

A MAP OF MISREADING: GENDER, IDENTITY, AND FREEDOM IN ROBERT KROETSCH'S *GONE INDIAN*.

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M.E. Turner, among several others, has contended that the discussion of Robert Kroetsch's work is too often based upon the critical positions set out in Kroetsch's own theoretical work; Kroetsch's literary output has enjoyed a high level of acceptance because Kroetsch's criticism implicitly posits his own works as models for postmodern fiction and poetry. Although Turner's argument is overstated, it is often difficult to separate Kroetsch's novels from his critical pronouncements. In at least one instructive case, though, this tendency results in fallacious conclusions, not because of the naive linking of an author's artistic and critical statements, but because of a fundamental misreading of both the critical and the literary texts.

"The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction: An Erotics of Space" is Kroetsch's most frequently cited theoretical statement. *Gone Indian* is perhaps Kroetsch's most underappreciated novel. Both works have been consistently misread on the basis of what critics have anticipated Kroetsch *ought* to be saying, what they were prepared to accept his saying. Recently, from the perspective of "third-wave feminism" (or "feminization of deconstruction"), Susan Rudy-Dorscht identifies the central misreading of Kroetsch's "Erotics of Space" (a misreading which is apparent even without that perspective). It has been read as being prescriptive of Kroetsch's conception of male-female relationships rather than descriptive of the relationships discerned in previous prairie fiction:

Although Kroetsch recognizes that traditionally we have "conceived of external space as male, internal space as female. More precisely, the penis: external, expandable, expendable; the vagina: internal, eternal," his reading of the

sexual/textual politics between male and female overturns these phallogentric assumptions. ("The Studhorse Man" 26)

Rudy-Dorscht seeks to replace both first-wave feminism—that which calls for "texts written by biological women . . . [to] be recognized, included, and valued within the canon"—and second-wave feminism—which "rests upon the notions of femininity as an essential difference and of female writing as a writing of the body" (26)—with third-wave feminism because the prior two positions perpetuate the reductive dualism of male-female. As she writes in *Telling the Difference: Rereading 'Woman,'* her doctoral thesis on Kroetsch's novels (but not, except glancingly, *Gone Indian*),

The third attitude in feminist thinking undermines the hierarchy of the binary opposition which permits questions of equality to be asked and finds, with Barbara Johnson, that differences between seemingly stable categories are based on "a repression of differences within entities, ways in which an entity differs from itself." (7)

Critics of Kroetsch's fiction, and of *Gone Indian* in particular, similarly perpetuate the repressive binarism his characters seek to escape. His characters are typically plagued by a dichotomous view of existence, and critics tend to be entrapped by that view as well, seeing the resolution of each novel as an assertion of the primacy of the vital, active half of each binary opposition over the repressive, stultifying half. As David Creelman writes,

his texts are filled with oppositions, in which a first term concerned with a static vision of the world is rejected in favour of a second more radical term which focuses on process and activity. (64-5)

Instead, though, the novels portray the struggle to escape the definition of identity in the restrictive binary form of "if I'm not that, then I must be this." Kroetsch's protagonists typically find—although usually not by seeking it—a way to define identity without resorting to that binarism, or evade defining it at all. Rudy-Dorscht's position, clearly, is applicable to the larger question of identity, whether its derivation is related to gender or not. If Jeremy Sadness, the central character in *Gone Indian*, defines himself as opposite to Professor Madham, or embraces Western

Canada as opposed to Eastern Canada, or seeks to be Indian as opposed to White, or establishes his maleness in opposition to femaleness, or establishes any facet of his identity by differentiation on the basis of the many binary oppositions at play in the novel, his sense of identity is still constructed and constrained by the reductive, dualistic thinking which sponsors the binaries.

