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“GONE BACK TO ALBERTA”

ROBERT KROETSCH REWRITING THE GREAT PLAINS

FRANCES W. KAYE AND ROBERT THACKER

Maybe that did it, I thought—maybe that was one of the things that turned me into a writer—my playing [softball] far out in the field. The playing, and the watching that went with it. The listening, out there. The wanting to enter the game while fearing that someone might hit the ball in my direction. The being isolated, out there in the prairie wind and the summer light; my striking up a conversation with a nearby gopher as I watched the pitched ball. . . . The caring so much, so enduringly, for the movements of small creatures, for the ongoing game, for all the shouting and the laughter that are some of the various names of love.

—Robert Kroetsch, *Alberta* ¹

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As its name suggests, postmodernism has been an intellectual movement that defines itself by what it is not. Most often seen in literary analysis and derived from modernism—itself a postromanticism, an urge and movement that broke normative literary forms inherited from the nineteenth century—postmodernism undercuts rather than concludes, making its primary characteristics discontinuity and indeterminacy. Somewhat curiously, this aligns it with the region of the Great Plains, habitually defined in terms of what it lacks—lack of rainfall, lack of trees, lack of hills—and even with the Native peoples, the First Nations of the region, habitually described as *preliterate*, *prehistoric*, *precontact*. Canada, which includes half the physiographic region of the Great Plains, tends to define itself as *not* the United States of America. What is more, these alignments replicate Euro-American discovery of the Plains, actually and imaginatively. It was truly *terra incognita*.

Postmodernism is also concerned with the search for the hidden, including questions not normally asked, with games and systems, with becoming rather than being, with playfulness,

with a refusal of meaning. Its being is a perpetual critique, leaving assumption after assumption after assumption dissected, *displayed* in its forlorn misappreciation for all to see. Indeed—and here we go postmodernistly—is there anything other than an intellectual game involved in the linking of the Great Plains to postmodernism or postmodernism to the scholarly study of regionalism?

Postmodernism, like all previous intellectual movements, is a repackaging of age-old concerns about truth and truth-telling. It sets forth a methodology combining the scientific and social concerns of its time with theories that ask different questions of existing bodies of knowledge or that posit as worthy research topics previously deemed insignificant. In our time relativity, uncertainty, and subatomic physics have given us significantly different models of the universe than those of Newtonian physics or Darwinian biology. Wars of mass destruction and transportation and communications that literally give us the world at our fingertips have made global diversity tangible. The period some of us have taken to calling postmodern is different from all the periods that preceded it, as they were different from their predecessors, and this has necessarily called forth new intellectual structures for sorting out knowledge.

This essay suggests ways and reasons to ask postmodern questions about the Great Plains. This entire issue focuses on the writing of Robert Kroetsch, novelist, poet, and essayist. His work, with its thorough and explicit grounding in place set off against his playful insistence that whatever we are reading can never be “true” to life, offers us a field for generating new questions and new areas for research. He forces us to meditate on the gap between all forms of representation and what we so inadequately call “life” as it is lived in the region we both discover and invent as “The Great Plains.”

If the postmodernist gets in a red pickup, mashes the accelerator a few times, thrusts in the clutch, turns the key, and nothing happens, she is not apt to chalk it up to indeter-

minacy but to a dead battery, notwithstanding postmodernism's dislike of metaphor. Postmodernism is a reaction, a search for naïveté, in response to a world of increasingly complex technological systems—like automobiles—that increasingly function as intended. Twentieth-century scientific models of the world, particularly in physics, move toward uncertainty and chaos, and postmodernism represents a parallel move in the humanities. Just as modernism drew upon “primitivism,” often consciously or unconsciously borrowed from African, Pacific, or Native American cultures, postmodernism depends on the ambivalence between technological structures defining what things mean and a need to undercut the idea that history or names or systems can assign fixed meanings. Postmodernism resists the equation of cause and effect operating as simply in human affairs as the key turns on the car—unless the battery is dead.

HISTORY

I have considerable disdain or distrust for history. History is a form of narrative that is coercive. I don't trust the narrative of history because it begins from meaning instead of discovering meanings along the way. I think myth dares to discover its way toward meanings (if you have to have meaning). Myth comes at its stories completely from the other direction.²

Just as Robert Kroetsch might assert his disdain or distrust for history (although most historians would argue that his implied definition is distorted and vastly oversimplified), most historians reciprocate by disdaining, or at least distrusting, postmodernism for its determined refusal to mean. Such distrust shows up not in argument but in the framing of analysis in terms to which postmodernism is not relevant. Historians choose systems that, like cars, are knowable, in which questions generate specific answers. Thus Frederick C. Luebke, writing on “Regionalism and the Great Plains,” surveys the development of the study of regionalism in

the twentieth century, particularly in history and geography, and points out complications that can no longer be ignored within the system. In the 1960s "the concepts of diversity, nonconformity, and dissent gradually acquired an unprecedented respectability," as did, once again, regionalism. Early regionalism focused on the environment; more recent studies focus on "culture, showing how it filters reality and fosters a wide range of behavior within a single environment." Luebke concludes, "Regions are therefore best conceptualized in terms of the interplay between environment and culture; they are best described and analyzed through appropriate comparisons in time, space, and culture."³

The New Western Historians have done exactly this. Patricia Limerick in *Legacy of Conquest* describes the undertaking metaphorically, in terms of theater:

Everyone became an actor in everyone else's play; understanding any part of the play now requires us to take account of the whole. It is perfectly possible to watch a play and keep track of, even identify with, several characters at once, even when those characters are in direct conflict with each other and within themselves. The ethnic diversity of Western history asks only that: pay attention to the parts, and pay attention to the whole.⁴

Both Luebke and Limerick are calling for a new system, but one that remains a closed and essentially knowable system. The play is more involved, more tragic even, but it still has informing myth, a web of meaning that one may comprehend in an orderly fashion. (If it is not the battery that is causing the problem, maybe the ignition switch has a worn contact or the starter motor has a short.) Yet to suggest that the story of the West has many characters with whom the viewer may identify, that it is not a melodrama of "good guys" and "bad guys," has an undeniable power to shock lay audiences, if not professional historians, as we can see

clearly in the outraged public reaction to the exhibition "The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920," organized by the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, and shown there, in the nation's capital, from March through July of 1991. Historians have at least to some degree always accepted pluralism and always engaged themselves in a revisioning of the American West, but members of the public and of Congress reacted angrily to exhibition labels suggesting that Indians may have been innocent victims and white pioneers greedy aggressors.⁵

Curiously, this reaction ignored the very ambiguity of even the most popular versions of the psychic history of the West. Captain Kirby York, the John Wayne figure in *Fort Apache* (1948), for instance, admires and respects Geronimo and Cochise, recognizes them as patriots fighting for the lives of their own people, and despises the greedy and stupid white officials and officers. But he hates these white men all the more because he sees no possible alternative to being on their side; and in fact, at the end of the movie, he represents their side. "This is the fate of an ironic hero," writes Richard McGee, "to turn a lie into a legend (myth) as a weapon of civilization."⁶ The shock of the exhibition was not in suggesting that Euro-Americans were venal, but in showing that historians, unlike Captain York, can resist the lie and thereby hinting that he, too, might have had a choice other than Apaches or white men.

