

**From Howard O'Hagan's *Tay John*  
to Robert Kroetsch's *Badlands* :  
Canadian Revisionings of the Western Novel**

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要約

## カナダの「西部小説」

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同じアメリカ大陸にあるとはいえ、カナダ西部とアメリカ西部ではその発展の歴史が、かなり異っている。したがって、米加両国における「西部小説」の間にも、それ相当の隔りがある。というのも、カナダ西部は、アメリカ西部よりその歴史が新しく、またより規制された計画の下に発展したからである。つまり、カナダ西部史には、初期のアメリカ西部そして、西部を舞台とするアメリカ映画や、テレビ・ショウ、小説を特徴づけている暴力沙汰や権力による法の施行——インディアンとの戦争、牛盗り、荒野の戦い、リンチなど——はあまりみられない。実に、James Fenimore Cooper の時代より、アメリカの「西部小説」は一つの型にはまった作品が多いのである。（これは、John G. Cawelti の *The Six-Gun Mystique* に詳説されている。）

一方、そうしたパターンは、カナダの西部には適用されず、既成の型から自由であったため、20世紀のカナダ西部の作家たち（Howard O' Hagan をはじめ Robert Kroetsch まで）は、カナダにおける最も実験的な文学作品を生み出してきた。この試論では、これらカナダ作家の作品と、彼らの文学を生み出した背景を考察し、さらに米加両国における「西部小説」の差異を明らかにし、カナダの「西部小説」がアメリカの西部小説と異って、カナダ文学の主流に属するものであることを証明したい。

Although almost forty years separate Howard O'Hagan's *Tay John* (1939) from Robert Kroetsch's *Badlands* (1975), the two texts can be conjoined by a crucial question. Why are some of the finest Canadian novels—particularly novels of an experimental fictional design—based on a de-mythification and/or re-mythification of the West? That question is given a further point when one compares the achievement of the Western Canadian and Western American novel. For the 49th parallel is a literary boundary as well as a political one, and while the state of Montana has not served as a particularly notable setting for serious fiction, the province of Alberta—at least in a Canadian context—definitely has.<sup>1</sup> More generally speaking, the Canadian West (British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba now included along with Alberta) has produced a number of strikingly original authors. I refer to Howard O'Hagan and Sheila Watson; to somewhat more contemporary writers such as Robert Harlow, Jack Hodgins, Margaret Laurence, Rudy Wiebe, and, most notably, Robert Kroetsch, all of whom set forth mythologies of the Canadian West conceived in a new vein.<sup>2</sup> That new vein can best be characterized as the conscious deconstruction of alternative mythologies, the two mythologies of earlier Canadian prairie fiction as well as the obsessive mythology of “manifest destiny” perpetrated in the American western popular fiction of cavalry and Indians, cowboys and rustlers, barmaids and schoolmarms.

Of course not all fiction set in the American West fully fits the formula for the stereotypical western. Thus John R. Milton, in *The Novel of the American West*, distinguishes between “the western of the lowercase *w* [with] its popular appeal to mass audiences” and a different Western, “a higher form of literature” (and thus the uppercase *W*) that “strives to become significant in both theme and form.”<sup>3</sup> As this critic, however, acknowledges, “the legendary cowboy has... in the past seventy-five years ridden through an amazing number of bad novels” as compared to only “a few good ones.”<sup>4</sup> But I would argue that even the few “good ones”—novels such as A. B. Guthrie's *The Way West* or Frederick Manfred's *Lord Grizzly* or Walter Van Tilburg Clark's *The Ox-Bow Incident* or Frank Water's *The Man Who Killed the Deer* (all works that Milton assesses in some detail)—are still closer to the formula western than are their Canadian counterparts and partly because that cowboy still rides through them.

