

Snyder, James R. *Robert Kroetsch's Open Field: A Study in Canadian Postmodernism*. Thesis (PhD [English]), University of Western Ontario. Ann Arbor: ProQuest/UMI, 1990. (Publication No. NN59115)

Abstract

Critics of Robert Kroetsch's fiction have praised his willingness to take risks employ new and difficult forms, but many of the same critics decried this openness and difficulty of form when it was carried to an extreme in his later novels. This thesis considers the development of Kroetsch's work from the perspective that his latest, most adventurous work is also his best and most typical. The focus of the thesis is Kroetsch's fiction, with relatively brief examinations of his poetic and critical works, chiefly in terms of how they pertain to the direction his fiction takes.

Kroetsch's main theme is the impossibility of fixing anything in the flow of reality. This theme takes many forms, most typically the problem of identity and the related problem of place: how does one know who and where one is when the nature of the individual and of the individual's personal geography shifts radically from instant to instant. Kroetsch's response to this continual shift is not to assert solidity of meaning against the flux of existence, but rather to posit only provisional answers to the questions of person and place, open always to adjust those answers to changing circumstances and perceptions. The form of Kroetsch's novels increasingly partakes of the same challenging approach as he moves further from his modernist influences into the realm of the postmodern. By virtue of numerous narrative strategies designed to stymie any reader's attempt to make coherent sense out of the novel Kroetsch all but forces his reader to recognize the provisional nature of knowledge and the falseness of any knowledge that aspires to completeness and solidity.

Kroetsch's radicalization of the form of the novel reaches a peak with *What the Crow Said*. With *Alibi*, he focuses on the radicalization of character. Throughout his varied career as novelist, poet, and critic, setting out on a new departure with virtually every project, Kroetsch is remarkably consistent, both in terms of theme and in striving always to remain open, flexible, and challenging.