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# INHABITING THE DANGEROUS MIDDLE OF THE SPACE BETWEEN

## AN INTRAMODERNIST READING OF KROETSCH'S GONE INDIAN

MARY K. KIRTZ

*Our fundamental tactic of self-protection, self-control, and self-definition is not spinning webs or building dams, but telling stories . . . about who we are.*

—Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*

*Maybe character is the congruence of many stories. . . . Everyone of us is making up a novel . . . we make up characters about each other, we do.*

—Robert Kroetsch, *Labyrinths of Voice*<sup>1</sup>

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Robert Kroetsch, whose approaches to novel writing extend from the primarily realist novel *But We Are Exiles* (1965) to the clearly postmodernist *What the Crow Said* (1978) and the somewhat less postmodern *Alibi* (1983), has left equally wide-ranging impressions on the English-Canadian critical landscape. Responses extend from those who see, at least in his earlier novels, a sympathy for realist and modernist impulses towards synthesis (Turner, Schaefer) to those who have identified Kroetsch as a preeminent postmodern writer (Hutcheon, Neuman); indeed, Linda Hutcheon has called him "Mr. Canadian Postmodern."<sup>2</sup> Even within the two parts of Hutcheon's formulation, however, we see mirrored the opposition between two critical stances: "Canadian" suggests Kroetsch's search for some fundamental basis for differentiating Canadian writing from British and American, and "Postmodern" foregrounds his questioning of the validity of such fundamental categories.

### DEFINING A MODE

Kroetsch himself has made statements that imply these contradictory impulses simulta-

neously to define and defy literary convention: on one hand, he claims that "I want to avoid both meaning and conclusiveness." On the other, he constantly asks how one writes in a new country, urging Canadian writers to dig beneath the surface, to develop "an archeology of place," in order to find "hints and guesses that slowly persuade us towards the recognition of larger patterns." In his own case, he tells us that his personal "archaeological discovery [of an old seed catalogue] brought together for [him] the oral tradition and the dream of origins." In other words, Kroetsch's dilemma seems to be that he wants to define the characteristics of Canadian literature, to find some "locatable center"—as evidenced in his various articles and interviews—even while he denies the possibilities of such definition. This same dichotomy is evident in his questions about the nature of the self. He notes that he is "intrigued by the idea of bringing back together . . . the self, with that total relationship with the world." Yet he also claims that "I'm not interested in psychological depth: I'm more interested in story: *how we function*."<sup>3</sup> This, then, appears to be Kroetsch's central paradox: even as he adheres to a postmodernist viewpoint, he constantly defines and redefines what he sees as the quintessence of what it means to be a Canadian writer. Even as he fractures the form of the standard critical essay, he constantly suggests new standards for finding, analyzing, and judging the essence of Canadianism in the nation's literature.

This tendency finds political and geographical parallels in the formation of Canada itself: the continual fragmentation of the "Canadian essence" in its literature has its paradigm in the continual conflict between Canada's various regions and the larger national entity. As each successive constitutional crisis has shown, the effort to draw up a constitution—to define the national identity, to create a totalizing national system—has been undermined by regional insistence on maintaining local singularities and differences. Thus, that contradictory impulse to both define and defy

conventional approaches to literature is equally applicable to the formation of nationhood in Canada. Even as it seeks to form a conventionally unified nation under a ratified constitution binding on all Canadians, the federal government's policies promoting multiculturalism, bilingualism, and autonomous regional governance (Nunavut in the north, for example) encourage a splintering of the core. It is no surprise that Alberta, perhaps the western province that has pursued its regional interest most aggressively, is the province in which Kroetsch was born. The pull between regional autonomy and national authority finds clear echoes throughout Kroetsch's work.

Even interpretations of *Gone Indian* tend to split along similar lines. Although she herself sees it differently, Sylvia Soderlind notes that *Gone Indian* is "usually interpreted as a tale of a young man's search for himself"; Margaret Turner moves one step further, calling the novel "an exercise in the creation of self and place"; and Jurgen Schaefer sees "the hero's frantic search for his identity [as] the basic structure of *Gone Indian*." Schaefer further insists that "there can be no question that it is about alienation and identity, Western and Indian consciousness . . . an imaginative evocation of the Indian past as a new and significant dimension of Canadian history."<sup>4</sup> All of these interpretations imply that the tension in Kroetsch's work is finally resolved in favor of the modernist quest for wholeness and totalization, as opposed to the postmodern desire for dissolution.

