard was, I believe, flattered at the prospect of becoming a fictitious character. I at the time imagined I would write a wonderfully eloquent love story; indeed, anything but a biography.” Thomas goes on to show that the narrator becomes a character, creating additional ambiguity about whether his fictive narrative is supposed to be understood as biography, autobiography, or fiction.⁷

The effect of the revision of the opening of the novel is not merely to allow readers to evaluate for themselves the reliability of Demeter as narrator; it also means that for some portion of the beginning of the narrative, readers will have been fooled into accepting Demeter as reliable, if eccentric, will have willingly suspended disbelief, and therefore will desire to continue to believe. By literary convention, the narrator of a novel is to be trusted as conveyor of the story—to be “believed”—unless proven unreliable. Thomas writes that *The Studhorse Man* “is in part a parody of the academic critical obsession with the ‘unreliable narrator,’ itself grounded in the tradition of formal realism, which demands verification [of the reliability of the narrator and thus the ‘truth’ of the fiction] within the action itself.”⁸ The effect in *The Studhorse Man*, however, is not merely satiric, as it might have been if the story began as it does in the drafts. Instead, we as readers take seriously the question of literary genre. We know what we are reading is a novel, but we are willing to speculate, with Demeter, about whether the story he purports to write is biography, autobiography, or fiction.

Kroetsch’s narrator seems potentially trustworthy: he speaks of research, of his note cards and letters; he verifies that he knew Hazard; he insists that he has been an eye-witness at

many of the events he recounts; his detailed descriptions, lively word play, and precise vocabulary all seem to vouch for his reliability as a teller. We first begin to doubt not his reliability but the veracity of the narrative he tells. The zany, tall tale quality of Hazard’s adventures undercuts the premises we had acknowledged in agreeing to speculate about the genre of Demeter’s narrative. Demeter tells the history his research has unearthed, but we don’t believe the story because it is unbelievable; in short, we intuit that Demeter’s story is a tall tale rather than a biography, a fabulation rather than conventional literary realism. The term *fabulation* describes

the large and growing class of . . . recent novels, which do not fit the traditional categories either of realism or of romance. These violate, in a variety of ways, standard novelistic expectations by drastic—and sometimes highly successful—experiments with subject matter, form, style, temporal sequence, and fusions of the everyday, the fantastic, the mythical, and the nightmarish, in renderings that blur traditional distinctions between what is serious or trivial, horrible or ludicrous, tragic or comic.⁹

Because the information about the narrator’s insanity and the biographical nature of his work is withheld in the revised version of the beginning of *The Studhorse Man*, we begin by trusting Demeter and therefore are led by Kroetsch to assent to Demeter’s fabulation. The effect is complex, for at the same time that we concern ourselves with the story of Hazard and the veracity of his story as told by Demeter, we are also aware of the novelist whose name appears on the cover of the book, the trickster Kroetsch behind the trickster Demeter behind the trickster Hazard.

By the end of Chapter 1 of the published version, Demeter has clarified that his work has historical basis: he describes himself taking notes as Hazard speaks, “devoting my life to the making of his present into history.” But

because we have already assented to engage in fabulation, and because such assurances of realism are commonly part of fabulation, we continue to suspend disbelief. Eventually, of course, that the crazy tale is presented as sane does cause doubt about the sanity of the teller. If he were to say, "I don't believe this," or, "If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I'd never believe it," he might seem more rational. Instead, he reacts as if what he recounts is perfectly normal. The "strangely enough" that opens the manuscript has been deleted, leaving us with the verifying narrator who assures us, "I have used the fork myself" or "I have taken the trouble to visit the little train station in which Hazard Lepage awakened," the honest narrator who admits that "the bald truth is, I have not the foggiest notion how the two men got out of their fix," and the sensibly questioning narrator who reminds us that "while a biographer must naturally record, he must also, of necessity, be interpretive upon occasion."¹⁰

The altered opening, therefore, that postpones our knowing for sure that Demeter is in an asylum, raises doubts: is he a madman, or is this a mad world? Demeter eventually asserts that he is rational and at the same time insists again that his work is a biography:

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.