Jeremy Sadness has been saddled with a quest and an identity not his own. His struggle to earn a Ph.D. and become a professional academic derives from the wish of both parents that he should be unlike his seaman father, and from Professor Madham's example and advice as his thesis supervisor and surrogate parent. Jeremy's journey west in search of academic employment is also clearly not of his choosing. His precarious marital and financial situations seem similarly to have been imposed upon him. Evidently as a result of these burdens, Jeremy is burdened also with a handicap: he cannot achieve an erection lying down. To find a cure for his sexual dysfunction, Jeremy must cast off inherited and imposed restrictions on identity, not only his own but those of others. Jeremy's response is to embark on a quest westward in order to become Grey Owl. Transforming himself into Grey Owl—going Indian—is the active half of the binary: Jeremy opposes his dream of becoming Grey Owl to the dream his parents and Madham share of his becoming an academic: he will become Grey Owl instead of becoming Jeremy Bentham.

Professor Madham, responding to Jill Sunderman's appeal to "explain everything" (1) about the disappearance of Jeremy with her mother, Bea, constructs a narrative out of the cassette tapes he claims Jeremy filled while on his quest. The book's forty-six sections are narrated alternately by Madham and Sadness. The doubled narrative pattern suggests the binary opposition of Sadness and Madham: Jeremy feels himself to be antithetically opposed to Madham and what he represents, as many of the critics have noted. But, as Sadness is progressively affected by his experience in the Northwest, he feels less and less need to speak to his cassette recorder and to Madham—he removes himself from the dialogue. As Jeremy tends increasingly towards silence late in the book, Madham fills the silence for him, interjecting commentary into even those sections ostensibly narrated by Jeremy. The final chapter should be in Jeremy's voice, but since that voice has been

silenced—at least in terms of this coercive, reductive narrative dichotomy—Madham has the last word.

Professor Madham clearly is, if not a madman, then a seriously unbalanced and unreliable narrator. Madham tells Jill that, while he has done some editing, most of the narrative is a direct transcription of Jeremy's tapes, but she and the reader have only Madham's assertion for this. We have no way of confirming the veracity of any of the information presented, so the game becomes to learn about the narrator and to try to piece together the story through his disorderings of it. The reader is forced to accept that there is no final solution, no single ending—"Endings be damned" (24). Like the prairies' promise of diffusion of identity rather than a concluded self, the book remains an open field, a wealth of possibilities offering a series of metamorphoses, rather than a single switch from one pole to its opposite.

One of the dangers for the reader playing this game is to fail to maintain adequate critical distance from the attitudes and assumptions of the characters, or mistakenly to identify them with Kroetsch's own. Peter Thomas, for example, simplifies the novel as being typical Kroetsch: "once more Kroetsch pairs a restrained central character with his unrestrained *doppelgänger*" (69). To Robert Lecker the novel presents "a typical Kroetschian conflict between a father figure aligned with the East, the rooted past, narrative definition, and institutionalized learning, and a surrogate son whose dream is counter-East, who responds unpredictably to immediate circumstances, who thrives on inventing himself" (62). Arnold Davidson refers to the book in terms of the "hoary opposition of youth versus age. . . ." (136). Peter Sinnema concludes that Jeremy and Madham remain trapped in a dialectic opposition:

Whereas Jeremy can see himself becoming Madham within the dialectic . . . he cannot go Indian. Braids versus brush-cut is a gap impossible to span, but the episteme of Binghamton . . . binds Jeremy into a system of knowledge enabling dialogue with Mark Madham. Overdetermined by the valorized ambiguity of *Gone Indian* which throws him into a dialectical contiguity with Madham, Jeremy cannot abandon notions of indigenous Otherness in the very moment he quests to go Indian. (94)