Although the New Western Historians say little that has not been implicit to some degree in traditional histories of the West, they provide a synthesis and an emphasis shocking to many readers. Their interpretations may not challenge those of all academic historians, but they do challenge popular thinking, even though popular history, myth, belief, ideology—call it what you will—of the West has always itself been ambiguous. (After having survived the shock of turning the key to nothing, one is not ready for the second shock

of jumper cables that produce a second no response.) New Western History remains a complex but essentially closed and knowable history—it is not postmodern.

Other historians have been closer than the New Western Historians to postmodernism or at least to the kinds of questions postmodernists ask. Gene Wise's *American Historical Interpretations* has never really had much impact upon historians, but Wise's use of literature, specifically William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, as a model for history shows the value of postmodernism to history and regional studies. Faulkner is an especially significant choice: the American author most noted for his devotion to region and whose work strikingly prefigured postmodernism and influenced both South American magic realism and contemporary Native North American writing, two notably postmodern fields. According to Wise, the traditional or modernist historian holds as ideal the recovery of a single past that really happened. The historian assumes that constraints on knowing this past are technical rather than philosophical: no body of scholars can collect and evaluate enough material to eliminate ambiguities or completely exclude subjective concerns from the historian's own society. Wise, on the other hand, argues that this ideal is philosophically unrealizable. The ambiguities are both part of the past—different participants had different, often irreconcilable points of view—and also part of the idea of knowledge itself, since human apprehension is subjective and emotional. At the same time, he concludes that pure relativism is unsatisfactory as well. What he argues for is recognition that the knowable and unknowable intertwine.⁷ The past, as novelist Margaret Laurence reminds us, changes along with the present:

*A popular misconception is that we can't change the past—everyone is constantly changing their own past, recalling it, revising it. What really happened? A meaningless question. But one I keep trying to answer, knowing there is no answer.*⁸

The past, despite its material, written, and oral fragments, is exactly that: past. And hence unrecoverable. What we have instead is our apprehension of the past in the present, and that depends upon the questions we of the present choose to ask the past.

Hayden White, a philosopher of history, has done much to explore these paradoxes. "Neither reality nor the meaning of history," he writes, "is 'out there' in the form of a story awaiting only a historian to discern its outline and identify the plot that comprises its meaning."⁹ The most useful discussion for our regionalist purposes, however, is William Cronon's 1992 article in the *Journal of American History*, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative."¹⁰ Cronon explicitly takes up postmodernism's challenge to the idea of "story," the ordering necessary to writing coherent history but also the ordering that by its own internal logic imposes an order, White's "emplotment," on the elements it sets up to define. "Narrative succeeds to the extent that it hides the discontinuities, ellipses, and contradictory experiences that would undermine the intended meaning of its story" (1349-50). To understand is to impose a plot; to impose a plot is to foreclose the possibility of other understandings, since a plot determines both what will be included and, as a corollary, excluded.

Cronon focuses on the Great Plains of the United States and on his own field, environmental history. He begins by discussing two works published in the same year (1979), on the same topic, and with virtually identical titles: Paul Bonnifield's *The Dust Bowl* and Donald Worster's *Dust Bowl*.¹¹ Both are scrupulously researched and carefully written, but Bonnifield's study is in the form of a national epic, Worster's in the form of a global tragedy. For Bonnifield the Dust Bowl was a time of testing from which the individuals and the culture emerged renewed and strengthened, able to move triumphantly forward. For Worster it was a disaster of global proportions from which the individuals and culture emerged stubbornly unrepentant and unen-

lightened, continuing to move toward a final environmental Armageddon. Cronon looks at other pairs of plains historians. Not only is the form of the story important, but also where one chooses to start or stop. For Walter Prescott Webb, university-trained Euro-American historian, the story of the Great Plains begins with the entry of Anglo Americans and continues into an ever improving future. For traditional Crow leader Plenty Coups, the story begins at the beginning of time and ends with the disappearance of the buffalo.

The reconciliation of Webb and Plenty Coups is easier than the reconciliation of Bonnifield and Worster. It involves the strategy of the New Western historians, lengthening the narrative and adding to the number of narrators. Bonnifield and Worster, however, seem to present an either/or dichotomy. Either Bonnifield is right or Worster is right. (Or neither is right.) For Cronon this dilemma requires a resolution.

Because stories concern the consequences of actions that are potentially valued in quite different ways, whether by agent, narrator, or audience, we can achieve no neutral objectivity in writing them. . . . If our goal is to tell tales that make the past meaningful, then we cannot escape struggling over the values that define what meaning is.

. . . How, for instance, are we to choose among the infinite stories that our different values seem capable of generating? (1370)

Cronon rejects the most obvious answer to his question: "To test a narrative by its ability to include facts—the relevance of which is defined by the narrative's own plot—is to slide rapidly into tautology" (p. 1371, n. 44). He then tries to construct a partial solution to his dilemma: History cannot contravene known facts. (One cannot have lied in claiming to have turned the car key.) For environmental historians such facts include environmental

limits. Historians, Cronon says, write for a community of scholars who consistently challenge each other's narratives and keep them with the "right" story. Cronon's conclusion, however, is finally subjective and personal:

I would assert the virtues of narrative as our best and most compelling tool for searching out meaning in a conflicted and contradictory world. . . . At its best . . . historical storytelling helps keep us morally engaged with the world by showing us how to care about it and its origins in ways we had not done before. (1374-75)

But Cronon still does not tell us who is "right"—Bonnifield or Worster—though he has set them up against each other, and his own work suggests that his moral engagement is closer to Worster's than to Bonnifield's.

Cronon's article is now beginning to garner significant response. David Demeritt, in the *Journal of Historical Geography*, succinctly notes some of the contradictions inherent in Cronon's conclusion. Demeritt points out that the "fact" that the United States entered World War II on 7 December 1941 is widely known and accepted, despite the less known but equally substantiable "fact" that "American warships had been skirmishing with German submarines since September 1941." Demeritt concludes:

Just as historic facts are constructed by historians, facts about nature are constructed by natural scientists. . . .