The very way in which American Westerns (Milton's capitalized category) critically examine what the other “subliterary genre” merely conveniently assumes still conjoins the two forms as closely related versions of the same basic mythos of the West. For example, in *The Ox-Bow Incident*, to look briefly at probably the best known of the previously named novels, the lynched men turn out to be innocent, a possibility never envisioned in the standard western, but the lynching still remains. The lynching, a paradigm now of frontier failure, could have and should have—as the subsequently conscience-stricken musings of one of the characters attest—been prevented, and prevented by the very code that underwrote it. Or as Milton notes, “what characterizes *The Ox-Bow Incident*,” as serious literature “is the lack of the strong will and the fast gun.”<sup>5</sup>

That absence, with its unfortunate consequence, serves to validate basically the same code affirmed by the presence of the hero and his trusty Colt 45 in more standard westerns (Milton's smallcase category). In short, with both forms we are very much on the frontier and a quintessentially American frontier at that. Furthermore, and as Dick Harrison observes, "even [the highly praised western satiric] writers such as Thomas Berger in *Little Big Man* and Ken Kesey in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* are ultimately less concerned with criticizing frontier values than with lamenting their passing."<sup>6</sup>

The American frontier, with all its attendant tropes, is not a fact of Canadian history (and it may not have been that much of a fact of American history either). Neither is it a main feature of what we might call the Canadian literary imagination, as Robert Kroetsch points out in one of his early interviews significantly titled "The American Experience and the Canadian Voice":

In the United States, the Freudian metaphor has swept the boards, the superego versus the id kind of thing. The id is the good guy trying to free himself, and the superego takes many forms, the government or the military-industrial complex or, in recent history, the universities. The good guy is the youth or the frontiersman, the man in the ten-gallon hat. I see in Canada much less excitement about that particular Freudian metaphor. I suspect we're more Jungian in some way. We see opposites in necessary balance all the time—maybe that becomes paralyzing. I don't know. If you accept the Freudian view there's lots of room for will. Either you're clamping down or you're freeing yourself. But we're caught in a balance, and not only the French-English one, though that's the supreme political one. The hope-despair balance is fascinating to me, because that's the razor's edge; that's where we live. We become fascinated with problems of equilibrium. Americans are interested in expansion. This difference has to have an effect on our literature, on our language.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, and as I will subsequently argue more fully, it is precisely *because* the Canadian western consciously opposes its own predecessors as well as its well established neighbor to the south that we are now experience a flourishing of first-rate western fiction. As post-structuralist critics maintain, it is the necessary grappling with tradition, a figurative grappling with a potentially suffocating inheritance that creates the avant-garde.<sup>8</sup>

"One is struck in reading Canadian fiction of the first half of the twentieth century," Kroetsch observes, "by the degree to which tradition writes the novel, form creates the author. Regardless of content, the Victorian prototype is apparent in works as seemingly different as the prairie novels of F. P. Grove and the urban novels of Hugh MacLennan." In all of this fiction, Kroetsch points out, "concepts of character, theme, setting and structure derive from the great models of the nineteenth century," and, in consequence, "the author is not creator but created—by genre, history, convention."<sup>9</sup>

When even the present is conceived of as a kind of outpost of a more central and authentic past, the text is doubly colonial and must come humbly and stumblingly into decentered being. As Dennis Lee, a major contemporary Canadian poet and critic, aptly argues, "if we live in a space that is radically in question for us, that makes our barest speaking a problem in itself. For voice does issue in part from civil space. And

alienation, in that space, will enter and undercut our writing, make it recoil upon itself, become a problem to itself."<sup>10</sup> But a paradox of Canadian literature is that one of our most colonial spaces—the West as colony of the East as colony of England and the United States—also calls, by its very nature, its colonial definition into question.

A certain historical perspective is here pertinent. Abstracting from three excellent studies of the Western Canadian novel (Edward McCourt's *The Canadian West in Fiction*, Laurence Ricou's *Vertical Man/Horizontal World*, and, most importantly, Dick Harrison's *Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction*), we can note how, in this fiction, one mythos has succeeded another.<sup>11</sup> As Harrison, especially, emphasizes, early Canadian writers developed a uniquely Canadian myth the West, a myth of a garden to be cultivated in the name of empire. Such authors as Ralph Connor or Nellie McClung evolved that mythic Canadian West from a strong sense of self and an even stronger identification with the empire whose comforting presence they felt—or strove to envision. But their literary West was achieved more by visionary determination than by observation, and the "garden myth" foundered on the inescapable fact that even the most sustained effort of creative imagination or the most determined suspension of disbelief cannot transform a fifty-degree-below-zero prairie blizzard into any kind of garden. So, starting in the Twenties, Canadian writers reacted to this early view of the Canadian West with grimly realistic fiction that documented the limitations of prairie life, and Philip Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925), Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese* (1925), as well as Robert J. G. Stead's *Grain* (1926) all cultivated a literary landscape in which the garden was substantially buried.