Other critics, however, claim that the tension remains unresolved in Kroetsch's work and the postmodern emphasis on dissolution is preserved. Hutcheon, for example, says that Kroetsch's desire to embrace such opposite views "is never resolved in any ecstatic union of poles." Robert Lecker suggests a possible compromise, arguing that at the border, that is, at the intersection of two poles, some sort of union, however momentary, is achieved. At such a juncture there is not only a desire

for but the actual achievement of a resolution between Kroetsch's opposing tendencies both to believe in and to deny the existence of a defining center. This resolution, particularly evident in Kroetsch's earlier works, situates their aesthetic in what I have called the intramodernist perspective, allowing a writer to play within and among the boundaries of all the "isms"—realism, modernism, postmodernism—to which Kroetsch, in this case, can legitimately lay claim. Intramodernism might be called "the space between," the space that Robert Lecker sees as the primary habitation of Kroetsch who "writes from the viewpoint of one who is continually seduced by the two poles he tries to embrace."<sup>5</sup> It is my argument that the seduction does indeed end in an embrace—but goes no further before separation begins anew. Resolution is invariably followed by an effort to unravel any possible threads of meaning leading away from it.

In a recent paper, I differentiated "intramodernism" from "postmodernism" as it is manifested in English-Canadian writing by focusing on specific narrative elements that help to define the essential nature of a novel as a representation of reality. I suggested that by using the formal structures of realism—but at the same time hinting in various ways that the nature of the constructed reality within these structures might be questioned—the writers of intramodernist fiction call attention to classical realism's unexamined belief in our own absolute reality. Rather than entirely abandoning the values of literary modernism or descriptive realism, as do postmodernist texts, intramodernist texts subsume both within a new kind of structure, one that allows for a postmodern questioning of our assumptions about the nature of reality and the relationship between life and art. Writers of intramodernist texts offer a mediation among different modes of representing reality in fiction. Working, to a greater or lesser degree, within the formal structures of realism, they search for universal truths while at the same time questioning the validity of the search.

In addition to this blending of modes, intramodernist writers also depart from typical postmodern practice in the role they offer the reader. Unlike postmodernist texts, which continually call upon us as readers "to acknowledge our own roles in co-creating the text being read," intramodernist texts "preserve realism's relatively passive reader who observes the fictive world rather than actively participates in its construction."<sup>6</sup> At the same time, realism and intramodernism differ significantly in how they position this passive reader in relation to the text. The infrastructure of the intramodernist novel provides an extra layer of fictional reality between the reader and the text; this layer—or space—focuses our attention upon the nature of reality within the fictive world itself. Taking the place of postmodernism's actively involved reader *outside* the text is a fictive character *inside* the text who is observed to be creating his or her own reality in the space between the surface text and the actual reader.

This fictive reader's place in the text, rather than reinforcing the novel's creation of a believably "real" world, calls it into question, since the reality constructed by this character can be observed by the actual reader to be at worst spurious, at best subjective. We look over the fictive character's shoulder as she or he creates a fictional world; when that world turns out to be unconvincing or flawed in some way, we then reflect on the ways in which *any* fictional construct differs from or fails to reflect what we think of as "real."

What differentiates this double layer of text in intramodernist fiction from similar devices in postmodern texts is that there is no self-reflexive acknowledgement, *within* the confines of the text, of the fiction's own artificiality. The intramodernist text dramatizes, within an unreflectively realistic framework, how we take events that have no context or value judgment attached to them and infuse them with meaning. In this way, the intramodernist text offers a meditation on how we read, interpret, and shape both texts and

objects to satisfy our own perceptions of the world.

In an essay titled "Disunity as Unity: A Canadian Strategy," Kroetsch declares that his concern is

with narrative itself. The shared story—what I prefer to call the assumed story—has traditionally been basic to nationhood. As a writer I'm interested in these assumed stories—what I call meta-narratives. It may be that the writing of particular narratives, within a culture, is dependent on these meta-narratives. . . .