Jeremy's dream is "counter-East" and to "go Indian" initially, but by the end of the novel, he has dropped out of the dialogue that Sinnema cites: Jeremy no longer "quests to go Indian." Jeremy originally wants to become Grey Owl, who "killed" his former self as Archie Belaney to become reborn as an Indian naturalist and author. Stanley Fogel contends that Jeremy's dream "To become Grey Owl is to free himself from the welter of words that paralyses him. . ." (84). Most opinions of the novel similarly view the dream to become Grey Owl as freeing, but Jeremy's vague struggle to become Grey Owl actually paralyses him from taking action, leading him to reject actual possibilities for transformation. Jeremy's wilful attempt to become Grey Owl is as wrong-headed as Madham's trying to turn Jeremy into a younger version of himself. When Daniel Beaver tells Jeremy that Grey Owl would be proud of the way Sadness handled himself in the fight after the snowshoe race, Jeremy's reaction makes clear that it is to a misty ideal of Grey Owl that he aspires:

"He was a good fighter," Daniel explained. "He killed a man himself one time, in a fight."

"He killed himself," I whispered. I didn't dare flex a muscle. "He killed Archie Belaney. Then he became Grey Owl."

"I never heard of that," Daniel said. "But once he killed a man. Another man. He was quick with a knife, Grey Owl. He liked to drink. He liked women. . . ."

"You didn't know him," I said aloud, defending Grey Owl. No one could say those things about my borderman. My pathfinder. (100-101)

The temptation to which Fogel and others appear to succumb is to see Madham as the negative role model and Grey Owl as the positive role model simply because Jeremy sees them that way. Surely Madham, rather than being merely emblematic of a "rooted past" and the repressive East, is as much a product of transformation as Grey Owl, even if we disallow the hinted possibility of his being the mature Robert Sunderman, Bea's absent husband. Madham grew up in the West and reinvented himself; he dreamed East and pursued a counter-quest to become an academic intellectual. And, just as surely, Grey Owl is as much a concluded self as Madham, his character set down, idealized, and

reified in the books he published and the invented history he told—no refuge from a paralysing welter of words there.

Jeremy's first name was the dubious last gift of his father, who disappeared after naming him for Jeremy Bentham in the hope, Jeremy's mother tells him, that he would grow up to be a professor (52). Madham takes over as surrogate father, further encouraging academic discipline and rationality. Again the temptation is to label this inherited desire negative and Jeremy's desire for transformation positive, but the desire to become a professor would surely seem a dream of transformation for Jeremy's father, a rootless sailor, and for Madham as well, who has undergone such a metamorphosis, leaving behind in his boyhood the Northwest Jeremy seeks. And the dream of becoming Grey Owl is equally an inherited desire. The tailor across the hall from Sadness's childhood home, who also assumes the role of surrogate father, provides an alternative to the ambition Jeremy's real father held for him: "He gave me *his* dream of the European boy who became . . . pathfinder. . . borderman. . . the truest Indian of them all" (emphasis added) (94). The desire to become Grey Owl, however positive that ambition may seem when contrasted to the notion of emulating Jeremy Bentham, is nonetheless someone else's dream and a dream to adopt someone else's identity.

The misreading of the critical text and the novel are linked most clearly in the reactions of most critics to the role of female characters in *Gone Indian*; the critical responses tend similarly to simplify the complexity, ambiguity, and indeterminate nature of most of the characters in the book, male or female. Few characters in the novel are what or who they seem to be, and fewer still remain consistent throughout the narrative, so it is unlikely that a whole class of characters could be relegated to a single, unambiguous and unchanging role. Citing Thomas, though, Lecker notes a typical male-female opposition:

. . . Jeremy must flee several constraints. One of these is Woman. Like Dorck, Jeremy persistently tries to escape from Bea and Jill Sunderman, both of whom threaten to sunder man in time. Conforming to Kroetsch's female stereotype, they are cast "as representatives of the female claim in time." (69)

Lecker, like Thomas and many others, fails to recognize that this

"female stereotype" is being exploded in Kroetsch's work. Lecker confuses the stereotype of the entrapping, domesticating female Kroetsch perceives in earlier Prairie writing (and describes in "The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction") with the role of the female in Kroetsch's own fiction.