The stark realism of the late Twenties and early Thirties with its dark portrayals of drought and Depression found fullest expression in the prairie patriarch vainly striving to impress his will on all around him and to achieve the garden of his imagination. His failures at both tasks, his dispossession in the text in which he was denied his claimed central role, looked forward to his virtual exclusion from subsequent texts. Saddled with this fictional father, his author sons and daughters soon had an easy Oedipal revenge and simply wrote him out of existence. Stand-ins were occasionally provided, for example the kindly hired hand in W. O. Mitchell's *Jake and the Kid* (1961). But even better, the displacement of the father could become itself a ground of origin and being, leaving the protagonist as well as the author and the reader all true orphan heirs to their previous placelessness. More simply put, realistic portrayals that tended to tragedy gave way to mythic visions tinged with comedy, but the myth now was a myth of lost origins and a consequent re-construction of imagined history and/or genealogy whereby past, present, place, and protagonist might all be conjoined together.

The third mythos is thus in opposition to the first as well as the second. The garden myth was, as noted, a simple, straightforward myth of the future, a vision of what the garden would be when it had become the garden it should be. The contemporary mythic fiction is more complex and subtly paradoxical. It gives us mythic portrayals of the need for myth, and the myth most needed is a mythic picture of the past. Furthermore, the search for the missing myth is regularly mocked and parodied in the

very works which also portray that same search as essential.<sup>12</sup> And there is still another structuring polarity to this new mythic fiction. Robert Kroetsch some time ago observed that he once “considered it the task of the Canadian writer to give names to his experience, to be the namer. I now suspect,” Kroetsch continues, “on the contrary, it is his task to un-name.”<sup>13</sup> More and more this author and others too have insisted on un-naming, on the need to free experience from the constraining term or label. Words must take us beyond the name of the word just as myth must provide us with an imaginative pattern that gives to the facts of experience a depth and dimension that those facts do not possess of themselves.

The garden myth as a myth was far too limiting and served mostly to reduce Western Canada to Toronto’s (and England’s) back forty—the wheat field out there that helps support the rest of us back here. At least as constraining, and as colonial, was a far more pervasive North American myth of the frontier West that well might have reduced Western Canada to Ponderosa North—an extension of Hollywood instead of Empire. But in this case, too, the facts of the land helped to refute the myth whereby the land might have been subsumed, or, more accurately, falsely imaged out of its own authentic existence, and here, too, some historical perspective is appropriate.

For almost any North American—Canadians as well as Americans—the term “western” immediately evokes a certain narrative structure that John G. Cawelti, in *The Six-Gun Mystique*, has cogently analyzed in terms of a frontier conflict between advancing civilization and retreating savagery.<sup>14</sup> This structure dramatizes the opposition between, on the one hand, the need for a stable social order with an enforced morality and, on the other hand, the appeal of individual freedom and irresponsibility pursued to the point of lawlessness and moral chaos. Despite the temptation of the latter, the issue is regularly resolved in favor of the former through the actions of a hero who makes the right judgments and who, as “a man with a gun,” makes those judgments stick. In short, the ambivalent moral stand of the traditional American western is refied by the ambivalent hero who employs violence to counteract violence. Like the frontier, this hero, too, is poised between a feared and desired freedom, an essential and resented order. His action suspends his indecision. No wonder the imperative of heroism, in the American frontier mythos, are seldom resisted.

