

HEIDEGGERIAN ELEMENTS IN ROBERT KROETSCH'S "SEED CATALOGUE"

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ROBERT KROETSCH'S *Seed Catalogue* is neither phenomenological nor structuralist, to borrow a distinction made by David Carroll in *The Subject in Question* (15). That is, it is neither subject-centered nor language-centered, but belongs, instead, to a third, rare, more sylleptic mode of writing aware of and making use of the conventions of the other two. As David Arnason has shown in "Robert Kroetsch: The Deconstruction of the Metanarrative of the Cowboy," *Seed Catalogue* deconstructs ideologies which have become familiar to us concerning the Western hero and the purpose and function of the poem and the poet on the prairie, and is concerned with language and the way writing is a supplement to speech and experience.¹ Yet the poem seems to some extent at least to have retained the phenomenological subject, the philosophical subject. Furthermore, it appears to be deeply concerned with the problem of truth and, in this light, practices a Heideggerian uninventing and unnamings. It uninvents spring, for instance: the spring season that opens the poem is not renamed but deconstructed much like the dismantling of storm windows (Brown 154) when the weather changes :

We took the storm windows/off
the south side of the house
and put them on the hotbed.
Then it was spring. Or, no
then winter was ending. {*Seed Catalogue* 109)

For all its promised warmth and renewal, the spring retains winter and cold and death within it and this metaphor (with its negating "no") appears to reflect what Heidegger thinks about both truth and Being. *Dasein*, authentic Being, is fundamentally aware of its own dying, knows that death is its "ownmost" possibility. Authentic, moral living cannot come about without the newness and the extraordinariness which *angst* and the certainty of death, unmitigated by transcendentalism or spiritualism of any kind, give to *dasein*. Truth and untruth have a similar paradoxical relationship and neither *is* without the other, any more than Being *is* authentic without the knowledge of history (change) at its centre. The

poet in *Seed Catalogue* is a Heideggerian poet who, through his consciousness of Being and his facing up to death, provides for his people and for his prairie community.

The philosophical subject is central to Heidegger, though as William Barrett notes, nowhere in his writings do you find references to either "man" or "consciousness" (218) : the subject is too important a question to name and thus, like the existential humanists or the pre-Romantics (and to an extent the Romantics), to bind and imprison within one, permanent, unchanging and suffocating understanding of his Being — to take history "forever" out of the Being of being. The poet, who falls off his horse in the poem's opening lines, is never named either — he is just the nameless cowboy unhorsed,² yet he is also the conventional autobiographical subject, the poet writing a poem about becoming a poet. Not unlike the description of the will-less protagonist which opens Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House* (1941),³ this first picture we have of the subject is self-deprecating :

Winter was ending.
This is what happened :
we were harrowing the garden.
You've got to understand this :
I was sitting on the horse.
The horse was standing still.
I fell off. (no)

This subject is not the ordinary prairie farm boy who, if he ever fell off a horse, would fall off one that was galloping, or at least in motion. Eventually this incompetence makes sense. The subject is a budding poet — a "sissy" (Arnason 82), not quite a man, someone who, on the prairies, is looked upon with contempt and expected to "hang around the girlies." His father's prohibition against writing, and particularly against writing poetry, makes clear the extent to which the poet is alienated from the prairie community, to the point even of having his sonship implicitly questioned. The father attempts to drive the poetic spirit out of his son with hard work:

First off I want you to take that
crowbar and drive 1,156 holes
in that gumbo.
And the next time you want to
write a poem
we'll start the haying. (119)

But the father doesn't succeed and the rest of the poem continues the fragmented story of the boy's growing consciousness of the world around him and of his development as a poet in the unlikely poetic soil of the Canadian prairies. His memories include the death of his mother, his father's unsuccessful attempts at shooting a badger on the farm and the myth he builds for himself about the event

later, his various experiences with sex as a boy, drinking bouts with friends and their revelries, and his own perceptions of the role of the poet in the community.