Cronon and many other environmental historians react with great fear and anxiety to the suggestion that the past and even nature itself are things we construct. They are caught in the terms of the objectivist/relativist dichotomy whereby relativism is the only alternative to a realist epistemology. Relativism is logically self-refuting and morally repugnant, but it is not the only game in town. We do not need to retreat to the ruined redoubt of realism to keep relativism at bay.

Though facts, history, and nature may have no more concrete claim on us than that they work for us, we can use them all the same. . . . As long as we agree to live by them, constructed or not, facts, history and nature can help explain the world we make for ourselves to ourselves. . . . [A] recognition of the discursive construction of knowledge does not preclude making moral choices about the world. . . .

Cronon responds that "the redoubt of realism is not quite so ruined as Demeritt would have us believe," reminding us that the "objectivist-relativist dualism" is as old as philosophy. "One transcends some paradoxes by passing *through* them, not by wishing they would go away."¹²

Clearly the concerns of Cronon and Demeritt are significant to all readers of this journal. *Great Plains Quarterly* defines itself as dedicated to the publication of narratives that inform readers about some aspect of the Great Plains region. How can a writer like Robert Kroetsch, with his distrust of history as a coercive narrative—and William Cronon's morally engaged narrative is explicitly coercive, as both he and Demeritt acknowledge—serve the regionalist or historian like Cronon who finds "something profoundly unsatisfying and ultimately self-deluding about an endless postmodernist deconstruction of texts that fails to ground itself in history, in community, in politics, and finally in the moral problem of living on earth" (1374)? The simple, and thus suspect, answer is that postmodernism, particularly homegrown North American postmodernism, suffers none of these failures. The postmodern engagement is as intense as Cronon's, but it is on a different plane. Arguably, too, Robert Kroetsch not so much illustrates this but, in ways both fundamental and complex, embodies such a postmodernist stance. Fiction may be one of the most satisfactory ways in which to pass *through* the paradox.

Let us look at Kroetsch's own version of the Dust Bowl, *The Words of My Roaring*.¹³ This

1966 novel is early Kroetsch, written before he had developed his consciously postmodern critical stance, but it reveals him very much embarked in that direction. In the novel he deconstructs myth to discover a sense of place, using the spoken language of the community to create his written text. A comic novel, *Words* departs outrageously from the idea of regional realism an earlier writer like Willa Cather would have presented, and yet it is thoroughly and very specifically grounded "in history, in community, in politics, and finally in the moral problem of living on earth." It is "about" the 1935 provincial elections in Alberta, which saw the rise of the Social Credit party under William C. "Bible Bill" Aberhart, who had his beginnings as a teacher and radio preacher in Calgary during the late 1920s and into the Depression, and who sprang from his Sunday afternoon Bible radio program (which reached some 350,000 listeners at its height) to the premier's office in that election.¹⁴ His legacy affects Alberta still, since Preston Manning, Leader of the Reform Party of Canada (which won fifty-two seats in the Canadian House of Commons in the 1993 election, fifty-one from western Canada) is the son of the last Social Credit premier of Alberta, Ernest Charles Manning. Thus the election Kroetsch takes as his subject was a "watershed"—the irony will be evident presently—election in Alberta history.

Narrated by one Johnnie Judas Backstrom, absurd underdog candidate in a rural riding, the novel parodies history and politics, immerses itself in birth and death (Johnnie is an undertaker; his opponent is Doc Murdoch, who delivered him), samples the community of small town bars and stampedes, morally engages in creating a trickster myth for Johnnie and uncreating the Ontario establishment myth of his opponent, and paradoxically champions the followers of the preacher politician Applecart, parody of Aberhart. It is not the history Kroetsch applauds here, since he has little use for Aberhart, but the vitality of the myth Social Credit fed to a desperate people and the vibrancy of their acceptance of

it—a myth which, as suggested, still has currency in Alberta. But Kroetsch also parodies the myth of the garden and its inapplicability to the Great Plains. Written thirteen years earlier than the two Dustbowl histories Cronon discusses and set in Canada rather than the United States, *The Words of My Roaring* provides not a synthesis of Bonnifield and Worster but a strategy for benefiting from their contradictions. Worster's plot is tragic even if his characters are good guys; Bonnifield's good guys are even more admirable if they are working toward Worster's tragedy. The tension elevates both stories, and the reader may choose one, the other, both alternately, or both, despite their irreconcilability.

Kroetsch's Great Depression carries weight here, as well. Despite his technical disavowal of metanarrative, his attraction to, and reworkings of, classical myths—beginning with *Words* but continuing throughout his fiction and, arguably, reaching an extreme in *What the Crow Said*¹⁵—attests to the felt pull of such myths as metanarratives; that is, he may be subverting their assumed meanings, yet by his very subversion Kroetsch is attesting to their essential attraction to human existence. When Johnnie wins the election by impulsively promising rain and then benefiting from a soaking that arrives election eve, this very real wasteland dissolves in comic redemption. The parody Kroetsch aims at Aberhart or the myth of the garden both undercuts and asserts their attractions. Similarly, by setting *Words* in the midst of the Dust Bowl, Kroetsch is assuming something of the same tragic or apocalyptic cast about that period that Bonnifield and Worster do—the decade was a test of civilization's mores and of people's mettle. Thus in *Alberta*, Kroetsch asserts that "The Canadian prairies were hit as hard as, or harder than, any region in the world" and sees it significant that it was to "The Book of Revelation that political leader William Aberhart turned for deliverance."¹⁶ In his nonfiction Kroetsch mirrors the melding in fiction of the "facts" of the era—that "Canadian prairies were hit as

hard"—and the fabulistic mythic response to such "facts."

But before looking in more detail at Kroetsch's postmodern theory and its applicability to regionalist studies of the Great Plains, we need to consider two other disciplines, archaeology and geography, that Kroetsch relates directly to this methodology.

ARCHAEOLOGY

*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 it's sitting where it's found and not make any assumptions not disrupt the ground and then read from there . . .*¹⁷

Despite Robert Kroetsch's assertion that literary culture is moving "from metaphoric to metonymic" (p. 9) (a distinction discussed below in terms of geography), he is talking metaphorically here. He is also speaking metonymically—using "archaeology" to mean the visitor's view of an archaeological site.