The role of Woman as Lecker and Thomas discuss it corresponds more with how the male characters and narrators perceive the female characters than with how the reader comes to understand them. Linda Hutcheon attributes at least some of this distortion to the gender-bias of male critics, but, regardless of its source, her description of its result is germane. She points out that there are varied images of the female in the novel, not just the entrapping Woman:

...while there are indeed images connecting women to enclosure in Kroetsch's novels, these are often the images offered by a male narrator and reflect more upon his individual (limited) view of women than upon the text's view as a whole. Bea and Jill . . . may indeed be named the ominous "Sunderman," but . . . first of all, it is Bea's *husband's* name, and second, within a postmodern perspective, the notion of 'sundering man' may well be a positive. . . . Kroetsch has always . . . worked to show how male and female roles are fictions. . . . (171)

Madham's reaction to Carol Sadness's last statement in the book indicates the degree to which the reader's perception of the female characters is determined by their presentation by the male narrators. As he attempts to convince her that her husband must have died in the collision with the train or the fall from the bridge, Carol interrupts, "I would have gone with him." "It is that kind of silliness that intrudes upon reason" (153) is Madham's only comment, but the surprise the reader experiences at Carol's remark is due to the limited perspective both Madham and Jeremy—and so the reader—have of her. Neither can see her as anything but a single, stereotypical entity. To Jeremy, she is the demanding shrew of a wife he left behind; to Madham, she is the youthful, adoring sop for his ego. Jeremy defines her as being like Madham; Madham defines her as opposed to Jeremy; neither sees her as herself, or guesses that she may share the desire for freedom that each imagines is a solely male quest.

Critical views of this book, then, tend to over-simplify the

oppositions—East-West, male-female, stasis-flux, reason-intuition, and the rest—by not giving full weight to the shifting nature of the opposed pairs, and to what often turns out to be the near identity of apparent opposites. Kroetsch's position is not that we live in a dualistic, dichotomized world, but that the human mind seeks dualistic structures and easily assimilated binary oppositions. What he says of the doubled world of *The Double Hook* is clearly applicable to his own work: "should not the dichotomies themselves be dissolved?" ("Death" 210). In the same passage Kroetsch notes that James, the pivotal figure in Sheila Watson's novel, is "freed . . . from freedom," from the need to be the questing male, seeking invulnerability in isolation. Kroetsch's novels similarly celebrate those characters who break out of the binary pattern, albeit often only briefly, not those who demonstrate the dominance of one aspect of a dualistic opposition, even if it is the "active" half. Jeremy is not celebrated for championing the West versus Madham's East, or for asserting male isolation over female domesticity, but because at the end, and briefly during the narrative, he is able to make his mind a virtual blank, to experience without interpreting, without reducing existence to a system of binary opposites. When he is with Bea in bed, for instance, he feels like the "free man freed from his freedom" (149), is "as blank as the darkness" (146), and considers writing a thesis entitled "The Quest Unquestioned" (149).

And although Sadness is thought to be in opposition to Madham, the two are more alike than not. Throughout the novel Jeremy is tormented by the notion that "There is always a loser. . . . There is always a winner" (120), a logical outcropping of the habit of binary thinking. He may disdain Madham's academicism, but he is possessed of it as well. When Jeremy is asked at the Winter Carnival to pick the Winter Queen, to distinguish again between the winner and the losers, he is unnerved by the silence of the virtually identical candidates. Despite his dream of returning to elemental silence in the indifferent North, the experience of actual silence engenders only confusion and anxiety and leaves him yearning for the comforting if illusory solidity of Madham's scholarly outlook:

Not once did any one of the candidates speak a word. Not a human word. To me, a man forever attracted to the mael-

strom. Something in me wanted to write in the margins of those lives: Awk. Frag. Emph. Cap. Fig. Instead I was offered silence. What in heaven was I supposed to judge? (114)