. . . I'm suggesting that Canadians cannot agree on what their meta-narrative is. I am also suggesting that . . . this very falling-apart of our story is what holds our story together.<sup>7</sup>

Kroetsch here describes what I have been calling the intramodernist stance: the yearning for the center—the meta-narrative—even as one's recognizing that it cannot hold parallels the intramodernist's use of realist narrative structures while simultaneously casting doubt upon the nature of the reality such structures present. The simultaneity implied in Kroetsch's fluid image of "story-falling-apart/holding-story-together" suggests that there is something keeping the two impulses in balance. What I have been calling "the space between" corresponds to Kroetsch's notion of "the dangerous middle" in his essay "Beyond Nationalism: A Prologue." Here he asserts that Canadian writing

takes place between the vastness of (closed) cosmologies and the fragments found in the (open) field of the archeological site. It is a literature of dangerous middles . . . that, compulsively seeking its own story, . . . comes compulsively to a genealogy that refuses origin, to a genealogy that speaks instead, and anxiously, and with a generous reticence, the nightmare and the welcome dream of Babel.<sup>8</sup>

Among Kroetsch's novels, *Gone Indian* (1973) has the characteristic elements of such a text and thereby provides us with a venue through which we can see how those opposing impulses in Kroetsch's work—toward definition, yet away from resolution—can be reconciled. In particular, this reconciliation can be seen through a close examination of *Gone Indian*'s narrative structure that serves, finally, as a meditation on the process of defining a self.

#### GONE INDIAN

A plot summary gives little indication of the complexities underlying the textual surface. Professor R. Mark Madham of Binghamton, New York, is responding to a letter from Jill Sunderman of Edmonton, Alberta, about the whereabouts of graduate student Jeremy Sadness who has disappeared in the Canadian wilderness. Madham sends her a series of letters claiming to explain everything. They include transcriptions of tapes Jeremy sent to Madham interspersed with Madham's own interpretations of the events leading up to Jeremy's disappearance. We learn that Jeremy, at Madham's urging, had gone to Alberta to interview for an academic position; he seems to have fallen into several misadventures after collecting the wrong suitcase at the airport. In his search for the rightful owner, Jeremy meets Jill, her mother Bea, and Roger Dorck, all of whom have a mysterious connection to Madham through their relationship with the late Robert Sunderman. After taking part in some winter games during which he is mistaken for an Indian (and beaten up for daring to win a race), Jeremy disappears with Bea, leaving behind his tape recorder. Madham, in the course of narrating this story, reveals that he has been having an affair with Jeremy's wife, Carol, and that Jeremy's disappearance will allow them to live happily ever after. In addition, it becomes clear to the reader, through various "slips of the pen" made by Madham, that he is, in fact, Robert

Sunderman. As various clues surface in Madham's letters, it becomes apparent that Sunderman had faked his drowning, abandoned his wife, hopped on a train, and traveled southeastward to Binghamton, where he now resides as a university professor named R. Mark Madham. The story thus becomes much more than an explanation of what happened to Jeremy: it becomes Madham's rationalization of his own reprehensible behavior.

The surface structure of *Gone Indian* is borrowed from that standard-bearer of realism, the epistolary novel, in which the entire narrative is presented through a series of letters. Under the tenets of classical realism, this structure was intended to give the greatest possible sense of verisimilitude to a fiction, since actual letters are of course written on paper. Kroetsch has updated the form somewhat: in his letters to Jill, Professor Madham includes some highly selective summaries of the various tape recordings sent to him earlier by Jeremy Sadness. The content informing this epistolary structure is gradually revealed to be a version of the romantic quest. What is of interest here, however, is not the *overt* structure and content of this narrative, but the *covert* structure and content, hidden in "the space between" the text and the actual reader and occupied by the fictional readers of these tapes and letters.

The story, as noted earlier, is concerned with issues of identity. The issue is not, as some of the critics cited earlier suggest, however, that of a "young man's search for his identity" but rather the nature of that search and the nature of identity: What are we? Who are we? How do we know? These questions occur, not within the story of Jeremy Sadness as told to us by Professor Madham, but *outside* that story and *within* the space occupied by Madham and the text's other fictional reader, Jill Sunderman. It is in the double layering within this space that we observe not the story but its *telling*; that is, we as readers become privy to the way in which Madham manipulates Jeremy's story, a manipulation that

ultimately unravels and reveals a new story and identity at the center of the text. The text, then, is not so much about self-definition as about the *process* of self-definition, and the process is revealed through Madham's manipulation of two sets of uncontextualized events (Kroetsch's archeological fragments scattered through an open field): those in the tapes and those in Madham's own life—neither of which is accessible to the actual reader except through Madham.