Canadian writers, however, have not produced authentic all-Canadian-content versions of American westerns because a key ingredient is missing. As Dick Harrison has emphasized in *Unnamed Country*, the first Canadian settlers, like the early settlers of the U. S., encountered great difficulties but they viewed their experience differently. “They had the sense of a plain patrolled by the North West Mounted Police, surveyed for settlement, with a railroad stretching out to cross it. They were not on the edge of anything; they were surrounded by something, and they took it to be the civilized order they had always known.”<sup>15</sup> The attempt to cast the Canadian prairie as garden thus predates its settlement. The land was all surveyed and neatly divided up before it was occupied by families who moved West mostly on the new railroad instead of by wagon train.<sup>16</sup> Rosemary Sullivan has “summed up” the whole matter: “Nineteenth- and early

twentieth-century Western Canadian literature is different from traditional Western American literature because there never has been a [Canadian] frontier literature.”<sup>17</sup> There was no frontier literature because there was no frontier, and that lack, like the disappearing father, freed the novel to a different task, “to create,” in the words of Rudy Wiebe, “a past, a lived history, a vital mythology.”<sup>18</sup>

The best contemporary Canadian western writers undo the preexisting models that I have just discussed in order to achieve their different mythic models that are mostly an amorphous and thus unlimiting search for a model. Sheila Watson, for example, in *The Double Hook* (1959) begins with the father missing and then dispatches the mother too. The mother’s matricidal son, a reverse Oedipus, frees himself into life but his sister into death (everything is doubled in this novel), while Coyote, as a kind of sphinx conjoining attributes of the Christian God and the Indian Trickster, presides over the action.<sup>19</sup> Or Margaret Laurence, in *The Diviners* (1974), interweaves her dislocations of linear plot to emphasize both the simultaneity of past and present experience and the way in which each is a construct of the other.<sup>20</sup> Or Rudy Wiebe, in *The Temptations of Big Bear* (1973) substitutes for the expected White epic of how the west was won a different epic of how it was lost—for both the Natives and the Whites.<sup>21</sup> “Doubt[ing] the *official* given history,” Wiebe refracts that history through his informing doubt to give voice to the stories silenced by history and to call into question the accepted linear teleology of most western narratives, whether of history or of fiction.<sup>22</sup> Jack Hodgins, however, “encircles” his fiction in a still different fashion. His *The Invention of the World* (1977) recreates the history of Vancouver Island to become the recreated history of Ireland to become, in turn, the recreated history—the invention—of the world.<sup>23</sup> And even more to the point, Robert Kroetsch plays with the very constructs out of which his novels are formulated to highlight their fictionality, the fact that they are the invention of themselves and their world.<sup>24</sup>

Turning now to *Badlands*, the story of a daughter’s retracing of her father’s 1916 expedition after dinosaur bones down the Red Deer River and through the Alberta Badlands, we might first note that the man most absent from the first expedition is its one possible hero. “In the western yarn those men were trying to tell each other,” Anna Dawe at one point observes, “he was the only one with the ability to become a hero, the wisdom not to. Home was a word he understood and heroes cannot afford that understanding.”<sup>25</sup> “He” is Claude McBride and his name has the right heroic ring—like John Wayne or Kit Carson, as direct and forceful as the thunk of an axe. But how can this auspiciously named hero desert the task at hand and how can the novel get along without him?

Very well it seems, for Kroetsch’s western is working with a new mythology, one that dispenses with the older central figure and his potential for heroic self-hood. McBride is replaced, on the first expedition, by Anna Yellowbird, a fifteen-year old Indian girl, a child-widow whose husband has gone off to be killed in World War I. Because she has her own mythologies, because a shaman has told her a hunchback will lead her to the spirit of her husband, she joins the bone-hunting venture and becomes a guide and a

lover to its leader as well as most of his crew. The expedition, headed by William Dawe (who intends to immortalize himself by discovering a hitherto unknown dinosaur of his very own), is also replaced by a subsequent expedition—his daughter in search of her own origins and looking for where her father had gone wrong.