Sadness shares Madham's tendency to reduce the world to a comprehensible form, despite his attraction to the "maelstrom," and as the narrative unfolds it becomes increasingly apparent that Madham is also more like than unlike Sadness, taking over Jeremy's role as the mate of Carol, even imitating the lovemaking of the buffalo as Jeremy aspires to do. He shares, Jeremy says, Jeremy's impotence, and while Sadness has been stalled on his dissertation for nine years, Madham has been unable to finish his own masterwork for fifteen. Madham is not simply an Eastern, establishment academic who desires order for its own sake; he claims to have experienced at an early age the dissolution of identity and the fearsome indifference of the blank prairie that Sadness now faces, and he has asserted order in opposition to it. If anything, Madham is more aware than Jeremy of the opportunity afforded by the frontier for transformation, noting that Carol could not "grasp the consequences of the northern prairies to human definition: the diffusion of personality into a complex of possibilities rather than a concluded self" (152). Immediately after the passage above, he complains of being stifled by the Binghamton weather, one of the many signals that Madham is not the "concluded self" he believes himself to be.

The lack of solidity in the apparent opposition of Sadness and Madham is emblematic of the fluid state of identity in the novel from its beginning. Entering the carnivalistic world of the Northwest at Edmonton airport, Jeremy gets his first exposure to a land in which "Illusion is rife" (8). Having mistakenly picked up baggage belonging to Roger Dorck, he is detained in a holding cell with a young woman who turns out to be a young man, who claims further to have been a buffalo in a past life. Inspired by this vision of transformation, Jeremy determines to escape, "DISGUISED AS MYSELF" (11). That Jeremy considers his own public self a disguise underscores the distinction between perceived self and the unconcluded self or selves concealed by that pretense. This is one of the many transitory and unsatisfactory metamorphoses Jeremy will undergo. Although he already dresses and wears his hair like an Indian (albeit a stereotypical Indian—

Daniel Beaver's children mock him for this [65]), he feels he has become even more an Indian when he receives Daniel's jacket (93). He has also become Roger Dorck, and so the carnival's Winter King and the judge of the Winter Queen contest. He becomes a mock prisoner, and, in his dream, a buffalo and Has-Two-Chances (106). He becomes a corpse in a coffin, and flirts with being Robert Sunderman. Significantly, though, it is when he is not consciously seeking to *become* someone, but merely thoughtlessly voids his own received identity, that he finds the freedom and peace he seeks. In Madham's words, as he allows Digger, a fellow reveler, to assume his identity, "The metamorphosis, one is tempted to say, was complete. Jeremy [was] no longer himself," having "unwittingly lent his precious self to that old gravedigger" (139).

Although Jeremy often yearns for the solidity of identity that Madham represents, he desires equally the release from fixed identity that Madham rejected when he fled the Northwest in his youth. Madham's escape is typical of the many responses by men to similar threats to their sense of an inviolate, unitary identity. The evasion of responsibility and vulnerability is the quest for freedom for the novel's men, but Jeremy is "freed from his freedom," his need to pursue that quest further. Kroetsch's novels typically present an elemental opposition of earth and sky, of body and soul, represented in images of the spirit soaring and then being pulled to earth again by the weight of the body's demands. Also typical is the male characters' seeking freedom from domesticating women. The desire to fly, to escape the pull of the earth and of women becomes a central motif in this novel too. Sadness imagines Dorck's snowmobile accident as a beautiful moment: ". . . he leaped up and over; like a dream of himself he climbed, into the night air, free of the earth at last, his freed engine roaring" (26). The only drawback to this sort of flight, of course, is that it ends in a fall: it cannot be sustained. The liberation that Sadness finally arrives at by rejecting this opposition of earth/sky and man/woman can be sustained, perhaps, because it does not depend upon the continual escape from women. Rather than the flight from Woman ending in a paralysing fall back to earth, Jeremy soars with a woman and manages to stay aloft. Although this is only conjecture—the fate of Sadness and Bea is ambiguous—it is supported at least by Jeremy's choice of vehicle.