Critics have noted that Madham "stands for" the actual reader in *Gone Indian*. Calling him "the prototype for the reader in the novel," Shirley Neuman suggests that Madham "might be said to represent the collusion of the reader with the omniscient third person narrator against the character who is the victim," thus eliding the actual and fictional reader into one personage, both out to "get" Jeremy. Hutcheon sees Madham's role as somewhat less complex, that of a parodic "reader-surrogate." The fictional character Madham, by imposing his own interpretation on Jeremy's tapes in order to steer his letters toward proving a particular thesis, self-consciously parodies the entire process undertaken by the actual reader who interprets the text in order to create a meaningful story out of it. Soderlind notes a further complexity created by the presence of Jill, the addressee of Madham's missives; she views the image of Jill reading Madham's text as the exact mirror image of the actual reader reading Kroetsch's text.<sup>9</sup> Thus, Madham not only stands in for the reader, as Hutcheon and Neuman suggest, but, since Jill serves as the reader of the text Madham creates, he also stands in for the writer.

While these critics view Madham's role in postmodern terms, Madham has none of the metafictional self-consciousness or self-reflexivity that one associates with various reader-surrogates in postmodern fictions. He does not signal his awareness of the actual reader outside the text; rather, he addresses himself exclusively to Jill *within* the text—a singular difference suggesting an accommodation with

the conventions of realism rather than a parodic pull against them. And Jill, even more than Madham, lacks any parodic or self-reflexive characteristics; even more than he, she represents a reader-surrogate straight out of the conventions of realism, providing Madham with the pretext for writing the story and the actual reader with a vantage point from which to view the story Madham constructs. Because they lack self-reflexivity and maintain their frame of reference within the text, both Jill and Madham are therefore characters typifying the intramodernist, not the postmodernist, reader-surrogate. In other words, they occupy the "dangerous middle" of "the space between" the primary text and the actual reader.

Kroetsch has stated that "in a sense we haven't got an identity until somebody tells our story."<sup>10</sup> An underlying assumption here is that the telling will lead to some kind of truth about one's identity. The obvious question this raises concerns the nature of the storyteller—how do we know that the story being told is really ours, is really contributing to our identity? In *Gone Indian*, Madham makes clear his purpose for telling Jeremy's story: he plans to define both Jeremy's character and his own and immediately sets the two in opposition to each other. He writes to Jill:

*I am transcribing a few passages from those . . . tapes, simply that you might better appreciate the kind of rascal you found yourself involved with. . . .*

*. . . Attached find the necessary documents. They will show me to be, so to speak, unfallen. I am my own man.*<sup>11</sup>

In addition to laying out his purpose, Madham reveals his process: he lets us know that he has been selective in his transcriptions of the tapes. He is transcribing only "a few passages," attaching only the "necessary" documents. His desire to arrive at a modernist synthesis of the material, but only by using elements that will be his alone to deter-

mine, becomes even more clear in a later passage:

Of course I have had to select from the tapes, in spite of Jeremy's instructions to the contrary: the mere onslaught of detail merely overwhelms. We grasp at . . . the world of reflection, of understanding. The insight born of leisurely and loving meditation. The word made human. (p. 13)

This passage also suggests a further duality for Madham in "the space between": here we see him in his combined role of both writer-and reader-surrogate. In chapter nine, Madham reveals the writer's methods as he describes Jill taking Jeremy's various artifacts, his "archeological fragments," out of his suitcase and creating a narrative from them:

Out of his suitcase, you are creating him. . . . You try to smooth a wrinkled sweater, . . . deign not to touch a pair of socks. . . . He is sloppy, uptight, unclean: your version of a savage. . . .