Up to this point in the story, Hazard has behaved more irrationally than Demeter. His monomania about breeding Poseidon, the sexual adventures he unintentionally keeps having, and his thirteen-year engagement to Martha seem less rational than Demeter's youthful voyeuristic interest in an older woman or his adolescent need to dwell on the life of an older and more sexually successful male.

Demeter's act of reconstructing history through interviews and research likewise seems a sane task. We nod in bemused agreement when he addresses us as "all of you who think you do not live in a madhouse." Demeter's saying "Dear Reader" or "You" is not merely a parody of Victorian omniscient narrators, but also a way of creating a narratee, a person to whom the story is told, giving the reader a role to play in the reading, thereby foregrounding our involvement with Demeter and his narrative. His description of himself sitting naked in the bathtub comes across as childish and possibly mad, although we recall tales of sane bathtub thinkers like Archimedes and Diogenes. In comparison to Hazard's procreative processes, Demeter's creative processes seem rational.¹¹

NOVEL AS TRAVEL BOOK

The reliable/unreliable narrator, biography/fiction, realism/fabulation dualities of *The Studhorse Man* must be placed in the context of another genre to which Demeter's narrative belongs: the travel book. In 1968, the year before the publication of *The Studhorse Man*, Kroetsch published a travel book entitled *Alberta*. Like *The Studhorse Man*, *Alberta* describes the adventures of a man traveling in Alberta, traversing its landscape and meeting its people. Clearly Kroetsch's research for *Alberta* was also a part of the research for *The Studhorse Man*. The position of the narrator with relation to the text is remarkably similar in the travel book and the novel. *Alberta*, as a non-fiction piece, presumably is narrated by Kroetsch himself and ostensibly describes his actual experiences as a traveler returning to his native province. Like *The Studhorse Man*'s fictional narrator, *Alberta*'s narrator has researched the relevant material; is personally involved in his subject, which includes material about members of his family; provides detailed, eye-witness accounts; and uses a lively, precise vocabulary. The tales that the persona of the travel book tells, like Demeter's, often have a larger than life quality to them, not surprisingly, since the tall tale is a characteristic

type of discourse for the region, perhaps stemming from the pioneer's need to excel at mastering the adverse environment. The trip through the Canadian Rockies tells of startlingly deep snow preventing the trail from opening until July 12 and amazingly brutal cold: "Don't talk to me; if I talk my face will crack with the cold," says an American. The conversations Kroetsch recounts in Edmonton contain the braggart speech of the ancient epic hero—or of the macho cowboy of the old west. The Kroetsch persona takes on some of the naiveté Demeter later displays: "All on a hundred and sixty acres?"¹²

His dead-pan comments border on the absurd—possibly the insane: "Ted and I further agreed on the primacy of God's command to love, and on the naturalness of nature." They spar in a re-enactment of the epic taunt:

'I'll pitch horseshoes with anybody,' he said.
'I once grew a beard, myself,' I countered.

But again I found my story topped. Ted was sick one winter, and one day met a friend who had been sick and got well. 'How'd you do it?' Ted asked. 'I ate garlic,' the friend answered. Ted went to the store for garlic, and while buying it he decided if he was going to eat garlic he might as well grow a beard. 'Never had a cold or sore throat since I let it grow,' he explained. 'And if you had one yourself, you know how the wife likes it.'¹³

"The voice. The voice" of the novel, then, has a beginning in the voice—or voices—of the travel book. Kroetsch affirms the oral tradition as a source of literary tradition in "On Being an Alberta Writer": "The great subtext of prairie literature is our oral tradition." He asserts that "the oral tradition, become a literary tradition, points us back to our own landscape, our recent ancestors, and the characteristic expressions and modes of our own speech."¹⁴