Like Dorck before him, Jeremy's flight begins on a snowmobile, but rather than a Skidoo or Bombardier, Sadness identifies the make as a Sleipnir, which confuses Madham (somewhat improbably) (137). (The immediate source of Sleipnir is likely *As For Me and My House*—a central text for "The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction," too—in which the narrator, Mrs. Bentley, imagines that the men in her life would like to transform their horse into a "Sleipnir or Pegasus" to escape her [140].) The snowmobile is named for the legendary eight-legged steed of Odin, the Norse equivalent of Pegasus. Among other deeds, Odin rode Sleipnir into the land of the dead and returned again, and it is exactly that kind of experience that is suggested here, especially in that an undertaker supplied the vehicle and that Jeremy emerged from a coffin to begin his journey. The dissolution of Jeremy's identity, the breaking down of the schematized patterns of thought, is a kind of death, but, unlike the "deaths" of Sunderman and Dorck, it is not a descent into paralysis, into the closure of coma or the freezing waters (or the paralysis of a "concluded self" that Madham suffers). Rather, it is suggested, Jeremy and Bea leap into the abyss but are saved from their apparent fate by their choice of vehicle and, more importantly, the warmth of each other's body—everything else, all of the restrictive elements of identity, falls away. Again, it is not a matter of fleeing Woman—except as a constraining, falsifying conception—but of breaking out of the prison of perceived identity, being a man and a woman, not Man and Woman, which even Madham recognizes: "Perhaps what really matters is the warmth each finds in the other's body. Two bodies. Warm. The rest is fiction . . ." (157).

Before this end is reached, though, the journey on the snowmobile takes Sadness first to Sunderman's house, *WORLDS END*. During his first visit, he had seen it as a contrast to the images of flight and freedom. Jeremy likens it to Madham's house, its interior an "imprisoned garden" (31), a world of plentitude and fertility encased, contained, controlled. The house is filled also with clocks—"Someone didn't trust the sun" (32)—which no longer tick. This house of clocks is the evidence claimed by most critics, Lecker, Thomas and Fogel among them, for labelling Bea and Jill as "representatives of the female claim in time" (Thomas 72), and Bea as "seeking to reduce the questing male to slippered pantaloons" (Thomas 79). Robert Lecker, citing both of the state-

ments by Thomas above, insists that *WORLDS END* is “filled with artificial time. . . . dominated by time, days, dates, numbers, history, closure. . . . both Madham and Bea are interested in closed structures that leave no room for Jeremy’s achronological quest” (70). But time is not an issue in Bea’s house; the clocks do not tick and the plants do not depend upon seasons, so the interior of the house is “achronological” too. Also, Bea and her house are in a virtual state of suspended chronology because of her abandonment by her husband—and by Dorck, who had taken his place—so it does not seem fair or logical to associate that state with “Woman.” As Hutcheon suggests, it is Robert Sunderman who does the sundering, not his wife and daughter, who have had that name and the state it suggests imposed upon them.

Lecker and Thomas and others talk in terms of Jeremy’s escaping Madham, Jill, and Bea so that he can be freed into his quest, but in this novel, as in Kroetsch’s others, freedom consists not of the liberty to pursue the quest but in being liberated *from* it. Although Sadness initially likens Bea to Madham because he believes that she, too, wants to fix his identity, to transform him into her errant husband, Jeremy comes to perceive in Bea an opportunity to avoid establishing a concrete, singular self. When he returns to *WORLDS END* on the Sleipnir, he finds not a trapped Eden but a pre-Edenic darkness, a blankness, in which he is able to escape the academic need to explain and to find “a suitable metaphor” for his experience (148). He sees himself as the “free man freed from his freedom” (149), freed from the demands of the imposed male quest story that drives most of Kroetsch’s male characters.