You open a new notebook to the first blank page, then notice he has brought along six of the same. . . . The eternal scrounging lazy unemployed bum of a graduate student— (pp. 20-21)

Here Madham explicates for the reader not only Jill's process of constructing Jeremy's identity, interpreting his story, but also Madham's, and finally, both the actual reader's and writer's. The actual reader gets Jeremy's story only through the double layer of interpretation (as writer, as reader) provided by this fictive character.

In addition to representing the two principal characters (reader and writer) *outside* the text, Madham subsumes into himself all the characters *inside* the text as well. They exist, after all, only in his version of them: the letters, the transcriptions, the interpretations are his alone. When Neuman asked Kroetsch whether his narrators "create themselves by

telling," Kroetsch responded that "there's a complicated sense in which Madham is using or really stealing . . . is parasitical . . . the question of symbiosis [arises] . . ."<sup>12</sup>

#### DETERMINING A SELF

The theory of establishing self-identity, a "center of narrative gravity," through telling stories is one now widely accepted in psychological circles. As Daniel Dennett suggests, "the distinctiveness of different narratives is the life-blood of different selves."<sup>13</sup> In the narrative inscribed by Madham into the text, however, such distinctiveness among the various stories is not only lacking but deliberately blurred by the story-teller. This erasure of the chief characteristic informing different selves suggests that no distinction can be made among them. The narrative of one is the narrative of all.

Clues to intermingling of the selves are strewn throughout the text: Jeremy and Dorck have identical suitcases and Jeremy doesn't want to open Dorck's suitcase for fear of discovering his own possessions inside (p. 19); Madham notes that Jill Sunderman and Carol Sadness have the same looks and are the same age (pp. 20, 24-25); Madham's transcription of Jeremy's tape has Jeremy warning him, "one false move . . . and instead of addressing you, I'll be you" (p. 62); Madham declares that Jeremy "knew *nothing*: and yet would dare to dream my northwest" (p. 101); Jeremy feels compelled to "play Indian" while Madham declares himself to "have been Indian enough" (p. 124); Jeremy, whose idol Grey Owl (himself an Englishman pretending to be Indian) "died into a new life" (p. 62), is mistaken for an Indian after winning the snowshoe race; Jeremy lends "his precious self" to the gravedigger and enters a room "no longer himself" (p. 139); Jeremy notes that Bea Sunderman, "the woman [Madham] should have married" (p. 30), takes Jeremy "for her lost husband" (p. 148), Robert Sunderman; Dorck mistakes Jill for her mother, Bea (p. 156) and so on.

Madham chides Carol for failing "to grasp the consequence of the northern prairies to human definition: the diffusion of personality into a complex of possibilities rather than a concluded self" (p. 152). We have in this statement the classic tension for its inhabitants between regional and national identity in the Canadian northwest: the vast spaces allow an endless expanse of personality; as far as the individual is concerned, there are no boundaries, no barriers. The nation, however, requires definition, confines itself within borders, must be a "concluded self" if it is to retain a distinct identity. Madham personifies the latter; he has in fact been driving toward just such a conclusion of self, one in which, as Madham has Jeremy say, "the inside and the outside are one, united" (p. 149).

The possible selves Madham has offered to Jill in his narrative are indeed complex, but all are intended to serve a singular goal—to show Madham as "unfallen," as his "own man." In order to define himself, to become his own man, Madham tells Jeremy's story—or rather, rearranges Jeremy's story into an order of Madham's, not Jeremy's, choosing. Since Madham is transcribing the tapes, how can we know that what we are getting is "according to Jeremy?" Madham scatters clues to his own identity as he purports to tell Jeremy's story, imposing his version of the story onto the random tapes he receives, confessing that "It would seem apparent that the tape recorder itself, and not what was recorded on its tape, tells the whole story" (p. 150). In his transcription and interpretation of the tapes, then, Madham takes over Jeremy's story, Jeremy's identity, and ultimately, Jeremy's life. Jeremy's story is really part of Madham's effort to establish his own persona, not to explain what happened.