I would much rather see the site than the museum, where it's all carefully assembled and tagged and explained. I like that site, right here, the hot sun, the workers who are semi-wiped out, digging with incredible care, paying attention in that wonderful way. (p. 167)

The fragments discovered on the site are, metaphorically, the fragments of myth, oral tale, and literary influence to be found in any text. To a certain extent, Kroetsch is "inventing" archaeology as a positive mythic force, while at the same time using the metonym of "history" as a limiting force in regional writing. Other prairie regionalists find in history a far more freeing metonym. Rudy Wiebe, for instance, uses history as the jumping-off place for his thoroughly mythic novel *The Temptations of Big Bear*, while in his play *Far As the Eye Can See*, he inserts historical characters—

including William Aberhart—into action set in 1976.¹⁸

Kroetsch's vision of archaeology is not necessarily shared by archaeologists trying to find a theory for their discipline. Like historians who have, in the disciplinary mainstream, concentrated on finding an objective "truth" in the past that followed social science "laws" of human behavior, archaeology, as a discipline, has until recently viewed itself much as Kroetsch does, discovering rather than inventing the past, imposing no plot on its potsherds and pits. More recent theoreticians of archaeology, however, are rejecting their positivist heritage and sounding a good deal like the historian Cronon. Bruce Trigger writes, "In the case of archaeology the situation is even more fraught with difficulties, since, before past human behaviour is explained, it must be inferred from material remains that in turn acquire status as data as a result of theory-influenced and hence at least partly subjective processes of classification."¹⁹ Even at the site, the plot or the story determines where to dig and what to save, a reason why some archaeologists deliberately leave sites untouched so as not to clutter up the material for later archaeologists working off a different plot.

Archaeologists are aware that they must share certain assumptions or their field disappears. For instance, as Guy Gibbon points out, they must assume that "'Archaeological assemblages are the material remains of past human activity' (and not deliberately planted as a joke by fun-loving aliens)...." At the same time, the recognition that they also share ideologically influenced and prescriptive views about "past human activity" has forced archaeologists to question the possibility of "objectivity" in their field. Their discovery that they cannot escape assumptions about particular pasts has made their field "a more uncertain, open, challenging and perhaps anxiety-ridden enterprise than our positivist heritage has indicated."²⁰

The bones and artifacts that enable archaeology and the voice that enables writing unite these two means of knowing in a question

that, oddly enough, rarely disturbs historians: Who owns the past? The question of whether to repatriate human remains—bones, funerary items, and other materials—now in archaeological collections has galvanized museums and Native peoples around the globe. The Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., and the Glenbow in Calgary, Alberta, are only two of the best-known North American institutions to have been the object of organized protests. Chippewa mixed-blood Gerald Vizenor, trickster and postmodern writer himself, makes explicit the connection between narratives and bones in a proposal for a "bone court":

[T]he proposal for bone rights is a postmodern language game with theories on narration and legal philosophies to direct the discourse. . . . The narrative perspective on tribal remains has been neocolonial; tribal bones held in linguistic servitude, measured and compared in autistic social science monologues. Tribal bones are liberated in this proposal, represented in court as narrators and mediators; manumission in postmodern language games.²¹

Vizenor deliberately uses language that separates himself and the bones from the archaeologists, whom he represents as speaking in "autistic social science monologues." Postmodernism and archaeology are thus, for him, antithetical.

Kroetsch uses Native oral tradition and the idea of a Native mythology in much the same way he uses the idea of archaeology. Anthropologists and Native storytellers may have deeply embedded—and opposing—cultural constructs that color their tales, but for Kroetsch the material, like the archaeological remains, is completely new, to be apprehended without any training in what it is supposed to mean. He explains that his research on the Blackfoot creator/trickster figure Old Man (Napi) and his readings in anthropologist Paul Radin's study of the Winnebago trickster were enormously freeing, putting him in contact

with a myth that for him was decreed because it did not come to him with the social and religious baggage of classical or Judeo-Christian myth. Like the archaeologist using bones, Kroetsch uses the Indian woman Anna Yellowbird in *Badlands* and the whole motif of *Gone Indian* in the novel by that title as a metonymic achievement of both freedom from and freedom into myth, a particularly effective version of the borderland he finds most fulfilling for writing.²² Both books show Kroetsch using what Mary Kirtz has called “intra-modernism” in her article in this issue. The texts were written before 1980, when archaeology, to the clear-eyed Euro-North American observer, could still seem to be what Kroetsch uses it to mean, unencumbered by a too-familiar story that inscribed its own meaning despite the writer’s quest for scientific objectivity.

The use of Trickster in a Native context by Native writers such as Louise Erdrich, Leslie Silko, and Tomson Highway has changed the context of the myth for succeeding writers. Kroetsch’s postmodernism offers no clues to the solution of the question of who owns the past of either bones or stories (and both are serious questions), but it does alert the regional scholar to similarities between fields that are seemingly unconnected. Trigger writes,

because the archaeological record, as a product of the past, has been shaped by forces that are independent of our own beliefs, the evidence that it provides at least potentially can act as a constraint upon archaeologists’ imaginations. To that extent the study of the past differs from writing a work of fiction.²³

Kroetsch shows us how to reverse this argument on several grounds. Precisely as a product of the past, the archaeological record frees the imagination from the constraints of its own culture and connects the archaeologist and the fiction writer, who are both trying to unname and revise the fragments of a society and place.

GEOGRAPHY

[G]eography is also part of text in a strange way, and I think geography is not fixed, it’s changing—every journey across it or through it is another reading in a way. . . .

. . . It’s interesting that, as a kid, the one science that tempted me was geography. As a kid I hadn’t heard of paleontology yet. Paleontology is an opening up of geography. . . .

*Geography is people relating to what I’ll call place. . . . It’s mapping and it’s also playing with an unknown. . . .*²⁴

Place is, of course, what defines regionalism. Whatever regional studies one undertakes—literature, history, archaeology, or anything else—one must connect them with place, in our case, with the Great Plains. Geography is the study of human society in terms of spatial relations, just as history studies temporal relations. Thus geography is clearly a science when it concerns itself with climatology or volcanology, clearly a social science when it concerns itself with demography and economic distribution, and just as clearly “cultural” or “humanistic” when it becomes cultural or human geography. Kroetsch for the most part means physical geography when he talks about geography—the hoodoos of Drumheller, the glaciated surfaces of farmland, the shores of ancient Lake Agassiz. *Badlands* is in that sense his most geographical novel, concerned with the dinosaur bonebeds along the Red Deer River and the story of palm trees and lush swamps inscribed in the deep rock of an Alberta where warm swamps are clearly absurd. Once again it is the open site with its fragments not yet assembled that calls to Kroetsch. In his article below, Bruce Butterfield looks at some of the alternate strategies for assembling fragments that Kroetsch uses in this novel.