You can't escape the fact of the phenomenological subject in *Seed Catalogue* which is a prairie *ku'nstlerroman*; an autobiography; our prairie version of Wordsworth's *The Prelude*. The poem is not, however, at all self-conscious in the sense of Romantic (Hegelian, Kantian) self-consciousness, the sort which Geoffrey Hartman describes in his "Romanticism and 'anti-selfconsciousness'." In fact, its purpose is to re-write or unname exactly that sort of super self-consciousness which makes an idol of individual self-awareness. We do find out a little about the subject: the location of "the home place: N.E. 17-42-16-W4A Meridian," the names of a few relatives, and the fact that he has certain writer friends such as Al Purdy and Rudy Wiebe. Because of the general sparseness of detail, however, and the unconvincing neglect to provide enough biographical information to help the reader locate the subject neatly in time and place, the poem is really not a traditional autobiography. The biographical specificity is more the identity of the home of all prairie small-town people than of the poet himself. *Seed Catalogue's* self-less consciousness is the self under erasure.

If *Seed Catalogue* is erasing the self, finding only traces of the past of self whose Being is no longer recoverable, and who is always-already Being in a future time, then it is writing as supplement, writing that is aware of its own disjunctiveness and dissociation from the "reality" of the thing it has chosen to describe. The subject is "Pinch Me" (*Seed Catalogue* 13 m) who is left at the end of the poem when Adam and Eve both "got drowned" (44). He is the "Pinch Me," of "pinch me to see if I am dreaming," and the ending (all endings which conventional poetry dramatizes are rewritten in this poem) is only the question after which you hope to find an answer or at least a response — some sort of continuation.⁴

Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art," is helpful here. In it, he establishes the "thingly character" (19) of works of art :

Works of art are shipped like coal from the Ruhr and logs from the Black Forest. During the First World War Holderlin's hymns were packed in the soldier's knapsack together with cleaning gear. Beethoven's quartets lie in the storerooms of the publishing house like potatoes in a cellar. (19)

"Thingness" is the essence of an entity before various traits have gathered around it: "Obviously, a thing is not merely an aggregate of traits, nor an accumulation of properties by which that aggregate arises. A thing, as everyone thinks he knows, is that around which the properties have assembled" (23). Things, for Heidegger, including works of art, are not simply constructs without a reference outside of the "mere" chain of signifiers which describe them. The early Greeks knew about this "rootedness" of things. Things had in them a thereness, a Being of beings: ("*hupo-keimenon* . . . the core of the thing, something always already there" 23). Not so for the Western world and the interpretation of Being (presence) it standardized

If they are presences, then what sort of presences are they and how is the poet making us aware of the presence rather than the absence of the thing he is attempting to "set forward" — the prairie and its concealed Being?

Heidegger says about things that we experience their presence by experiencing their absence. We cannot receive a strong impression of a thing's thingness without closing ourselves to its sensations: "In order to hear a *bare* sound we have to listen away from things, divert our ear from them, i.e., listen abstractly" (26). The thing which is the sound cannot be brought near without abstracting it and removing it from its context. The Parthenon, the Cathédrale de Chartres, Sartre and Heidegger become clear to us in the remove of the context of *Seed Catalogue*. We know them better and more fully here than they could be known in their own fully familiar and sensuously cultural homeland. They are objectified here. This is a duplicity which startles the prairie writer/reader who is accustomed to lamenting the absence of culture in his back yard. The thingness of Sartre is closer to us than to the French, thus, but the unknowable Being of Sartre's being is not. We have it more and in purer form than they over there, but the abstraction of Sartre and the other cultural icons onto Canadian soil makes the whole unpalatable and inordinately unlikely :

In the thing-concept . . . there is not so much an assault upon the thing as rather an inordinate attempt to bring it into the greatest possible proximity to us. But a thing never reaches that position as long as we assign as its thingly feature what is perceived by the senses. Whereas the first interpretation keeps the thing at arm's length from us, as it were, and sets it too far off, the second makes it press too hard upon us. In both interpretations the thing vanishes. (26)