In these terms, what happened to Jeremy is immaterial, and his disappearance at the end, like Robert Sunderman's, suggests the dissolution of his self, his story, at the very moment at which Madham's story, and hence, his self-definition, is completed. Jeremy's story ends



at exactly the same point as Robert Sunderman's: both fall into an abyss; both stories end at a point marking a beginning in Madham's life. Sunderman, whose life story might have been that of Canada's greatest hockey player, falls through the ice at the moment when Madham begins his journey toward a career as an academic. Jeremy, failed academic and unfaithful husband, mirrors these aspects of Madham's own life (Madham has been writing a book for fifteen years; in escaping Alberta, he abandoned Bea), and disappears so that Madham can make a new start. He can become Carol's ideal husband and he is, after all, writing the book we are reading. Both characters' stories are therefore subsumed into Madham's larger purpose, to create himself anew—as unfallen, as his own man—through this telling.

Here is the fictive analogue for the traditional historian historicizing the events scattered throughout a particular time and place—archeological fragments, again—from a particular point of view and for a particular purpose. William Cronon, as cited in the article by Kaye and Thacker, above, describes how two historians, Bonnifield and Worster, took the same events to construct two quite different narratives about the significance of the Dust Bowl years. Each clearly had a specific pattern in mind into which were woven events lacking both context and specific value. Through the process of being woven into a particular narrative pattern, these events gain significance: Bonnifield sees them as evidence of humanity's heroism; Worster, as evidence of our stupidity. Since changing the pattern also changes the meaning, no single "truth" about the events can be established, but the effort to do so continues.

#### CREATIVE FICTIVE GENEALOGIES

The working title for *Gone Indian* was "Funeral Games," taken from Book Five of the *Aeneid*, one of Western literature's seminal texts. Soderlind suggests that this allusive usage emphasizes the shallowness of Kroetsch's

text; it is simply a puzzle to be solved.<sup>14</sup> To the contrary, however, Kroetsch uses Virgil to offer insight into what he views as the totalizing tendency of traditional history. In the *Aeneid*, the games, as a respite from warfare, represent a denatured version of battle, since nobody dies. If we take this allusion literally, then nobody actually dies in *Gone Indian* either—they simply "die into a new life." Were the similarities to end here, then the intertextual relationship between *Gone Indian* and "The Funeral Games" would indeed remain at the surface level of play. The "intertextual" relationship among the various selves in the novel, however, implies something deeper. Sunderman falls through the ice and resurfaces as Madham in Binghamton, New York; Jeremy retraces the journey, or rather, Madham retraces the journey back to Alberta through Jeremy (whose actual existence or real fate we may never know since the only person who is alleged to have received or heard the tapes is Madham); what Madham retraces in telling Jeremy's story is a version of what Madham's life *might have been* had he remained Sunderman, and here, the intertext of the "Funeral Games" sheds light on Madham's intentions, for Virgil, like Madham, had a deeper purpose than mere play.

Virgil, whose own intertext for Book Five of the *Aeneid* was Book Twenty-three of the *Iliad*, gave the various heroes names and lineages that would allow contemporary Roman families to trace their genealogies back to Aeneas and his men. The noble Romans were thus provided with a history and a genealogy assuring the authenticity of their descent from the gods. As Thomas Van Nortwick points out, "Virgil insists on reading [contemporary Roman] history back into the Aeneas legends, making it a part of the hero's burden" and, additionally, part of the reader's story as well.<sup>15</sup> The epic is rendered "real" by the intermingling of the names of fictional heroes and actual personages—and who is to say that this is more fictitious than a historical account of the founding of Rome? Nevertheless, although Virgil's readers may have

considered the characters named in the epic as their "true" ancestors, these characters remain the figments of Virgil's imagination. The Roman readers outside the text were thus participating in the creation of their own fictional genealogies.

If one considers R. Mark Madham, in his occupation of the "space between," as a personage *outside* the text of the story told in his letters, then Madham (first as Virgil creating the text, then as a nobleman interpreting the text) creates a genealogy for himself, starting with his former self, Sunderman, and finally subsuming the life of Jeremy. By beginning with Robert Sunderman's death and ending with Jeremy's supposed demise, Madham brings these other two selves into linear concert with each other and under his own rubric in his contention that "it would surely seem impossible that anyone might drown in all that ice and snow. God knows, I shall never forget it" (p. 155). Thus, if one separates the reality within the fictional world of *Gone Indian* into two layers—that of the letters and that of "the space between"—Madham's genealogy, like those provided by Virgil, is both authentic (the contemporary Roman family names did exist; Robert Sunderman's story did occur) and spurious (Virgil's heroes remain fiction, whatever their names; Jeremy's story is Madham's fictive reconstruction).