In Kroetsch's vision, Alberta exists as a pastiche composed not only of its mountains and prairies and rivers, its cities and towns,

but also of its history past and present as told by historians and by its individual inhabitants (each with his or her own stories) and by its artists. The introduction to the 1993 edition of *Alberta* emphasizes this postmodernist vision by constantly moving between descriptions of places Kroetsch revisits and the stories connected with each place. Interpretive centers tell the story of the dinosaurs ("a kind of fiction," Kroetsch learns at the Royal Tyrrell Museum) or the Frank Slide; individual Albertans recount the stories of being cowboys and cowgirls and farmers; a parade visualizes the stories of Kroetsch's home town; artists and sculptors reveal more of Alberta's story in their art; the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village depicts the stories of an ethnic group; local people tell tales of singer k. d. lang or Kroetsch himself as perceived in Alberta; the published stories written by Joy Kogawa and Rudy Wiebe and Aritha Van Herk bring places in the province to life. Kroetsch poses the question, "where to find Alberta?" and gives a postmodern answer: "we learned that to understand a place you go and take a close look, then you think for a long time about the fragments that constitute your perceptions. And then you guess at what the story might be." Tall tales, so characteristic of the plains region, define Alberta as distinctively as do facts about blue herons, white pelicans, and pronghorn antelopes or the cost of homesteading a bush quarter.¹⁵ The postmodern vision conflates history, biography, autobiography, travel narrative, and fiction, insisting that *all* stories be seen as *stories*.

RECOUNTING WONDERS

We expect travel narratives to tell us of true but amazing places and adventures. Conventionally, we believe the voice of a traveler, even when it recounts wonders. Hence, comparable scenes from *The Studhorse Man* seem as sane and reliably recounted as their counterparts in *Alberta*. For example, Demeter records that when Hazard's frightened horses block a truck driver's route, the

two men exchange insults, shouting (with the help of bystanders) some seventeen different slang words for the male sexual organ while girls scream and clap, chanting, "Shame! Shame!" The exaggeration of the seventeen slang terms is offset by Demeter's insistence that his "rather extensive investigations into timetables" verifies that the passing of a CPR freight train that frightened Poseidon occurred at "exactly 8:44 A.M." Similarly, when Demeter records the conversation with Uncle Tad in which Tad lists the ten "degrees of affinity and consanguinity which, under the statutes in that behalf, bar the lawful solemnization of marriage," he notes that this conversation took place in Hazard's dream. Demeter's interspersed "account of my own reassuring experience at the circus" as a child enhances the humor, while adding a touch of conventional realism to the fantasy of the dream.¹⁶

The pastiche effect in the novel echoes the pastiche that traveler Kroetsch observes in the province:

On that day all traffic is barred from the main street and dozens of booths cater to visitors. The Church of God ladies serve delicious home-made pies. The Loyal Order of Moose raffles off a pig. CFCW, 'Your Rodeo Radio Station', plays country music from a trailer all day, insisting loudly that 'Country Music is Canada'. Five self-conscious, long-haired local boys in the back of a pick-up truck turn up their electric guitars and sing of their unhappy love, while four Hutterite girls in long skirts and headscarves watch quietly, each of them now and then touching her face to a cone of candy floss. The Women's Christian Temperance Union wages its ceaseless war from a booth outside the town's most popular beer parlour. Children line up to ride a Ferris wheel, or a merry-go-round, or a string of ponies that walk all day in a circle while the owner sells tickets from the window of his truck. The newest pieces of farm machinery, fiercely green and yellow and red, look like something out of science fiction.

The history of the province is visualized as a pastiche within the scenery:

I watched out the window; I could see the Roman dome of the Parliament Building, with the heavy black lines of the High Level Bridge beyond spanning the valley of the North Saskatchewan. It grows on you; the heavy old bridge where trains flash across, coming north from Calgary, the valley deep and green below, the river running free. Beyond an unmarked spot that was mile zero to the voyageurs and their fur-laden canoes stand the towers of the University of Alberta.¹⁷