In *The Words of My Roaring*, the inappropriate myths, framed in eastern terms, that Doc Murdoch projects on the land deservedly lose him the election. Johnnie’s Social Credit myth is also inappropriate, however, and Johnnie’s very existence is at least symbolically

dependent upon Doc (though his mother would have given birth, doctor or no doctor). The rain that wins the election for Johnnie is certainly undeserved. Cultural geographers also undertake the creation and uncreation of the myths of place that Kroetsch undertakes. Martyn Bowden and John Allen have studied the images of Great Plains-as-desert and Great Plains-as-garden, while James Shortridge has looked at the use of the term *Midwest* for the Great Plains and at the cultural baggage the term carries.²⁵

Cultural geography has often occupied itself with myth, and in the case of the Great Plains a typical problem has been what John Allen calls "The Garden-Desert Continuum."²⁶ Is the Great Plains garden or is it desert? Who has viewed it as each, and why? How did that perception motivate both individuals and governments? Allen's work, like that of Martyn Bowden and others who have probed "geographies of the mind," parallels Henry Nash Smith's study in *Virgin Land* of the myths of garden and desert in eighteenth and nineteenth-century literatures about the West. Other cultures constructed other myths. N. Scott Momaday records the Kiowas' emergence onto the Plains, where the sun has "the certain character of a god," from the "wilderness" of Yellowstone, where "they were bent and blind."²⁷ In recent humanistic geography, much has been made of the landscape as text, to be read as the autobiography of a culture or a people sharing a culture.

[I]deologies exert their authority and find expression not only in language but also in landscape. Non-verbal 'documents' in the landscape can be powerful visual signs, conveying messages forcefully, and their importance is enhanced when we are dealing with historical but (often) predominantly illiterate societies,

writes Alan R. H. Baker.²⁸

Emergence from confinement into the presence of a certain deity presents a different set

of associations from the garden-desert continuum, but both sets define region and ways of living in region for the viewers of place. As Donald Meinig says, "Regions are abstractions, they exist in our minds." Space, terrain, and human habitation exist, but the viewer draws the lines of region. In fact, region, as historian Paul Veyne and geographer Nicholas Entrikin have observed, "functions for the geographer in the same way that the plot functions for the historian."²⁹ The idea of region, an idea that cannot be delimited purely scientifically, determines the geographer's point of view, sense of what is relevant, and sense of order. Like plot, region defines a narrative that is partly invented and partly discovered. To this extent, geography works little better for the postmodernist than does history. The past did happen, the region is there, but *both* must be partly invented, partly discovered.

Geography is particularly handy for the postmodernist, however, in its affinity to metonymy—the figure of speech that evokes whole congeries of associations by the use of a name. Metaphor is an act of implied comparison—a "dead" battery is like a "dead" person or animal: it no longer functions. While metaphors can work on more than one level, metonymy, less comparison than evocation, is commonly more complex and ambiguous, and it often involves place: by saying "Washington" or "Ottawa" one evokes national government for weal or for woe. But place names also evoke the tragedies defining the breakdown of meaning that impels the very idea of the postmodern: Buchenwald or Bosnia or, to return to the Great Plains, Batoche or Wounded Knee.

The strains within the discipline of geography between science and the humanities manifest themselves in competition between ways of looking that require theory and eschew the particular—"laws" of climate or landforms—and regional, specific observations irreducible to laws. This regionalist, specific geography lends itself to postmodernism and acquires theoretical legitimacy from it. Entrikin writes, "The retreat from meta-level narratives in

post-modernism has been appropriated by some geographers as a basis for working out a more favorable relation between a theorizing perspective and the geographer's traditional concern with the particular."³⁰ The emphasis on the particular also extends to ideas like cause and meaning. Instead of looking for universal laws of human behavior (like universal laws of cloud behavior), regional, cultural geographers study the particular, idiosyncratic relationships between specific individuals (who see and act upon a region in response to their specific reactions to their culture, their place, and their personal circumstances) and the specific aspects of the place as mediated by cultural and political contexts. Thus geographers study migration to and from a specific place in much the same way historians do—"between" the poles of science and art. As a novelist of place, weighing the physical and cultural contexts of a region against the idiosyncrasies and subjectivities of his characters, Kroetsch functions as a kind of human geographer.

LITERATURE

*This must be one of the functions of art: to put us into situations where we apprehend the rules only up to a point. This is where art, by the paradox of its difference from life, again becomes mimetic. . . . And yet it would be an error not to perceive the differences between life and art, just as it would be an error not to see that they are the same.*³¹

*There are no truths, only correspondences.*³²

American regionalism in literature began, of course, with the first tellers, and the tales evolved as the people moved onto the Great Plains. This is particularly evident in the Sun Dance ceremonies, which united almost all the cultural groups who found themselves on the northern Great Plains from perhaps the fifteenth century to the early nineteenth and have continued among the First Nations of the Plains until the present, with a brief, en-

forced hiatus from about 1890 to the mid-twentieth century, as both Canada and the U.S. proscribed the Sun Dance and other traditional ceremonies.

The Omahas maintain both oral and written versions of the tale of the gift of the Sacred Pole, the Old Man of the nation, and of the conscious decision to accept him and his stories as an ordering narrative of the Omaha people, dating probably from some time in the seventeenth century. Scholars of regional literature have until recently, however, ignored Native literatures, and their new inclusion in the literary canon arises from many of the same distrusts of a universal meaning that animate postmodernism.

The canon of American literature is currently undergoing considerable revision that casts doubt on the utility of "isms" in literary history. Canadian literature, still in the phase of initial "canon formation" and starting later than U.S. literature, is even less easily defined by "isms." Nonetheless, some kind of taxonomy is useful in an article such as this one, aimed at readers from many disciplines. In using such terms as "realism," however, we must remember that literary history is as invented as any other kind of history. "Romanticism" had its carefully, almost scientifically, observed moments. "Realism" in the hands of its best practitioners, such as William Dean Howells and Sara Jeanette Duncan, was never a naive attempt to mimic everyday life. Kroetsch's European influences are certainly as compelling as O. E. Rølvaag's or Willa Cather's, but what he chooses to do with them is qualitatively different. A quick tour of the Euro-North American literary history of the Plains may help establish a baseline from which to survey the ways Kroetsch follows earlier traditions, as well as the ways in which this very following subverts them.

Conventional American literary histories of regionalism usually begin with the Southwest humorists of half-horse, half-alligator fame and continue with stories of the post-Civil War local color movement that both

anticipate and manifest the ascendancy of realism. Generally intended as an accurate mirror of everyday life in a particular region, this local color literature was also occasionally political in its aims. Hamlin Garland's South Dakota and Middle Border stories are perhaps the best known Plains forms of this early movement. Cather and Rølvaag, modernist writers heavily and somewhat self-consciously European influenced, represent the culmination of local colorism. Frederick Philip Grove, a Canadian prairie contemporary of Cather and Rølvaag, is more difficult to categorize. His early European career certainly put him in the midst of European modernism.³³ In his decidedly postmodern recreation of himself as a Canadian, however, he chose to characterize himself as something of a realist. Like Cather and Rølvaag (and to a lesser extent Martha Ostenso, another Canadian prairie contemporary), Grove was in rebellion against technology and the homogenization of post-WWI North American society. Rural life and pioneering were an antidote to the machine age. This puts these writers in the same camp as the Agrarians of the southern U.S., but the frontier and pioneering, as well as physical isolation from technology, made the Canadian Prairie a more realistic protest location than the U.S. South or the U.S. Plains, where, in the 1930s, regionalist theoretician Lowery Wimberly mourned the growing rural-urban split that left urban writers unable to write about the country except anachronistically and sentimentally. And no one back on the farm, he believed, with some justification, was writing.³⁴ Thus the image of regional writing in the 1930s becomes almost parodic, but not deliberately so. Garland's bedraggled farmwife had become a cliché, but there appeared to be nothing else to write about.