The games that Virgil plays with the notion of authentic identity find an analogue in the games played by the Canadian literary establishment in its own quest for identity. Virgil, after all, was trying to write the story of the founding of Rome, giving his epic the veneer of historical authenticity even as he mythologized out of existence the actual events of the construction of Rome. In writing the *Aeneid*, Virgil intended, among other things, to "prove" one specific point—that Romans were the true descendants of the hapless, albeit heroic, Trojans. Kroetsch, in presenting his fictional parallel of identity formation, is poking fun at the totalizing schemes of thematic criticism in which whole characters and books are forced under a single

template "proving" that Canadians are, for example, always victims (Atwood), or suffer from a Garrison mentality (Frye).<sup>16</sup> It is all, finally, fiction.

Again, we see the complexity of Madham as a fictional creation, and the last word is his. The story Madham tells apparently is intended to assuage his own guilt—for abandoning Bea, for seducing Carol. By heaving his abandoned wife and Carol's wayward husband off the railway trestle together, Madham completes the symbiotic relationship between his and Jeremy's life. Bea and Jeremy, totally subsumed into Madham's version of reality, fall, emitting only silence, not unlike the (non) sound of the tree, unattended by listeners, falling in the forest. Only Madham's voice remains to continue the story.

Thus, while he clearly remembers one fall (Sunderman's) and reconstructs the other (Jeremy's), Madham himself remains unfallen, having been propped up by these two other selves: Sunderman fell into the ice and "died" so that Madham could begin a new professional existence as an academic, and Jeremy falls into the abyss and "dies" so that Madham can begin a new personal existence as Carol's consort. By the time Madham narrates the story of Jeremy's disappearance, he has destroyed the tapes and speaks completely in his own voice. Dennett notes that in human beings, the need for self-knowledge involves "incessant bouts of storytelling and *story checking*, some of it factual and [some of it] fictional."<sup>17</sup> Since Madham has destroyed the tapes, there is no way to check the veracity of the tales he tells us and therefore no way to know if Jeremy's story happened as Madham would have us believe.

What we can believe is that Jeremy's story and self have been dissolved within the pincer movement that unites Madham's split identity at last. Yet the actual reader, observing Madham's manipulations of the tapes and identities, is acutely aware that this singular "center of narrative gravity" has been achieved at the expense of others' voices, others' stories. Madham may claim that these others do

not scream, but even he admits that their tongues have become "unhinged," ready to tell their own story, to assert their own identity, in yet another round of searching for the always elusive truth residing in the ever shifting centers of narrative form. The text thus leaves us in that "dangerous middle" between totalizing center and fragmented margin.

#### KROETSCH AND CANADA

This reading of *Gone Indian* represents a peculiarly Canadian perspective and serves as an analogue for the development of the Canadian literary canon. Exploring the novel's infrastructure—how a particular world has been put together—suggests how the actual Canadian world may be put together by its people, a question that has constantly preoccupied Kroetsch.

The practitioners and promulgators of Canadian literature are themselves caught between the present *Zeitgeist* of postmodernism, with its refusal to privilege either places or people, and their own desire to be recognized, to have an essential center, in the modernist (and regional) sense of the word. This is a literature that, like other post-colonial literatures, has grown up between—and within—modernism and postmodernism and consistently tries to reconcile the two into a "third thing." Intramodernism, as the mode holding these tendencies in momentary suspension within the "dangerous middle" of "the space between," allows Canadian writers—and particularly Kroetsch—to have it both ways.

Each of the papers in this collection suggests that there are at least two stories being told. The story on the surface of the text continues the traditional effort of putting together a coherent narrative, creating a "closed cosmology" with a set genealogy (paralleling Canada's effort to create a unified country). The story beneath keeps breaking apart, plowing up the "open field" and scattering the genealogical fragments (again, just as Canada

itself seems to stay embroiled in the process of *becoming* rather than *being*—the constitutional crises, the language questions, the multicultural debates). By constantly exploding the meta narrative of the surface text via various subtexts, Kroetsch's novels balance within that "dangerous middle," a fairly apt description of Canada's perception of itself and its place in the world.