The mythmaking of *Badlands* is not, then, any myth of the “Old West”: 1916 was rather late for the “Old West.” It was rather late, too, for Dawe’s idiosyncratic exercise at discovering a much older West. Paleontological pioneering, as much as any other, was largely over and done. The important action was earlier or elsewhere. Indeed, in 1916, standard Western myths of heroic bravery and armed valour were being deconstructed in the trenches of Europe. Dawe would avoid that lesson but he does not learn it and proceeds to dis-cover through dynamite and death the dinosaur to which he gives his name but which does not in return redeem his life, as his subsequent suicide attests. His foray, as noted, is also replaced by another even later foray into the west and into a different mythology. In 1972, Anna Dawe, Dawe’s daughter, returns to the Badlands to find her father, to find herself, to find her country, to find her fiction, her myth. She finds Anna Yellowbird, now a drunken old woman also devoid of myth and ready to go looking. Together they retrace the course of the Red Deer Expedition and beyond: they trace the course of the river itself to its source in the mountains where, in an ecstasy of ambivalence, quest devolves to carnival. The two women free themselves from the paper rule of William Dawe—ersatz father, ersatz lover—by discarding his papers. The “field notes” (partly faked) the daughter has kept for ten years since her father’s death and the photographs the other Anna has saved for over fifty years are scattered into the mountain lake.

In that deprivileging of both the patriarchal principle and the written word, Anna achieves, to quote from another Kroetsch novel, “a complex of possibilities rather than a concluded self.”<sup>26</sup> The father’s excavations, his search for a definitive paleontology and a place in the history of that search, give way to a different archeology, an archeology of the open site content with fragments, glimpses. Thus Dawe “come(s) to the end of words” (p. 269) in one way and his daughter in another. But it is that second way that informs this text that is itself a kind of archeological open site, as is emphasized by the other texts of other searches—*The Odyssey*, *Ulysses*, *Huckleberry Finn*, “Heart of Darkness,” *Absalom! Absalom!*, *The Double Hook*, *Surfacing*—embedded in the text of *Badlands*.

Kroetsch’s re-definition—and de-definition—of traditional mythic values and structures contraverts the six-gun mystique with its attendant assumption of Manifest Destiny on two different levels. First, manifest to whom? The vacillating narrative stance of *Badlands* undermines the authority of all the voices whereby the text is rendered. Second, whose destiny? By confuting the standard mythic teleologies, particularly the final ascendancy of the hero (by definition male), the novel raises ontological questions about the validity of any pursuit of the signs and symbols of transcendence—whether the bodies of recently vanquished enemies or the bones of long dead dinosaurs. Destiny is hardly manifest; it is not even provisional. Indeed, the construct of “destiny” is as dead-end (to a postmodernist consciousness) as were William Dawe’s

tedious field notes or the skeleton he found at the price of his surrogate son.

To mark the "difference" of this deprivileging let us look now at Walter Prescott Webb's *The Great Frontier* and more specifically at a brief story (not a novel itself but the paradigm of one) which Webb presents to illustrate the workings of the frontier. In his chapter, "The Emergence of the Individual" and in a section itself significantly titled "Jim Brown Knows the Way," Webb asks us to imagine five men setting out a journey into the forest and on to hostile Indian country, four who "have risen to high position in their respective occupations" and who "represent civilization at its best" and a fifth who has "not so distinguished himself."<sup>27</sup> The first four are a general, a banker, a professor, and a preacher, while the fifth is, of course, Jim Brown who, naturally, turns out to be the natural leader of the expedition. He can read the lay of the land, find game, tan leather to make them all new clothes when the civilized garb of the four "tenderfoot" travelers soon wears out, and bring down the Indian leader when the five are, predictably, attacked.