Plains literature in the United States certainly did not end with Cather's turn to other regions in the late 1920s, but if measured simplistically by such things as Pulitzer and other prizes and inclusion in college surveys of American literature, its significance to the national literature has been small. That has not been

the case in Canada. Starting with Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House* in 1941, prairie literature has taken off. It is impossible to imagine the "canon" of Canadian literature without Ross, Kroetsch, Margaret Laurence, Rudy Wiebe, and other westerners, even though it took critics and readers a good quarter century to penetrate beneath the seemingly simple surface of Ross's first novel. American plains writers have not achieved that level of success. Larry McMurtry has certainly been popular, in film and television as well as fiction, but has attracted relatively little critical attention. On the other hand, Wright Morris and Larry Woiwode, while critical successes, are relatively little known, even in their home states of Nebraska and North Dakota. And Louise Erdrich, the contemporary plains writer who has managed both popularity and critical acclaim, is almost always discussed as a "Native American" rather than a "regional" writer.

Except for the South, the idea of region has not been a significant organizing principle for twentieth-century literature in the U.S., and the idea of the West, as articulated by James Fenimore Cooper and Washington Irving, has either moved into popular culture (John Wayne, Marshal Dillon, and Louis L'Amour) or become the intellectual property of historians. In Canada regionalism has become far more pronounced in the last decade or so, especially as Canada has threatened to split apart. The West, the Prairies, is recognized politically and economically as an entity, though literary regionalism is perhaps more marked by strong regional presses than by a particular set of images. For the most part the idea of the West in U.S. literary criticism or intellectual history has continued to follow the lines of discussion laid down by Henry Nash Smith in *Virgin Land*. Critics, far from mistaking even the most realistic regionalism for a slightly fictionalized account of "what really happened," analyze instead the use of the "myths" and "symbols" that represent a collective sense of the meaning of the westward movement as captured in writing.³⁵

Robert Kroetsch's postmodern stance may defy national regions: his fondness of trans-boundary experiences makes his work embrace the Plains as a whole. Although an aspect of postmodernism is a resistance to what Kroetsch frequently calls the "temptation of meaning," it is not the idea of meaning he resists, but a particular, unchangeable, universal Meaning. "The current threat to the literary text," observes Kroetsch, is "the critic as theologian who cannot permit deviation from the right reading."³⁶ Meaning is contingent upon its context, and in literature that includes the context of the reader. For Kroetsch the story of the Tower of Babel is a story of liberation, of freeing into diversity. Regionalism, in its specificity and contingency, is therefore attractive to the postmodernist. Linda Hutcheon, who names Kroetsch "Mr. Canadian Postmodern," notes that

Kroetsch's work is rooted very firmly in the geographical, historical, and cultural world of Alberta. Like so many other Canadian writers, he eschews the so-called 'universal' (which he sees as a construct that is, in fact, rather limited) and prefers the particular and the different. . . .³⁷

In fact, Hutcheon claims, "Canadian novelists have refigured the *realist regional* into the *postmodern different*," and no single person has done more in this regard than Robert Kroetsch—"Mr. Canadian Postmodern" indeed.³⁸

Kroetsch is immediately distinguished from realist regional writers such as Rølvaag, Cather, Mari Sandoz, F. P. Grove, Sinclair Ross, or Margaret Laurence by the surface of his work, his concern with language and word play. He deliberately reminds us that we are reading a text, not gazing in a mirror of reality, even though he often includes passages of brilliant realistic description of places and people. Mari Sandoz received many letters from readers revealing that her Old Jules might have been a portrait of their fathers or grandfathers—Kroetsch does not get similar letters referring

to Hazard Lepage, although his *Studhorse Man* is quite as painstakingly researched by the narrator of the novel as Jules Sandoz was by his daughter; and, as Carol Beran notes in her article below, Kroetsch himself used his research for the non-fiction work *Alberta* in writing *Studhorse Man* as well.

For Sandoz the written text becomes a thing in itself, offering a reflection of the world so perfect she excised all conventions—even the historian's favorite convention, the citation—that suggested ambiguity or a separate reality outside the book's covers. Many historians, especially, reject this authority of the text. Kroetsch, on the other hand, parodies the acts of research and writing. His narrator is a madman, sitting in his bathtub in his asylum—a true ivory tower—and comprehending the world through his mirror, his note cards, and his recollections of the hero. Hazard Lepage is not a character in the conventional sense, but a creature of language and—for all his tall tale/trickster oral characteristics—a creature of *written* language, as his name suggests: chance on the page, or perhaps even a challenge to the reader to risk taking a chance on the page.

At the same time, there are continuities between Kroetsch's work and that of the prairie realists in both the United States and Canada. Like his contemporary and friend, Margaret Laurence, he cares deeply for the small prairie town and its inhabitants. Laurence's super realism, in which an object in the text becomes almost tangible to the reader through Laurence's repeatedly contrasting it to the memories and stories of her characters, is, like Kroetsch's postmodernism, a skillful device to catch the essence of region. Although Kroetsch is not consciously or superficially close to Sandoz, his ways of using his research are effectively similar to hers. Perhaps the most striking similarity, across time and border, between Kroetsch and one of the prairie realists appears in a comparison of *The Words of My Roaring* to Willa Cather's *My Ántonia*. In each novel, the writer is proceeding from and elaborating his or her story. Each writer

transmutes personal history into myth by the authority of a first-person narrator. Cather's framing "I" narrator in her introduction transmutes the young Willa Cather and her friend Annie Pavelka into Jim Burden and Antonia Shimerda as Kroetsch, young Alberta rake, transforms himself into Johnnie and Johnnie transforms the historical election and William Aberhart into Johnnie's rain-soaked victory and Big Bill Applecart.