In this sense, Kroetsch's novels are an excellent representation of Canada itself, a country pulled between its regional and national identities. One might even read *Gone Indian* as an allegorical text explicating this tug-of-war. Madham, as a totalizing national self, crushes, or at least tries to crush, the prairie self embodied in Jeremy Sadness (and in Madham's own earlier self, Robert Sunderman). Sunderman is "drowned" so that Madham can be easternized, and Jeremy disappears from the story just as he has thrown off his resemblance to the academic Madham and adopted the quintessential trappings of the Canadian West. If one were to carry the analogy even further afield, there is also the ambiguity of the American presence to consider. Madham is the closet Canadian in American clothing; completely assimilated, he doesn't want Jeremy to reverse the process. Thus Madham is a villain twice over, standing both for monolithic Canadian identity and American imperialism. Kroetsch seems to imply that, just as the United States is capable of destroying Canada's sense of itself, so can the imperatives of a national Canadian identity destroy a regional sense of self. Since neither event has happened, the inhabitants continue to occupy the dangerous middle ground between these two destructive possibilities.

It is clear from the numerous articles Kroetsch has written on the subject that he himself finds a disconcerting similarity between the creation of art and the creation of "national identity," disconcerting because it is based not on a belief that there is something essential—some unshakable foundation—at the depths of each but on a realization

that digging deeper simply uncovers other constructions, identities, terrains. Nevertheless, the work continues, as it must.

#### NOTES

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1. Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991), p. 418; Robert Kroetsch in Shirley Neuman and Robert Wilson, *Labyrinths of Voice: Conversation with Robert Kroetsch* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1983), pp. 189, 193.

2. Margaret Turner, "Endings be Damned: Robert Kroetsch's *Gone Indian*," *Canadian Literature* 119 (1988): 57-71; Jurgen Schaefer, "A Farewell to Europe: Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* and Robert Kroetsch's *Gone Indian*" in *Gaining Ground: European Critics on Canadian Literature*, ed. Robert Kroetsch and Reingard M. Nischik (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1985), pp. 79-90; Linda Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 160; Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths* (note 1 above).

3. Kroetsch, *Labyrinths* (note 1 above), p. 130; Robert Kroetsch, *The Lovely Treachery of Words* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 7; Robert Kroetsch, interview by Alan Twigg, in Twigg, *Strong Voices* (Madeira Park, B.C.: Harbour Publishing Co., 1988), p. 151; *Labyrinths* (note 1 above), p. 193.

4. Sylvia Soderlind, *Margin/Alias: Language and Colonization in Canadian and Quebecois Fiction*

(Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1991), p. 171; Turner, "Endings" (note 2 above), p. 59; Schaefer, "Farewell" (note 2 above), pp. 85, 87.

5. Hutcheon, *Canadian Postmodern* (note 2 above), p. 163; Robert Lecker, *Robert Kroetsch* (Boston: Twayne, 1986), p. 148.

6. Hutcheon, *Canadian Postmodern* (note 2 above), p. 27; Mary K. Kirtz, "'Facts Become Art through Love': Narrative Structure in Marian Engel's *Bear*," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 22 (Autumn 1992): 354.

7. Kroetsch, *Lovely Treachery* (note 3 above), pp. 21-22.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

9. Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths* (note 1 above), pp. 175-76; Hutcheon, *Canadian Postmodern* (note 2 above), p. 171; Soderlind, *Margin/Alias* (note 4 above), p. 172.

10. Kroetsch quoted in Soderlind, *Margin/Alias* (note 4 above), p. 182.

11. Robert Kroetsch, *Gone Indian* (Toronto: new press, 1973), pp. 1-2, 3, emphasis added. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

12. Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths* (note 1 above), pp. 174, 175, Kroetsch's ellipses.

13. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (note 1 above), pp. 430, 425.

14. Soderlind, *Margin/Alias* (note 4 above), p. 173.

15. Thomas Van Nortwick, *Somewhere I Have Never Travelled: The Second Self and the Hero's Journey in Ancient Epic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 127.

16. Margaret Atwood, *Survival* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1972); Northrop Frye, *The Bush Garden* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1971).

17. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (note 1 above), p. 428, emphasis added.