In fact, all of this is so predictable that it does not at all (as Webb intends) serve to let the reader "see how natural political democracy. . . in the truest sense of the word" comes into being on the frontier through the agency of many men like Jim Brown who had already freed themselves from "civilization's stamp of human inequalities."<sup>28</sup> As even the rhetorical overkill of "democracy in the truest sense of the word" attests, we are all along well into the realm of received myth. Thus Jim Brown can be quite unimpressed by the general's medals, the banker's moneybelt, the professor's discoveries and inventions, or the preacher's fine sentiments and avowed reluctance to take life—and the story valorizes that reaction. The general "wear[s] his uniform and medals on this expedition" and the uniform soon wears out.<sup>29</sup> Or the stuffed moneybelt that the banker embarks with comes back just as stuffed. Or the professor who "has studied so hard he has ruined his digestion" of course recovers it with campfire cooking.<sup>30</sup> On his first night out, "Professor Fairchilds forgot his stomach and took a second helping."<sup>31</sup> Not surprisingly, all four come to be substantially better men by virtue of their wilderness excursion.

All of which raises the interesting question of how they could have been so incompetent in the first place. A general (European, admittedly) setting off for weeks in the wilderness in his full dress uniform? Or a banker who knows so little of the financial institution of his country that he anticipated stores in the Mississippi valley of 1800? Or did he plan to buy Ohio from the Indians and pay them cash on the barrelhead? Or why would a competent Jim Brown stay with such a crew especially when they are at first calling him "Boy" and treating him as the general servant? None of them, for that matter, has any reason for being there other than the fact that the story requires it. All of them are nothing other than the literary clichés that the story also requires.

What I am arguing is that the very way in which this fantasy can be elevated into ostensible example illustrates how deeply the myth of the great frontier and the supposed workings of that frontier are ingrained in American thought and literature. I would also point out that this myth, even in Webb's redaction, has its distinctly pernicious

cious aspects. The largest change recorded in the story is that of the Reverend Henderson Fowler who first learns to hunt and then to hunt Indians; who feels, with his first kill, a "sense of exaltation. . . he had never know before," and who realizes that (the last words of the story) "in the new theology of the forest, the Sixth Commandment does not apply to Indians."<sup>32</sup> How convenient that the forest allows an almost comic elision of religion and genocide in the name of nature.

Critically assessed, this "purely fanciful example" turns out to be both more fanciful and more exemplary than Webb intended.<sup>33</sup> It is mostly pure fantasy but a fantasy that sets forth a dark underside of the frontier, its metaphysics of Indian killing as much as its politics of natural democracy. Standing outside of both that metaphysics and that politics, the Canadian author can look critically at this American construct, can, as we see in *Badland*, consign its natural hero to the more natural business of attending to his family and farm instead of playing cowboy and Indians in the wild. I would also here note that in Canadian fiction the Indian tends more to be an envisioned alternative to White life than an implacable threat. Thus, in W. O. Mitchell's *The Vanishing Point* (1973), the protagonist, a teacher at an Indian school, sets out to civilize his prize pupil, Virginia Rider, but she ends up "Indianizing" him.<sup>34</sup> Or in Kroetsch's *Gone Indian* (1973), Jeremy Sadness, an American graduate student, goes to Canada to discover (comically, of course) his real life as a fake Indian.

Such characteristically Western Canadian demythifying and remythifying of standard mythic teleologies are first fully observed in Howard O'Hagan's *Tay John*, a 1939 novel that establishes many of the resonances which distinguish the contemporary Canadian mythic western from the different myths of the American western. To start with, the first mythic givens in *Tay John* are not Western myths of self-assertion, of progress and profit, of heroic selfhood. Indeed, those precise myths are later mocked in the novel through the misadventures of Alf Dobble who aspires to establish a tourist kingdom in the Rockies and disastrously fails. What we have first is Indian myth but Indian myth arrayed, to borrow a title from Joseph Conrad, under Western eyes. And a curiously Western Indian myth too: an Indian people await a great leader who will take them on a western journey to a promised land. The interplay of different and conflicting myths continues when Tay John, the blond-haired Indian born from his dead mother's grave, renounces the role of Indian leader to enter the White world where he just as resolutely insists on his placelessness. Tay John is not at all the lone, celibate, male hero whose actions preserve the world in which the womenfolk may be (but never act). Instead, he interacts with the women in his world—perhaps too much—yet in that interaction male and female as much as White and Indian become inverted mirrors for one another and not simplistic polarities symbolizing such opposites as action vs. passivity or the lure of adventure vs. the comforts of home. Thus, in the first scenes of *Tay John*, Red Rorty, who came to the Indians to preach, remains to rape an Indian woman but is, as punishment, then killed by other Indian women—an immediate re-balancing of stereotypes as well as the undoing of Rorty's mission in the wilderness. Or in the final scene of the novel, Tay John, who found his proper mate in a dark-haired, dark-skinned White