Jeremy’s flight is clearly not away from women or even Woman, especially in that his ability to gain an erection in bed with a woman is the barometer of his psychic well-being. It is when Jeremy’s focus shifts from his desire to escape domestic entrapment and preserve his male solitude to a desire to interact openly and directly with a woman that that barometer begins to rise. At *WORLDS END*, Jeremy joins Bea in bed, and, finally, instead of envying and emulating the flight of Robert Sunderman and Roger Dorck, Sadness empathizes with the woman they have abandoned:

All those years she had been waiting and now he had

returned to the bed that was kept for him. . . . As if every woman kept a bed, not for a husband, not for her everyday lover, but for the mysterious youth who one night years ago walked into the darkness, vanished from the very surface of the earth. . . . And after all the waiting of all those women, one figure had finally returned. Finally. At last.

And then I made a discovery.

I was in bed. I had an erection. (148)

Clearly, then, it is not Bea, or Woman, or even *WORLDS END* itself that restrains Jeremy, since when he returns to all three with an altered inner vision he finds himself healed and liberated by them, not weakened and entrapped. It is worth noting, too, that the males in the story seem more desirous of stopping time than the females: not seeking to live outside time or with time, but selfishly to halt it, as it appears to be stopped in Bea's house. Madham suggests that it is Robert Sunderman who seeks to halt the flow of time, imagining the young Sunderman on the ice of the river: "his child-bride pregnant, the boy-husband alone, already regretting the boyhood he could not quite surrender . . ." (155). Dorck's flying and falling result in a similar halting of time: when he wakes, he remembers nothing from the moment of Sunderman's disappearance (155). Time is restarted for Bea and Jeremy at *WORLDS END*, not because Jeremy has completed his quest for a new identity, becoming Grey Owl, but because he has been freed from his male need to escape Woman and Time. *WORLDS END*, then, is not World's End with a missing apostrophe, not the trapped, entrapping Eden; it is instead a promise that worlds do end, that the "cosmologies of belief" (to use Kroetsch's phrase) can be escaped. Jeremy does not assume, so far as we can know, a new identity, but appears to allow the layers of identity to become diffuse and open. He is very nearly a blank, unthinking and nonverbal, by the narrative's close.

The depiction of the experience Sadness has on his journey to *WORLDS END* is typical of how Kroetsch images the fluidity of identity. In such cases, the character is exposed to some overwhelming elemental force: an overflowing river, a whirlwind, a swarm of bees, an avalanche, or the like. To reach Bea, Sadness must pass through a blinding blizzard. The elemental chaos of the swirling snow forces him to find his own way, to create a new path, just as he is seeking to find a native, fluid identity instead of

appropriating another's. "I was in the trackless snow, making my own path" (144), no longer seeking to become Grey Owl, "my pathfinder" (101), nor even becoming his own pathfinder, but forging entirely new, untrodden paths. He puts his trust in "a homing instinct that resided as much in my hands as in my head" (144). Upon his arrival, he becomes aware that something different, something alive, has entered the house with him: "Of this I am certain, however: a clock that had not been ticking began to tick" (146). As in the blizzard when he found that his instinct and body were a better guide than his intellect, now, in bed with Bea, "All thinking had swooned from my mind. I was as blank as the darkness around me" (146). The cause of his previous impotency becomes clear when it recurs briefly: "Yes, I was thinking again. . . . I was paralysed into thought. I was once again a total stranger to my own prick. I was at a dead loss as to what I must do." (147). Fortunately, Bea possesses the solution. She, "That invisible woman," is suddenly an earth figure, bringing to the entire room, the "smell of earth":

. . . not of flowers only, but the dark breathing silence of ferns in crevices of rock. The lichens, orange and yellow, on a rotting limb. The green moss, cool to the sliding mouse. The smell of a northern forest, where the snow melts itself black into the last shade. (147)

She facilitates the final step in the process of dissolution of Jeremy's identity, the confrontation with silence, at which Jeremy paled earlier. Bea does not represent the caretaker of imprisoned Edens, but:

The Columbus quest for the oldest New World. The darkest gold. The last first. I was lifting my hidden face. To the gateway beyond. To the place of difficult entrance. To the real gate to the dreamed cave. . . .