The insertion of the familiar in the midst of the unfamiliar does two things: it heightens our awareness of the thingness (Being) of the prairie objects slipped into the list of cultural absences (a condom dispenser, Louis Riel, *The Western Producer*, the principal's new car, and so on) and it displaces the nearness of the European art/ifacts and either makes them less inordinate and out of context or makes them more "pressing" and so irrelevant to us. This is exactly the poet's role in the process of finding out truth. If this juxtaposition of prairie experience and European art/experience is serviceable to us as a "work" then *Seed Catalogue* is continuing to uncover the truth.

The question of truth in works of art leads to the question of the best truth-teller society can expect to find, and thus ultimately to the role of the poet in the community. Related to the way we try to experience things, as familiar and as unfamiliar, is a third possibility which is to leave the thing in its constancy. The latter is what the poet does best. Kroetsch, in the list of absences, is not analyzing the things themselves, but setting them in such a light, in such a state of *dasein* (startled and startling into sudden emergence into light), and in such a state of opposition that thinking occurs. Not inordinate "philosophical" thinking, and not the splitting

of the object thought about from itself (the subject), but thinking which leaves the thing thought about whole : "We ought to turn toward the being, think about it in regard to its being, but by means of this thinking at the same time let it rest upon itself in its very own being" (31).

The truth of a thing, the Being of a being, is revealed by remaining unrevealed, though thought about. Truth is also untruth. Knowing is also not knowing. Inventing is uninventing :

But it is not we who presuppose the unconcealedness of beings; rather, the unconcealedness of beings (Being) puts us into such a condition of being that in our representation we always remain installed within and in attendance upon unconcealedness. ("Origin" 52)

The subject of *Seed Catalogue*, the poet, is the thinker, and this is just as much a dichotomy as truth = non-truth, and being = non-being. How can the poet with his unsystematic methods and his dependence on and attendance on the emotional be a thinker in Heidegger's sense of a thoughtful mind which by mediation works at preventing the race of the rest of the world towards technological thoughtlessness?⁶ Furthermore, how can a thinker be *grown* on the prairie? You can train and educate an analytic philosopher, the academy can build a scientist, but how can the small town (Heisler/Todtnau) *grow* a poet? How can it grow a poet as indigenous to its place and earth as carrots and turnips and radishes? The paradox of "how do you *grow* a poet?" is precisely, too, how do you grow a thinker? How do you grow a thinker about truth in a land and age (epoch) which resists poetry and thinking — where the best we can come up with is a digger of fenceposts, a writer of huge fiction and a galloper of caribou horses through restaurants?

The good poet is the best thinker, "the precursor of poets in a destitute time" ("What Are Poets For?" 142). He heralds in the future with his work. In fact, the future's presence would not be available to the world without the poet: "The precursor, however, does not go off into a future; rather, he arrives out of that future, in such a way that the future is present only in the arrival of his words" (142). The good poet is not just one manifestation of truth in the world but the very measure or gauge of present Being whose work is the place to look for evidence of the state Being is in, in the world. He has to, then, be more of a thinker, more willing to risk rejection, and more deeply involved in authentic living himself than the philosopher could be. The location of authenticity, *Seed Catalogue* tells us, is in the garden and not in the academy, in the clearing and not in the library. The title of the poem, the narrative voice which tells us that love "is a leaping up and down" (113), the colloquial and humorous voice of the seed catalogue persona imitating, poorly, what it thinks is a refined British voice, the voice with its cowboy concerns which informs the reluctant waitress that Pete Knight, the king of all cowboys is dead (123), all these are authentic, oral voices.⁷ The voice of being is

the voice of people who are kin to nature — the farmer and the poet familiar with the farm,⁸ the *poet-manqué* in one sense, are the best gauges of authentic living.