The split between the subject of the tale and the teller of the tale in the novel parallels the split between Kroetsch as recounter of his own adventures in the travel book and Kroetsch as adventurer. The persona Kroetsch projects in *Alberta* is slightly daring, occasionally amusingly dumb, and vaguely nutty. Thomas, in an article on *Alberta*, finds "the autobiographical record . . . curiously detached and lonely."¹⁸ He traces this stance to passages in journals in which Kroetsch reflects on his feeling of detachment. As readers, we constantly have a sense of Kroetsch standing outside, watching himself take this trip in a sophisticated but affectionate, detached mood:

. . . Jane and Sheila were content to eat the best parts of the lunch and marvel at the scene, for Mount Chephren, at 10,710 feet, is exceptional even in this region of majesty, both for its classic beehive contours and for its reputation as a weather-breeder. John and I were beginning to despair as we descended fishless, and Chephren behind us was gathering a few wisps of cloud.¹⁹

In the travel book, life becomes a tale as speaker and actor become separated. Like the travel writer, Demeter as Hazard's biographer projects a fairly detached, outside view of a

man with a monomania about a horse and a strange relationship with a woman, and yet in some respects speaker and subject are one, because Demeter's identity gradually merges with that of his subject: both love the same woman, by the middle of the book both are on the same quest, and at the end neither of them marries Martha. Kroetsch himself says, "The narrator is being taken over by someone else's dream." John Moss writes, "In Kroetsch's vision of reality confronted by itself, the possessed and the possessor, the pursued and the pursuer, ultimately are one." Kroetsch describes as very Canadian "the *doppelgänger* thing. You meet yourself in another form."²⁰

The manuscripts of *The Studhorse Man* reveal revisions in the ending that underscore the identification of biographer and subject of the biography. In early versions, Hazard Lepage returns to Martha Proudfoot and they live together for seven years until "poor Hazard on his 59th birthday was kicked into rags and pieces by Poseidon, the first colt born of Martha's five Arabs": "He became a meek fool of a faithful (if not legal) husband and a doting fool of a father; a victim of the illusion that he was comfortable and happy, he stumbled into death and left behind him a prospering widow." In the final version, instead of merely saying, "I was young that night," the narrator takes on the identity of the subject of the biography: "That morning I was D. Proudfoot, Studhorse Man," leading the horses to Hazard's mansion.²¹ He and Hazard are ultimately also alike in getting neither the horses nor Martha. Hazard is killed by his stallion shortly after his arrival at the mansion, Demeter is arrested for occupying the mansion and holding the horses at gunpoint, and Martha takes Eugene Utter as her consort. The revised version, then, asserts the identification of the insane/obsessed biographer and the sane/obsessed subject of the biography, even as Kroetsch the teller and Kroetsch the adventurer in the travel book are assumed by the conventions of the genres to be one.

Both speakers present a world of wonders. In the travel genre, wonders—the strange re-

alities of the unknown place and its inhabitants—are the reason we read. We are prepared to believe the speaker of the travel book implicitly; because to some extent *The Studhorse Man* is a travel book, we trust its narrative voice. Like the tall tale, the travel book engages by juxtaposition of its fantastic elements with its realistic details.

WONDERS IN PIONEER NARRATIVES

Descriptions of prairie life in pioneer narratives read like tall tales, defining the prairie region as a world of wonders. A plague of grasshoppers in Kansas in 1874 caused incredible damage that extended beyond the crops; Adelheit Viets describes an experience reminiscent of a tall tale: "The storm of grasshoppers came one Sunday. I remember that I was wearing a dress of white with a green stripe. The grasshoppers settled on me and ate up every bit of the green stripe in that dress before anything could be done about it." The anonymous ballad of "The Alberta Homesteader" makes light of the unique dangers of pioneer life in details that have the flavor of a tall tale: "How happy I feel when I roll into bed, / The rattlesnake rattles a tune at my head."²²

In *Over Prairie Trails* (1922), Frederick Philip Grove writes of a Canadian prairie fog so strange and unique that comparing it to a tidal wave seems inadequate:

Though my senses failed to perceive the slightest breath of a breeze, the fog was brewing and whirling, and huge spheres seemed to be forming in it, and to roll forward, slowly, and sometimes to recede, as if they had encountered an obstacle and rebounded clumsily. I had seen a tidal wave, fifty or more feet high, sweep up the "bore" of a river at the head of the Bay of Fundy. I was reminded of the sight; but here everything seemed to proceed in a strangely, weirdly leisurely way. There was none of that rush, of that hurry about this fog that characterizes water. Besides there seemed to be no

end to the wave above; it reached up as far as your eye could see—now bulging in, now out, but always advancing.