I had tongued the unspeakable silence. (147)

Jeremy, by his physical union with Bea, has transcended language and his inherited voice to find the silence and fresh beginning he had sought. It is a perpetual return to the point of origin, of creation, always beginning again, never concluding. Their union is beyond words:

To speak would be to boast. And I was speechless. Per-

haps I roared. I am not certain now. I did not moan. To say that we were joined, Bea and I, would be, once again, to underline the failure of language. We were wedded in the smithy of our mutual desire. Fused in the bellowed flame. Tongued and hammered. . . . No no no no no no. I have ransacked my twenty-five years of education for a suitable metaphor. I have done a quick review of logic, called upon the paradigms of literature and history. I have put to test the whole theory of a liberal education.

Nothing.

Absolutely nothing.

I only know that for a long, long time I had not heard the ticking clocks. (148)

The clocks continue to tick—time is not stopped—but in his altered state, they are no longer a source of anxiety for Sadness. Unlike the other male characters in the story, rather than running away from Woman and Time, Sadness has come to terms with time and mortality by accepting and connecting with an individual woman, cutting through the layers of inherited and imposed identity which imprisoned both him and Bea. In terms Kroetsch has used often, Jeremy is freed from being questing Ulysses, Bea from being patient Penelope.

Again, then, according to most readings of the novel, the possibilities of transformation offered Sadness in *Gone Indian* are represented by Madham and Bentham on the one hand and Grey Owl on the other. Jeremy Bentham figures in the narration only in the image of his preserved body in a glass case in University College, but early in the novel the other two possibilities are opposed in Jermeý's mind. His discussion with his professor makes clear that he can become Madham *or* Grey Owl:

"Sadness . . . there's only one problem in this world that you take seriously. . . . Why did Archie Belaney become Grey Owl?"

"The story of a man," I agreed, "who died into a new life."

"He faked the death."

"But woke up free nevertheless."

"Be serious."

"One false move, Professor, and instead of addressing you, I'll be you. That's serious." (62)

By the end of the novel, though, *all* of the models of identity are rejected. Jeremy Bentham is permanently fixed in his glass case, having “become his own icon” (51). Grey Owl’s created self is permanently set in type. And Madham, who has similarly re-invented himself, strives mightily to maintain his concluded self and resist further transformation. Of all the characters in the novel, Jeremy ends up most like his real father, rather than any of the surrogates. His father’s identity is an enigma, his only connection with the family since Jeremy’s birth an unsigned postcard from Genoa—like Jeremy, he appears not to trust his own name. But unlike even that role model, and contrary to the claims of Lecker, Thomas, Fogel, and others, Sadness does not seek freedom by escaping Woman and Eastern intellectualism by dreaming West in order to become Grey Owl or anyone else. Instead, he discovers the fluidity of identity and recognizes that both he and Bea have been trapped by the restrictive conceptions they have of themselves and each other. In an interview with Alan Twigg, Kroetsch responds to the comment that women often escape traditional roles only to discover that there are no obvious alternative roles by agreeing, but saying also that the same is true for men. More importantly, though, Kroetsch views this lack of clear role models as a boon:

In order to go west, a man had to define himself as an orphan, as an outlaw, as a cowboy. With those definitions, how can you marry a woman? How can you enter the house again? You have to lose that self-definition. That’s the problem for the male. He must break his self-inflicted definition of maleness. (112)

Kroetsch’s characters may experience an initial anxiety at this dissolution of identity, but this anxiety is typically followed by an acceptance of the continuing freedom that dissolution brings. Rather than escaping Woman, Jeremy finds a woman, recognizes the entrapping and isolating nature of the male quest he has followed, and achieves an authentic relationship with her on the basis of that recognition. He and she are not Man and Woman, but human, possessed of protean identities that continue to shift because they are not rigidly fixed in a repressive dichotomy of gender.

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