THE BEST GAUGE OF HEIDEGGER'S THINKING about the poet is his own poetry. In an appropriate selection called "The Thinker as Poet," Heidegger explains, in verse, the qualities which make the good poet. Good thinking is discursive thinking: "That is the proper hour of discourse. / Discourse cheers us to companionable / Reflection" (6). Prophetic vision, clear sight, "precurative" sight, is poetic sight: "Only image formed keeps the vision. Yet image formed rests in the poem" (6). Poetry is dangerous to thinking, but it is a "good" danger: "The good and thus wholesome / Danger is the nighness of the singing poet" (8); but "philosophizing" is a "bad" danger to thinking: "The bad and thus muddled danger / is philosophizing" (8). Good thinking is courageous, slow, patient, and possibly most of all, "playful." The way poetry "plays" with language, philosophy cannot :

All our heart's courage is the
echoing response to the first call
of Being which gathers our
thinking into the play of the
world. (9)

The central concern for both Heidegger and Kroetsch about thinking and Being and the event of things (lovers, towns, poets) is their growing: "But poetry that thinks is in truth / the topology of Being" and "Singing and thinking are the stems / neighbor to poetry. / They grow out of Being and reach into truth" (13). In the spirit of this assertion, Kroesch asks, "how do you grow a poet?" (118). As a way of answering his own question, he dramatically, and intellectually, deconstructs the myth of the sterility of the prairie.⁹ The winter of the stillness of poetic presence, the presence of thinking, on the prairie is over :

The end of winter
seeding/time.
How do you grow a
poet? (36)

This poem is the beginning of seeding time — the poem about a seed catalogue is a planting in the "ground" of the "oral" prairies (the written word planted in the oral ground to gain or impart fertility), the non-intellectual prairies, the place of farmers, seeders, of poets of a new order (not of the sort Britain produced over the last 700 years, for instance), and the question about growing a poet *is* the seed in the ground of prairie stillness and the invisibility of prairie presence. The poem's

question about the poet is the precursor of future prairie presence, prairie culture becoming, emerging into light. It is the poet nurturing "our" being, the "crackle" of "our" voices as Dennis Cooley says it in *The Vernacular Muse* (182), and in that sense it is a rescuing of prairie from its status as a marginalized and self-deprecating lower class which always already shuts up in the presence of high European culture.

The absences in *Seed Catalogue*, the absence of Aeneas and Heraclitus and the Parthenon are presences of a past which mean little for the present. Kroetsch thinks into being our "dwelling" ("Being, Dwelling, Thinking" *passim*). The absence of Aeneas is replaced by the presence of "the Strauss boy [who] . . . could piss higher on a barn than any of us" (29). The absence of kings and queens is replaced with a story of "bullshitters"¹⁰ unreserved carnival celebration: "the absence of a bottle opener, and me with a vicious attack of the 26-ounce flu (29)." Notice how there is no desire in the imported absences mentioned while the "present" prairie absences are all about the juice and "fire" of living: "the absence of a condom dispenser in the Lethbridge Hotel," "the absence of the girl who said that if the Edmonton / Eskimos won the Grey Cup she'd let me kiss / her nipples in the foyer of the Palliser / Hotel," and being in "love" with "an old Blood whore" (29). Here there is "poetry" we understand.

Kroetsch is "setting back" *Seed Catalogue* into the earth of the prairie, of small town Alberta, in order to let that earth be earth: "That into which the work sets itself back and which it causes to come forth in this setting back of itself we called the earth. Earth is that which comes forth and shelters. . . . The work moves the earth itself into the Open of a world and keeps it there. *The work lets the earth be an earth*" ("Origin" 46). Part of the prairie earth is the indigenous, indestructible, eternal brome grass, for instance :

Brome Grass (*Bromus Inermis*) : No amount of cold will kill it. It **withstands** the summer suns. Water may stand on it for several weeks without apparent injury. The roots push through the soil, throwing up new plants continually. It **starts quicker** than other grasses in the spring. **Remains green** longer in the fall. **Flourishes under absolute neglect.**

Brome grass is hardy, of course, but so are prairie people. Another part of this prairie earth is the peculiar mixture of homegrown remedies for physical illness and spiritual "diseases" :

For appetite : cod-liver
oil
For bronchitis: mustard
plasters
For pallor and failure to fill
the woodbox : sulphur
& molasses.