"Brewing," "whirling," "bulging," and "advancing" provide a sense of incredible movement that contrasts paradoxically with the stillness of the air and the "leisurely way" the fog proceeds. The strange tidal bore phenomenon seen in the Maritimes is a mere "fifty or more feet high," whereas the fog extends "up as far as your eye could see," certainly a natural occurrence deserving the adverbs "strangely, weirdly." At another point Grove describes an amazing snowstorm: "the snowflakes were small and like little round granules, hitting the panes of the windows with little sounds of 'ping-ping.'" He speaks of "a relentless gale" and visibility of less than two to three hundred yards, concluding, "The inhabitant of the middle latitudes of this continent has no data to picture to himself what a snowstorm in the north may be."²³

Like the travel narrative tradition and the prairie tradition, Canadian literary tradition prepares us to accept wonders; Kroetsch's emphatic use of wonders links his novel with the pioneer narratives of the early settlers in Ontario. Catharine Parr Traill, in *The Backwoods of Canada* (1836), constantly speaks of wonders. Describing a red squirrel she notes, "I was surprised and amused by the agility and courage displayed by this innocent creature; I could hardly have given credence to the circumstance had I not been an eye-witness of its conduct." In *Roughing it in the Bush* (1852), Susanna Moodie writes of the strangeness of the new land as she travels to Ontario: "The scenery through which we were passing was so new to me, so unlike anything that I had ever beheld before, that, in spite of its monotonous character, it won me from my melancholy, and I began to look about me with considerable interest." In the woods, she gathers "rare specimens of strange plants and flowers. Every object that met my eyes was new to me, and produced that peculiar excitement which has

its origin in a thirst for knowledge and a love of variety."²⁴

ODYSSEUS AND OTHER ALLUSIONS

The world of wonders—the tall tale, the fabulation—in *The Studhorse Man* validates prairie experience and Canadian experience in the context of the continuum of human experience. Homer's *Odyssey* functions as an archetypal pattern underlying the story of Hazard, reminding readers that narrations of the wonderful adventures of a traveler have been accepted as part of European literary tradition from the beginning; that Hazard fails in his quest for wife and kingdom not only links his story, for example, with Hamlet's (with Eugene Utter in the Fortinbras role), but also subverts one mythic pattern while invoking another. The death and resurrection pattern of Hazard's life echoes the wondrous pattern Christians have believed in for centuries, while Hazard's ultimate death subverts it. The subversive elements in *The Studhorse Man* reveal that the great tradition—whether defined as European, Christian, Canadian, or prairie—is always in flux.

Furthermore, by using the stories of Odysseus and Christ as intertexts, Kroetsch links *The Studhorse Man* to two germinal works in the canon of Canadian fiction: Hugh MacLennan's *Barometer Rising* (1941), in which the Odysseus story appears in a Canadian Maritime landscape to indicate that European tradition has crossed the Atlantic to validate Canada's emerging identity, and Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House* (1941), which probes the meaning of Christian faith in a Saskatchewan prairie town. MacLennan's novel presents a man returning wounded and in disgrace from World War I, hoping to be able to clear his name and marry his sweetheart, Penelope Wain. Caught up in the tragic events caused by the accidental explosion of a munitions ship in Halifax Harbor, MacLennan's Odysseus-like character shows his heroism in the relief efforts while his good

name and his love are restored by events beyond his control. In the final scene of the novel, instead of telling Penelope of his love for her, MacLennan's hero, overwhelmed by patriotic feeling, thinks of his love for Canada:

Why was he glad to be back? It was so much more than a man could ever put into words. It was more than the idea that he was young enough to see a great country move into its destiny. . . . In returning home he knew that he was doing more than coming back to familiar surroundings. For better or worse he was entering the future, he was identifying himself with the still-hidden forces which were doomed to shape humanity as certainly as the tiny states of Europe had shaped the past. . . . But if there were enough Canadians like himself, half-American and half-English, then the day was inevitable when the halves would join and his country would become the central arch which united the new order.²⁵

In *As for Me and My House*, Ross depicts a small prairie town through the eyes of a minister's wife; she sees hypocrisy everywhere, while her husband preaches on the biblical text, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."²⁶ In contrast to MacLennan's heavy-handed insistence on the patriotic homecoming to a woman with the same name as Odysseus's wife and Ross's soberly serious presentation of questions of faith and action in the context of the Christian tradition, Kroetsch treats the classical and Christian material he borrows humorously. Hazard-Odysseus regains his kingdom by accidents, but here Fate is a trickster: Hazard-Christ apparently dies in a woman's bed (rather than on a cross) and is laid out in an ice house (rather than a sepulchre), where another woman brings about his comic Resurrection sexually, only to be killed definitively by his horse in a parody of the Ascension: "And Hazard Lepage flew upward through the air as if he were a spirit rising to the sky; but his body came back to earth, under the sicken-

ing crunch of the stallion's hoofs."²⁷ Both the pastiche effect of borrowing from multiple traditions and the parodic nature of the borrowing mark *The Studhorse Man* as postmodern.

CONCLUSION

The Studhorse Man is a borderland. Russell Brown sees the borderland as typically Canadian, finding "a striking insistence within Canadian narratives on patterns of repetition with a difference, on doubles that must be distinguished, on instances of 'the same but never all the same.'" W. J. Keith calls the novel one of Kroetsch's "unequivocally intellectual tall tales," while according to Aritha Van Herk it is "a baroque overstatement of Edenic homesickness." Linda Hutcheon describes it as a biography and a parody of a biography, a mythic quest and a parody of a mythic quest. It is both new and traditional: "While Kroetsch is an innovator, however, he writes with a full knowledge of literary and critical tradition, and he insists that this tradition be recognized through the creative act, even as he celebrates contemporary theory and practice," declares Robert Lecker.²⁸

Looking at *The Studhorse Man* in conjunction with *Alberta* clarifies that *The Studhorse Man*, for all its postmodern characteristics, is a highly traditional Canadian work. By engaging in fabulation, Kroetsch links his novel to the tall tale, the indigenous Euro-Canadian narrative form of the Plains region. By linking *The Studhorse Man* to the world of wonders thesis of the travel book genre, Kroetsch connects his regional novel to national tradition. European and Christian intertexts make the novel interact parodically with the tradition of western thought. Because we engage with the narrator of *The Studhorse Man* before knowing he is mad, because we recognize fabulation and assent to engage in it, and because we find the world of wonders familiar from travel literature, from the Canadian tradition of pioneer narratives, and from the Western European and Christian traditions, although there are indications that Demeter

is insane, we want to believe him and to assent to the story he tells. Thus, for all Kroetsch's questions about the fictive genre of the novel—fiction, biography, autobiography, or travel narrative—we end, as readers, where we begin, with the story of Hazard Lepage, Studhorse Man.

NOTES

Research for this essay was supported by grants from the St. Mary's College Faculty Development Fund.