woman, apparently pulls that woman, pregnant and dead, on a toboggan through a winter wasteland of falling snow and back into the earth from which he came. The irresolution of the novel—on the face of it Tay John has simply disappeared from the world—is a complex balancing of birth and death, beginning and ending, story and silence.<sup>35</sup>

That last term brings me to one final feature of the new Canadian mythic western. In the standard western, omniscient narration (“meanwhile back at the ranch . . .”) is the outward expression of ontological certitude. Destiny will be, must be, manifest. In the Canadian western, omniscience is regularly replaced by a chorus of uncertain voices, and manifest truth gives way to provisional hypothesis. Simply put, and to simplify a number of different complex authorial strategies, I would suggest that this de-potentializing of narrative on the part of the different Canadian authors particularly emphasizes the Canadian western’s attention to silence. If the American Dream is a dream of destinations—the buzz and business of the future—the Canadian Dream is, in Kroetsch’s evocative phrase, “a dream of origins.”<sup>36</sup> Those origins are silence, the silence of the prairie, the mountain, the coastal island, the land new to its White transgressors but ancient in Indian time, and, beyond that, timeless. One passage in *Tay John* perfectly sums up this re-vision of other quests—whether Western in the broadest sense (going back to Homer) or in the local sense (going back to James Fenimore Cooper):

Every story—the rough-edged chronicle of a personal destiny—having its source in a past we cannot see, and its reverberations in a future still un-lived—man, the child of darkness, walking for a few short moments in unaccustomed light—every story only waits, like a mountain in an untravelled land, for someone to come close, to gaze upon its contours, lay a name upon it, and relate it to the known world. Indeed, to tell a story is to leave most of it untold. . . . You have the feeling that you have not reached the story itself, but have merely assaulted the surrounding solitude.<sup>37</sup>

As Denham’s assessment of his own story suggests (Jack Denham is the narrator of much of *Tay John*), Canadian westerns from O’Hagan to Kroetsch are not prophecy, not truth, not fiction; they are meta-fictions—fictions about the making of fiction and meta-fictions made with a fundamental awareness that the rest is silence.

#### Notes

1. For good recent general comparisons of America and Canadian western fiction, see Frances W. Kaye, “The 49th Parallel and the 98th Meridian: Some Lines for Thought,” *Mosaic*, 15, no. 2 (1981), 165–75; and Dick Harrison, “Fictions of the American and Canadian Wests,” *Prairie Forum*, 8, no. 1 (1983), 89–97. T. D. MacLulich, in “Our Place on the Map: The Canadian Tradition in Fiction,” *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 52 (1982), 191–208, has also recently compared the “Westerns” of the two countries—along with the “Easterns,” the “Northerns,” and the “Southernns.”
2. A fuller discussion of my assessment of the genesis of the mythologies of the Canadian western can be found in “The Development of the New Canadian Western,” published in Japan in the *Annual Review of Canadian Studies*, 3 (1982), 17–30.
3. John R. Milton, *The Novel of the American West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), p.