For self-abuse: ten Our Fathers
and ten Hail Marys For regular
bowels : Sunny Boy Cereal
(119)

And there are also our particular prairie encumbrances to "romance" : always a pair of skates in every story, always ice skating or hockey at the heart of every narrative :

or that
girl in the skating rink
shack who had on so
much underwear you
didn't have enough
prick to get past her/
CCM skates (119)

The prairie world blossoms, grows, emerges in this poem, becomes unhidden and uninvented. This "new" world is, in *Seed Catalogue* and out of it, as particular and complex, as capable of being set forth and of sheltering, as there is will to think about it or time and space for the work to record it. The poet's work cares for this world in a way which does not analyse the earth out of its context and out of significance.

All the questions *Seed Catalogue's* subject asks — "How do you grow a gardener?" (m), "How do you grow a past?" (116), "How do you grow a prairie town?" (117), "How do you grow a lover?" (115), "How do you grow a poet?" (119) — are dramatizations of methods of consciousness : the desire to know, the ache to separate things from their ground and to analyse them as distinct and unattached things, as objects outside of history. Such questioning is usually the mark of a Western philosophical, analytical inquiry. But these particular questions are somehow all wrong, too, for that analytic tradition. They are not questions about justice, Truth, God, Trees, the Sun, and so on, detached from human emotion. They are a poet's questions — a poet's consciousness which is, in this case, not logical but evocative. These questions never get answered ; are dropped as soon as asked. The formula doesn't get completed. There are no certainties. The questions, no more than the imperative, finally, to the poet to "teach us to love our dying" (42), do not provide solutions but answer back with more poetry. In that way they partake of the Heideggerian principle that poetry with its natural duplicity, its trait of being set back in the earth, is the thought of truth.

This last point about dying is, perhaps, the most Heideggerian aspect of *Seed Catalogue*. Here we have Heidegger's notion of the difference between the one undifferentiated, "pre philosophical" self who has not yet encountered the terror of his own non-being and the self who has and whose struggle with angst will eventually lend dignity to existence. The poet of *Seed Catalogue* is an alone and

"anxious" Self, speaking his way toward understanding in the Heideggerian non-abstract sense of "unconcealedness" and "un-hiddenness" :

In this world that lies before him, open beneath the light, things lie unconcealed (also concealed) ; but unconcealedness, or un-hiddenness, for Heidegger, is truth; and therefore so far as man exists, he exists 'in the truth.' Truth and Being are thus inseparable, given always together, in the simple sense that a world with things in it opens up around man the moment he exists. Most of the time, however, man does not let himself see what really happens in seeing. (Barrett 222)

In the realm of speech and language, death is best represented by silence. Tongue-tiedness. Wordlessness. A fighting for breath. The truth of death is silence, just as death finally leaves each of us speechless. Tongue-tied. Silence is language confronting the absence at the very heart of presence. That is, silence is courage. A standing at the edge of the abyss. A looking at the terror, a looking right at non-being. Silence is an awakening; a being born of understanding. Language without silence is simply chatter, just another one of the ways modern Being avoids facing the silence of its own non-Being.