Surface, however, changes the reader's relationship to a story. The reader experiences little sense of vicariously living the lives of Kroetsch's characters. One can turn to Rølvaag's *Giants in the Earth* for a compelling glimpse of Norwegian immigrant life on the Great Plains, although Rølvaag is by no means naively realistic and, like Kroetsch, or Willa Cather, structures his fiction in terms of myth. Beowulf, Ibsen, the Icelandic sagas, and Norse folk tale, as well as the darker voices of Kierkegaardian pietism, are as present in *Giants in the Earth* as are Don Quixote, Odysseus, and the classical gods in *Studhorse Man*. Rølvaag, however, uses his myths with respect, to enhance the meaning of his novel and deepen his characterizations. Kroetsch abuses his myths to diffuse and remake meanings, to flatten his characters and remind us they are fictions. In *O Pioneers!* Cather calls quite literally on Ovid's Pyramus and Thisbe in "The White Mulberry Tree" and evocatively on the Osiris/Pluto vegetation myths. For her the mythic structure reaffirmed the universality and importance of her tale of immigrant farmers in Nebraska. Kroetsch, however, is working against the universal. His parodying of the myths is a project of unnamings, of separating, but not entirely cutting Alberta off from the dominance of the classical stories. Thus while Cather's Alexandra is both Demeter and Persephone and her evocation of Osiris a phantom of corn, death, and sexual love, Kroetsch's Demeter is the misnamed mad male narrator of the novel, and the studhorse man himself is Osiris as trickster, the horny tall tale extension of his stallion's enormous phallus, the studhorse man's livelihood and

eventually his death. In a properly postmodern instance of life imitating art, Cather, looking for universality in a classical culture, left the Plains and moved east for good as soon as she was able. Kroetsch, concerned with uncreating and recreating the Plains, moved away but then moved back after his fiction had established a region distinct from the universal. The difference between Kroetsch and the realists is not just technique but rather the reader's reaction. For Laurence or Cather or Rølvaag, we suspend disbelief and enter characters' lives. With Kroetsch we are never allowed to forget that characters are fictions whose lives are only on the page, even though in all cases the reading, if we are attentive readers, can increase our empathy for the "real" people of the prairies.

POSTMODERNISM

*Criticism, it would seem, narrates its own intention. Traditional critical writing narrates the history of the literary past. Only in the late twentieth century has criticism attempted a narration of the future of the literature of which it is the mediating force.*³⁹

The idea of the postmodern, as we have seen, turns away from Meaning to meanings and from The Universal to diversity. Postmodernism directs our attention to language and surface, to disorder rather than order, but at the same time it can insist that this very disordering is a quest for an order and a myth that come out of the oral traditions of life, in our case life on the Plains. By consciously avoiding the attempt to represent everyday reality, writing becomes realistic in another way, one that allows us to become naive again and to approach the Plains without the conceptual baggage of Manifest Destiny, the Significance of the Frontier, Mountie and Queen, Valiant Homesteaders and Noble Savages, Odysseus and King Lear, Virgin Land, or even the anthropologist's version of the Trickster.

Self-consciously postmodern writing like Kroetsch's should not put off the regionalist

by its deliberately unrealistic surface. Rather it offers the historian, the archaeologist, the geographer, and especially the literary scholar an approach that by emphasizing the difference between art and life and the paradox involved in creating any kind of representation directs us back to the particular lived life of our region.⁴⁰

While Kroetsch, as Linda Hutcheon asserts, may well be seen as "Mr. Canadian Postmodern," a countervailing argument may be offered in which he is, far more urgently, Mr. Great Plains Postmodern. Indeed, given Canada's regional fissures, claiming the preeminence of the Great Plains in Kroetsch's work makes far more sense than any pan-Canadian sensibility, no matter how Central-Canadian critics—such as Hutcheon—wish to make him their own. This is not to say there are no distinctions between Canadian Prairies and U.S. Plains. Clearly they possess different histories, different political assumptions, and different myths. At the same time the human response to a physiographic region does create a tangible human culture of the Great Plains north and south of the 49th parallel. In fact, it is by examining the ways Kroetsch deconstructs and denames the people of rural Alberta that postmodernism's utility (if it is not a contradiction in terms to insist that postmodernism be useful) to regional studies is best seen.

To illustrate, again, and to conclude: among Kroetsch's essays—many of them richly resonant for anyone concerned with regional studies—is "The Moment of the Discovery of America Continues," in which Kroetsch asks, "How do you write in a new country?" and goes on to invoke a phrase of William Carlos Williams's, the opening words of *Paterson*, "a local pride." For Kroetsch, as for Williams,

The feeling must come from an awareness of the authenticity of our own lives. People who feel invisible try to borrow visibility from those who are visible. To understand others is surely difficult. But to understand ourselves becomes impossible if we do not see images of ourselves in the mirror—be

that mirror theatre or literature or historical writing. A local pride does not exclude the rest of the world, or other experiences; rather, it makes them possible. It creates an organizing center. Or as Williams put it, more radically: the acquiring of a local pride enables us to create our own culture—"by lifting an environment to expression".⁴¹

And that, quite simply, is what Robert Kroetsch has done, from *But We Are Exiles* (1965) and *The Words of My Roaring to Alibi* (1983) and *The Puppeteer* (1992), through his poetry—especially *Seed Catalogue* (1977) and *Completed Field Notes* (1989)—and through his essays. Particularly, one might take his 1967 travel book, *Alberta*, a second edition of which, published in 1993 by Edmonton's NeWest Press, features Kroetsch's essay, "Alberta, Twenty-Five Years After *Alberta*:" The essay, its placement as wry commentary on a younger Kroetsch's writing and on the book itself within the covers of a book published twenty-five years previously, and its open-ended titling all add to Robert Kroetsch's share in lifting Alberta to expression. The essay, a series of incidents, each titled (from "In a Pig's Eye," the first, on), offers no overarching narrative beyond the picaresque travel of Kroetsch—along with his fellow Alberta writer, Rudy Wiebe—about the province during the summer of 1992.

These sections all implicitly comment on the republished book to follow, and most of them focus on individual Albertans, whether Cathy from Consort who bakes wonderful pies, or "an old bronc rider, Bob Gilbert" at the Jenner Rodeo, or Steve Didzena on the Assumption Reserve. Contextualized by Kroetsch's interests and his trip, each person is precisely detailed, explained, each doing what she or he is doing, each seen, met, and understood by Kroetsch. It is less a story than a chronicle, a batch of separate stories about a random group of separate Albertans. Yet in the essay's final section, "Postscript: Heisler (it rhymes with Chrysler), The Premier Village," Kroetsch saves himself for the final

Albertan, arrived once again home to the town where he grew up, still peopled with his people. This section—literally a post-script, Wiebe being nowhere seen—features another incident from that summer of 1992, Kroetsch's attending the Heisler Homecoming, an extravagant weekend reunion at which he saw and was seen, recognized and unrecognized, back in Alberta again. By so doing and by so writing, Robert Kroetsch places himself in the only place he can, really—the only place his writing has been from, been of, and been about: Alberta: place: "a complex of possibilities": "a local pride": "lifting an environment to expression": gone back to Alberta: gone back to Alberta: Robert Kroetsch: Mr. Great Plains Postmodernist: Robert Kroetsch: regionalist. So may we all be.