40. For two other excellent and somewhat more general discussions of the emergence and scope of American literary myths of the West, see Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975); and Richard Slotkin's *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1973).
4. Milton, p. 16.
  5. Milton, p. 203
  6. "Fictions of the American and Canadian Wests," p. 97.
  7. "Robert Kroetsch: The American Experience and the Canadian Voice" (an interview with Donald Cameron), *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 1 (1972), 49.
  8. See especially Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973). But in the case of the Canadian author and the American tradition we might slightly modify Bloom's Oedipal metaphor of influence and imagine a sort of adopted second cousin who can remain somewhat aloof from the family and any struggles for power within it.
  9. Robert Kroetsch, "Death is a Happy Ending: A Dialogue in Thirteen Parts (Conducted with Diane Bessai)," in *Figures in A Ground: Canadian Essays on Modern Literature Collected in Honor of Sheila Watson*, eds. Diana Bessai and David Jackel (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978), p. 206.
  10. Dennis Lee, "Cadence, Country, Silence: Writing in Colonial Space," *boundary 2*, 3 (1974), 154.
  11. Edward McCourt, *The Canadian West in Fiction*, revised edition (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1970); Laurence Ricou, *Vertical Man/Horizontal World* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973); Dick Harrison, *Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1977).
  12. There is a distinctly comic element to all of this recent Canadian western fiction. Indeed, and as Robert Kroetsch concluded in his review of Harrison's *Unnamed Country* (a review significantly titled "The Disappearing Father and Harrison's Born-Again and Again West"): "The habit of beginnings, of starting again, is deeply engrained in the western consciousness, and comedy is its necessary expression." *Essays in Canadian Writing*, No. 11 (1978), p. 9.
  13. Robert Kroetsch, "Unhiding the Hidden: Recent Canadian Fiction," *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 3, no. 3 (1974), 43.
  14. John G. Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1975).
  15. Harrison, *Unnamed Country*, p. 73.
  16. Some settlers did, of course, arrive by wagon. My own grandfather, for example, could remember coming to Alberta with his family by wagon train in 1892 when he was two years old.
  17. Rosemary Sullivan, "Summing Up," in *Crossing Frontiers: Papers in American and Canadian Literature*, ed. Dick Harrison (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1979), p. 152.
  18. Quoted by Sullivan, p. 154.
  19. For a fuller discussion of the trickster features of this text, see my article "The Double Hook's Double Hooks," forthcoming in *Canadian Literature*.
  20. Clara Thomas, in her *The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), provides one of the best overviews of Margaret Laurence's western fiction, which is all set in and around her created community of Manawaka, Manitoba.
  21. The best assessment of the fiction of Rudy Wiebe is W. J. Keith's *Epic Fiction: The Art of Rudy Wiebe* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1981).

22. "I doubt the *official* given history," Rudy Wiebe observes, "there is another side to the story and maybe that's the more interesting side. Maybe even truer." See Shirley Neuman, "Unearthing Language: An Interview with Rudy Wiebe and Robert Kroetsch," in W. J. Keith, ed., *A Voice in the Land: Essays By and About Rudy Wiebe* (Edmonton, Alberta: NeWest Press, 1981), p. 230
23. For a good discussion of the artistic complexity of this novel, see Robert Lecker, "Haunted by a Glut of Ghosts: Jack Hodgins' *The Invention of the World*," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, No. 20 (1980-81), pp. 86-105.
24. Robert Kroetsch as a metafictional writer is assessed at length in both Peter Thomas' *Robert Kroetsch* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Douglas and McIntyre, 1980), and Robert Lecker's *Robert Kroetsch* (Boston: Twayne, 1986).
25. Robert Kroetsch, *Badlands* (Toronto: New Press, 1975), p. 43. Subsequent references to this edition of the novel will be made parenthetically in the text.
26. Robert Kroetsch, *Gone Indian* (Toronto: New Press, 1973), p. 152.
27. Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Frontier* (1964; rpt. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 36.
28. Webb, pp. 45 and 39.
29. Webb, p. 36.
30. Webb, p. 37.
31. Webb, p. 41.
32. Webb, p. 44.
33. Webb, p. 39.
34. For a fuller discussion of the dynamics of this process see my article, "Lessons on Perspective: W. O. Mitchell's *The Vanishing Point*," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 12, no. 1 (1981), 61-78.
35. I discuss this balancing of story and silence more fully in "Silencing the Word in Howard O'Hagan's *Tay John*," *Canadian Literature*, No. 110 (1986), pp. 30-44.
36. "Robert Kroetsch: The American Experience and the Canadian Voice," an interview conducted by Donald Cameron, *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 1 (1972), 49.
37. Howard O'Hagan, *Tay John* (1939; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), pp. 166-67.

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