When Being faces its own non-Being, all the everyday ordinariness of Being and Being's nothingness or nowhere-ness disappears : Being is brought face to face with death. Angst brings you to a place of something, a not-nothingness. In that sense, *Seed Catalogue* is, in aggregate, a gift to the people of the prairie, the poet's contribution to their survival and his part in "keeping the farmyard in shape." This is important for understanding the duplicity of the poem. That the question of dying is central to *Seed Catalogue* is made clear by the preponderance of deaths in it: the mother in her grave when the poem begins; the magpie and badger, one shot at and killed by the father (112); the husband who has been buried "with his ass sticking out of the ground" (117); the Créés "surprised ... to death" (121) on the Oldman River by the Bloods; Pete Knight, "King / of *All* cowboys" (123 — whose death by falling off a horse, implicates the poet, who also has fallen off his horse, in his own death) j¹¹ Henry L. Kroetsch, patriarch, whose "last will and testament" (124) are recorded in the poem; Freddie Kroetsch, the best barn builder in the area, dead but "remembered" (124) by the poet; the poet's cousin Kenneth MacDonald whose bomber is shot down over Cologne in 1943 (126) ; and finally Adam and Eve themselves who we are told "got drowned" (127). The powerful request, "Poet, teach us to love our dying" (126) is a cry for help rising out of the community which has not allowed itself to recognize the neurosis which living and dying entail, made all the more unbearable by the suppression inherent in the various simplifying dualities by which people live and think. The poet knows, for instance, that religions tend to make us "love" our dying and to provide easy solutions for the fear of death by proclaiming everlasting and joyous living after this life. Such promises are placebos and solaces which keep life ordinary and "secure" and are illustrated by the priest's facile solution to the poet's and

Germaine's expression of the great body and soul problem. The two young people have discovered the pleasure of each others' bodies and when the boy makes a confession, the priest shows no willingness to acknowledge the complexity of the conflict between culturally-determined codes of behaviour and raging natural desire. He simply calls it "playing dirty" (114) and admonishes him: "keep your peter in your pants for the next thirteen years" (114). Typical of the independent spirit of the poet, he can't and doesn't listen to advice, and he and Germaine choose, instead, to "die" once more: "we decided we could do it / just one more time" (115),¹² If the love in "love our dying" means "loving" private *angst*, having the conscience to experience it, and having good faith that drives one to look into the abyss of death and non-being, then such a "work" which can do this is, for the good poet, a worthwhile and moral work. If "love" on the other hand means skirting death and loving death falsely, loving what is really not death at all but an escape from it, then such a work would be unworthy of the good poet. In either case, the concern with the poet's role in 'teaching' the community (presenting Being for the community) and the climactic position of death at the centre of this autobiographical poem shows Heidegger's influence.

THE HISTORY OF BEING (for the West), Heidegger says, begins with the fall of Being. Kroetsch's cowboy/poet falls into an originary site of Being — back into the garden. Paradise Regained. Eve is at the centre of this garden; but she is dead. She has experienced dying; knows it well. She whispers for the poet to bring her the radish seeds while the people about him call to him to be taught about death. She has already (always/already?) learned this and her whisper is seductive and oddly generative :

This is what happened — at my mother's wake. This is
a fact — the World Series was in progress. The
Cincinnati Reds were playing the Detroit Tigers. It
was raining. The road to the graveyard was barely
passable. The horse was standing still. Bring me the
radish seeds, my mother whispered

This poem is not authenticity all done, *fait accompli*, nor the utter relinquishment of power and will and a clear-eyed facing of death. The will to power is still there and it expresses itself in the fact of the poet's words, in his backward-lookingness, in his longing to superimpose the stories of his youth over the problems of today, and in his very love of life, which is a looking at the past. Heideggerian Being is historical, but it is forward-looking history because the primary mood of Being is awareness of the future — of death. The poem ends with that realization and it plays out the sequence of obsession with the past, of the young life of the poet

with his desires — for language, for the garden, for Germaine, for another.¹³ But the questions, the "how do you"s, point him always back to the future.

Seeing is not seeing. Answering is questioning. The clarity of Aristotle is blindness. The questions of the poet are answers. They are desiring sight without seeing. They are supplementing the presence which is all around them in science books, in seed catalogues, in the ir/replaceable objects of the sort Mary Hauck brings with her to Canada, to Alberta, and which burn to the ground in the Heisler Hotel fire. They are the real absences at the centre of *Seed Catalogue*. From expository discourse the poet returns to the interrogative. The interrogative is a paradox — it too has doubleness at its centre. Answered, the interrogative is all of Western philosophy in a nutshell — completion, ending, transcendence above the now of Being into the eternity of knowing, truth without history or change, the end of the matter. Unanswered, it is the orient. Unanswered, it is Openness, only a beginning, a failure in the best sense of the word. Unanswered, it is the failure of completion, the postponement of orgasm¹⁴ and the death of desire. Unanswered, the interrogative is the *angst* of failure, and the call for more.