NOTES

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1. The title of this paper is a paraphrase of a line from the Ian Tyson song "Four Strong Winds," Warner Brothers Inc., Vanguard Records, 1963; the epigraph is from Robert Kroetsch, "Alberta, Twenty-Five Years after Alberta:[sic]," preface to *Alberta*, 2nd ed. (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1993), pp. 49-50, ellipsis in original.

2. Shirley Neuman and Robert Wilson, *Labyrinths of Voice: Conversations with Robert Kroetsch* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1982), p. 133.

3. Frederick C. Luebke, "Regionalism and the Great Plains," *Western Historical Quarterly* 15 (January 1984): 24, 38.

4. Patricia Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987), p. 292.

5. William Truettner, ed., *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991); for the controversy over the exhibition, see Kim Masters, "They Went Thataway: At the NMAA, Revising the Revisionism of 'The West as America,'" *Washington Post*, 2 June 1991, p. G1; Pauline Turner Strong, "Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier: Controversial Art Exhibit Portrays Destruction Wrought by Westward Expansion," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 30 September 1991, p. 3B.

6. Richard D. McGhee, *John Wayne: Actor, Artist, Hero* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co., 1990), p. 222.

7. Gene Wise, *American Historical Interpretations: A Strategy for Grounded Inquiry*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), esp. pp. 23-56.

8. Margaret Laurence, *The Diviners* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart; New York: Alfred Knopf, 1974), p. 49, italics in original.

9. Hayden White, quoted in Ihab Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture* (Athens: Ohio State University Press, 1987), p. 210, n. 18. See also White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), esp. pp. 1-42 (note, pp. 31-38, that White uses the concept of metonymy in a somewhat different way than we are using it in this article); White, *The Content of Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

10. William Cronon, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative," *Journal of American History* 78 (March 1992): 1347-76, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

11. Paul Bonnifield, *The Dust Bowl: Men, Dirt and Depression* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979); Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

12. David Demeritt, "Ecology, Objectivity and Critique in Writings on Nature and Human Societies," *Journal of Historical Geography* 20 (January 1994): 31-32; William Cronon, "Cutting Loose or Running Aground?" *ibid.*: 42.

13. Robert Kroetsch, *The Words of My Roaring* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966).

14. See David R. Elliott, ed., *Aberhart: Outpourings and Replies* (Calgary: Historical Society of Alberta, 1991).

15. Kroetsch, *What the Crow Said* (Don Mills, Ontario: General Publishing Co., 1978).

16. Kroetsch, *Alberta* (note 1 above), p. 56.

17. Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths* (note 2 above), p. 9, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

18. Rudy Wiebe, *The Temptations of Big Bear* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973); *Far As the Eye Can See*, in *Showing West: Three Prairie Docudramas*, ed. Diane Bessai and Don Kerr (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1982), pp. 95-174.

19. Bruce G. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 382.

20. Guy Gibbon, *Explanation in Archaeology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 4, 180.

21. Gerald Vizenor, *Crossbloods: Bone Courts, Bingo, and Other Reports* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), pp. 64-65. See also Isabel McBryde, ed., *Who Owns the Past?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

22. For Kroetsch's comments, see Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths* (note 2 above), pp. 99-100; Robert Kroetsch, *The Lovely Treachery of Words: Essays Selected and New* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 2-3. *Badlands* (Toronto: new press, 1975); *Gone Indian* (Toronto: new press, 1973).

23. Trigger, *History of Archaeological Thought* (note 19 above), p. 381.

24. Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths* (note 2 above), pp. 8-9.

25. Martyn Bowden, "The Great American Desert in the American Mind," in *Geographies of the Mind*, ed. D. Lowenthal and M. Bowden (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 119-47; John Allen, "The Garden-Desert Continuum: Competing Views of the Great Plains in the Nineteenth Century," *Great Plains Quarterly* 5 (Fall 1985): 207-20; James R. Shortridge, "The Emergence of 'Middle West' as an American Regional Label," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 74 (1984): 209-20; Shortridge, "The Heart of the Prairie: Culture Areas in the Central and Northern Great Plains," *Great Plains Quarterly* 8 (Fall 1988): 206-21.

26. Allen, "Garden-Desert Continuum" (note 25 above).

27. Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1950); N. Scott Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969), p. 8.

28. Alan R. H. Baker, "Introduction: On Ideology and Landscape," in *Ideology and Landscape in Historical Perspective: Essays on the Meanings of Some Places in the Past*, ed. Baker and Gideon Biger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 5. See also D. W. Meinig, "The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene," and Marwyn S. Samuels, "The Biography of Landscape: Cause and Culpability," both in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, ed. Meinig (New

York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 33-48, 51-88.

29. Donald Meinig, quoted in J. Nicholas Entrikin, *The Betweenness of Place: Towards a Geography of Modernity* (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 55; Entrikin and Veyne, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 24.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

31. Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths* (note 2 above), p. 68.

32. Kroetsch, *Badlands* (note 22 above), p. 45.

33. Douglas O. Spettigue, *FPG: The European Years* (Toronto: Oberon Press, 1973).

34. Kathleen A. Boardman, "Lowery Charles Wimberly and the Retreat of Regionalism," *Great Plains Quarterly* 11 (Summer 1991): 143-56.

35. For two wide-ranging discussions of Canadian Prairie fiction and Great Plains literatures of landscape, respectively, see Dick Harrison, *Unnamed Country* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1977), and Robert Thacker, *The Great Prairie Fact and Literary Imagination* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989).

36. Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths* (note 2 above), p. 63.

37. Linda Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 175.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 160.

39. Kroetsch, *The Lovely Treachery of Words* (note 22 above), p. 22.

40. Realists and modernists, by no means as monolithic and straightforward as their comparison with postmodernism suggests, have themselves been known to employ postmodern techniques. Wright Morris, though a self-consciously modernist heir to Henry James and D. H. Lawrence, delights in deliberate misstatements that disturb the surface of the apparently mimetic text. The playfulness of his photo texts, the reappearance of the same photo in different contexts with different "captions," and his understated wordplay make him decidedly postmodern, even without his deconstruction of myth—playing Buffalo Bill off against Santa Claus in *Ceremony in Lone Tree*—or the measured ambiguity of his endings.

41. Kroetsch, *The Lovely Treachery of Words* (note 22 above), p. 6.