1. Robert Kroetsch, *The Robert Kroetsch Papers*, Special Collections Division, University of Calgary Library, MsC27.10.1. Permission to quote from Robert Kroetsch's manuscripts has been granted by the Special Collections Division, University of Calgary Library, and by Robert Kroetsch (28 April 1994).
2. Kroetsch Papers (note 1 above), 27.10.3, *The Studhorse Man* draft 3, p. 1.
3. Kroetsch Papers (note 1 above), 27.10.3, *The Studhorse Man* draft 3, p. 2.
4. Kroetsch Papers (note 1 above), 27.2.4.67a, Robert Kroetsch to Andrew Pennycook, 25 March 1969.
5. Robert Kroetsch, *The Studhorse Man* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1969; reprint, New Press Canadian Classics, Toronto: General Publishing Co., 1982), p. 7 (page citations are to the reprint edition).
6. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
7. Peter Thomas, *Robert Kroetsch* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1980), pp. 62-63; Kroetsch, *Studhorse Man* (note 5 above), p. 125.
8. Peter Thomas, "Robert Kroetsch and His Works," *Canadian Writers and Their Works*, Fiction Series, Vol. 10, ed. Robert Lecker, Jack David, Ellen Quigley (Toronto: ECW, 1989), p. 265.
9. M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 5th ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, 1981), p. 122.
10. Kroetsch, *Studhorse Man* (note 5 above), pp. 10, 9, 24, 99, 18.
11. Kroetsch, *Studhorse Man* (note 5 above), pp. 152, 142; Thomas, *Robert Kroetsch* (note 7 above), p. 62, notes the parody of Victorian narrators.
12. Wilfrid Eggleston, *The Frontier in Canadian Letters* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), p. 40, characterizes the frontier hero as the one possessing the greatest survival skills. Robert Kroetsch, *Alberta* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968), pp. 47, 50, 133.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
14. Robert Kroetsch, "On Being an Alberta Writer," 1983, reprinted in *A Passion for Identity: An Introduction to Canadian Studies*, ed. Eli Mandel and David Taras (Toronto: Methuen, 1987), pp. 340, 341.
15. Robert Kroetsch, Introduction to *Alberta*, 2nd ed. (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1993), pp. 3, 2, 4.
16. Kroetsch, *Studhorse Man* (note 5 above), pp. 42-43, 111, 110.
17. Kroetsch, *Alberta* (note 12 above), pp. 11-12, 130.
18. Peter Thomas, "Keeping Mum: Kroetsch's *Alberta*," *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 2 (Spring 1973): 54.
19. Kroetsch, *Alberta* (note 12 above), p. 34.
20. Robert Kroetsch, "A Conversation with Margaret Laurence," in *Trace: Prairie Writers on Writing*, ed. Birk Sproxtton (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1986), pp. 22, 26; John Moss, *Patterns of Isolation in English Canadian Fiction* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), p. 41.
21. Kroetsch Papers (note 1 above), 27.10.3, *The Studhorse Man* draft 3, pp. 338, 339, 310; Kroetsch, *Studhorse Man* (note 5 above), p. 156.
22. Viets quoted in Joanna L. Stratton, *Pioneer Women: Voices from the Kansas Frontier* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), p. 105; "The Alberta Homesteader," *Canadian Anthology*, 3rd ed., ed. Carl F. Klinck and Reginald E. Watters (Toronto: Gage, 1974), p. 137.
23. Frederick Philip Grove, *Over Prairie Trails* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1922; reprint, 1984), pp. 21-22, 60.
24. Catharine Parr Traill, *The Backwoods of Canada* (1836; reprint, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966), p. 96; Susanna Moodie, *Roughing it in the Bush* (1852; reprint, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1962), pp. 68, 118.
25. Hugh MacLennan, *Barometer Rising* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1941; reprint, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991), p. 218.
26. Sinclair Ross, *As for Me and My House* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1941; reprint, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989), p. 7. The Afterword to this edition is by Robert Kroetsch.
27. Kroetsch, *Studhorse Man* (note 5 above), p. 172.
28. Russell Brown, "The Written Line," in *Borderlands: Essays in Canadian-American Relations*, ed. Robert Lecker (Toronto: ECW, 1991), p. 13; W. J. Keith, *Canadian Literature in English* (New York: Longman, 1985), p. 165; Aritha Van Herk, "A Gentle Circumcision," in *Trace*, ed. Sproxtton (note 20 above), p. 264; Linda Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 164-65; Robert Lecker, *Robert Kroetsch* (Boston: Twayne, 1986), Preface, n.p.