NOTES

¹ See the essay in general, and specially his discussion of Derrida's notion, in *Of Grammatology* 14.1-5J, of the utter absence of signification outside the text.

² See "The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction." Kroetsch discusses here the tension between house and horse on the Canadian prairie and the perennial struggle for male independence (80).

³ Kroetsch has often said that Ross's *As For Me and My House* was the most important book in his development as a prairie writer proud of his heritage. See "The Moment of the Discovery of America Continues" 4.

⁴ *Seed Catalogue* is thus one side of a dialogue. In this sense, the poem is Derridean in its double, saying what it never yet has said, not answering its own questions, finding the aporias in the Utopian text, laying traps for the logic of this text about Adam and Eve and the poet in the paradisaal garden.

⁵ The idea of the essential, transcendental, and metaphysical quality of things is the core of Derrida's argument with Heidegger.

⁸ In *Discourse on Thinking*, Heidegger distinguishes between calculative thinking and meditative thinking and says that it is the second kind which the modern world needs more of. "[Meditative thinking] is thinking which contemplates the meaning which reigns in everything that is" (46).

⁷ For discussions of orality in *Seed Catalogue* see among others Arnason 84, Wood 84, Ricou 116, and Munton 91.

⁸ This recalls Wordsworth's famous injunction in the Preface to *The Lyrical Ballads* about rustics being the most fit subjects for poetry.

⁹ According to Laurie Ricou in "Prairie Poetry and Metaphors of Plain/s Space," *Seed Catalogue* and other Kroetsch long poems refuse the "abstractions" (112) and "disappearing landscapes" (115) typical of conventional prairie landscape poetry.

¹⁰ "Bullshit artists" are the best poets in an oral tradition according to Kroetsch. See his discussion of Glen Sorestad's poetry, "The Moment of the Discovery of America Continues" (17-18).

- [¶] The poet's death is further suggested by the fact that he falls into a garden; no one is left in the garden at the end of the poem.
- ² The connection between death and sex is made more explicitly in the "I don't give a damn if I do die do die do die" scene (117) which, as Arnason points out, involves a priest catching a boy in a graveyard in the act of masturbation and warning him that he will die if he carries on with his "self-abuse" (86).
- ^B He wishes to be a postman so he could "deliver real words / to real people" (117). The poem begins and ends in a garden, the home garden and the Garden of Eden; the last garden is lush and inviting, a place "where the brome grass was up to [Cindy's] hips" (127). The incident with Germaine is left unfinished and begging for completion or continuation; she seems to be there waiting for him, whispering to us. His mother's death, though mesmerizing as a voice speaking from the grave, is not lamented by the poet — even here there is incompleteness and powerful, unfulfilled, interrupted desire.
- ^H Frank Davey's very important essay on the debate between "delay" and "prolongation" takes issue with Kroetsch's assertion that the long poem in Canada is essentially a story of neurotic compulsion and the failure to end the poem out of fear of climax and closure. What Kroetsch discusses as a fear of orgasm, Davey calls instead a celebration of prolonged, continual orgasm ("The Language of the Contemporary Canadian Long Poem" *passim*).

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HERO

Francis Sparshott

Old hero Hemingway
 pushed his sharp weapon
 valiantly to the extreme end
 of the page. He stood rival
 to bull-stabbers, buffalo-shooters, snaggers
 of waggly fish delicious on long lines. Now
 he goes to his chosen reward : two
 barrels in the face. He has left for his dear
 wife this estate: all round the vestibule
 the scatterings of a broken head. Prolix
 in brief sentences, he scrawled a memorial
 in copious red : if you require
 a monument, dear, look at the walls
 around you. Remember me.