

— articles | articles

Tanja Cvetković

University of Nis, Serbia

Unhiding the Hidden: Uncreating Female Characters in Robert Kroetsch's *Out West Triptych*

Abstract

The paper explores the way female characters are represented in Robert Kroetsch's Out West novels: *The Words of My Roaring* (1966), *The Studhorse Man* (1969), *Gone Indian* (1973). The focus is on the harmonious integration of feminine and masculine aspects of being. While criticizing the Western prairie stereotypes of woman as a constraining, inclosing force, Kroetsch introduces the idea of woman as a liberating, renewing force. D.H. Lawrence's and Ted Hughes's ideas of woman as a creative force necessary to complete one's being support the analyses of the female characters in Kroetsch's novels.

Résumé

Le présent travail montre comment les personnages féminins sont présentés dans les romans de Robert Kroetsch: *The Words of My Roaring* (1966), *The Studhorse Man* (1969), *Gone Indian* (1973). On souligne surtout l'intégration harmonieuse des côtés féminin et masculin de l'être humain. Critiquant les préjugés de l'Ouest concernant les femmes en tant qu'une force limitante, l'écrivain introduit l'idée de la femme en tant qu'une force libératrice qui rénove. Par ses analyses des personnages féminins l'auteur soutient les idées de D.H. Lawrence et Ted Hughes sur la femme – force créatrice qui complète l'être humain.

In *The Hornbooks of Rita K* (2001), Robert Kroetsch (or rather his poet) writes:

We are all lonely. We like to announce it.

I raise my loneliness like a dry
laurel wreath.

...

Where did I leave my other
glove? And yet, because of it
(the missing glove, the myth),
I am not quite, ever, alone.

The longing for a reunion with the feminine, the “desire for what is most desirable” as T. S. Eliot put it, resurfaces further on in the book in the form of a significant, more specific identification of the missing double:

8 Just the other morning, for example,
I had a chat with a woodpecker.
I was under the pile of leaves
In your garden by the walk. (Kroetsch 2001, 86)

The association of the beloved with a garden is perennial and occurs in the wide range of works, from the Old Testament to the poems of D.H. Lawrence. It is recorded by T. S. Eliot in “La Figlia Che Piange” where the parting with the beloved in a garden is remembered as a loss which haunts the poet. “She turned away,” writes Eliot, “but with the autumn weather

Compelled my imagination many days
Many days and many hours.” (Eliot 20)

The need for what is lost to be recovered (the harmonious integration of feminine and masculine aspects of being) is a recognizable theme in Robert Kroetsch’s poetry and fiction. Hornbook 77 records a beautiful account of the mystery of the feminine which the damaged western male has forgotten how to understand. Musing over Rita K, Kroetsch’s poet observes:

Words are the fake pockets on a new jacket. You cannot tumble into one of them so much as a token coin. Words are what we are left with by the bird that hits the window. Invisibility was what Rita wanted. I asked her one May afternoon what she would like for her birthday. An eraser she said (Kroetsch 2001, 34).

The poet concludes that it is woman that is erased and, in order for what is lost to be found, a poet has to focus his lines on the search for the feminine aspect of his being.

* * *

The search for the feminine aspect of one’s being is emphasized not only in Kroetsch’s poetry but also in his prose. Many critics have expressed different views regarding the way Robert Kroetsch depicts female characters in his novels.¹ The underlying idea of the way female characters are treated in Kroetsch’s novels, especially the *Out West Triptych* comprising *The Words of My Roaring* (1966), *The Studhorse Man* (1969) and *Gone Indian* (1973), in my opinion, is connected with Kroetsch’s statement on Roman and Greek thought in his essay “Unhiding the Hidden”:

1) See, for example, Linda Hutcheon, “Seeing Double: Concluding with Kroetsch”; Aritha Van Herk, “Biocritical Essay”; Susan Rudy-Dorscht, “How the Studhorse Makes Love: A Post-Feminist Analysis”; J. R. Snyder in “A Map of Misreading: Gender, Identity and Freedom in Robert Kroetsch’s *Gone Indian*”.



Roman thought takes over the Greek words without a corresponding, equally authentic experience of what they say, without the Greek word. The rootlessness of Western thought begins with this translation. [...] But just as there was in the Latin word a concealed Greek experience, so there is in the Canadian word a concealed other experience, sometimes British, sometimes American (Kroetsch 1989, 58).

The tension between the appearance and the demands of authenticity becomes almost intolerable for Kroetsch so that he proposes that we should remove the inherited layers of meanings in order to see the truth of one's being. In the essay "No Name is My Name," Kroetsch makes another statement concerning identity which I connect to the way he deals with female characters in his fiction. He writes:

The problem then is not so much that of knowing one's identity as it is that of how to relate that newly evolving identity to its inherited or "given" names. And the first technique might be simply to hold those names in suspension, to let the identity speak itself out of a willed namelessness (Kroetsch 1989, 51).

After 'unnaming' and 'uncreating', we have to recreate and rename, to create anew out of our own authentic experience of reality as well as to relate the newly created identity to the world around. So, we have to dig under the surface in order to see the truth and discover a new authentic meaning of the way female characters are represented in Kroetsch's *Out West Triptych*; we have to uninvent them first.

When testing these ideas against the way female characters are represented in the *Out West* novels, we can identify two different images of women: the image of an entrapping, domesticating woman such as Elaine Burkhardt in *The Words of My Roaring*, or P. Cockburn in *The Studhorse Man*, and the image of a liberating, nurturing, flesh-and-blood woman such as Helen Persephone in *The Words of My Roaring*, Martha Proudfoot in *The Studhorse Man*, or Bea Sunderman in *Gone Indian*. The last three can be related to the idea of a woman as the Great Goddess – the Goddess of love, life, female sexuality and fertility, or the Mother of Creation, as suggested in Ted Hughes's study *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (1992). The Great Goddess, the Mother of Creation, is connected to Nature and equated with primeval forces of all of cosmic space in general. According to Ted Hughes, the Christian tradition finalized the division between Woman as virgin and Muse, (the platonically conceived ideal Woman), and the flesh-and-blood, fertile, sexually potent woman, mistakenly identified in the Roman and Christian traditions with a whore.

In his essay "The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction: An Erotics of Space" (1978) Robert Kroetsch describes male/ female relationships in prairie fiction, especially in Willa Cather's *My Antonia* and Sinclair Ross' *As For Me and My House*, in terms of the opposition of horse and house, the external and the internal, the open and the closed space, that is, of openness and closure:

The basic grammatical pair in the story-line (the energy-line) of prairie fiction is house: horse. To be *on* a horse is to move: motion into distance. To be *in* a house is to be fixed: a centering into stasis. Horse is masculine. House is feminine. Horse: house. Masculine: feminine. On: in. Motion: Stasis (Kroetsch 1989, 76).

He also states in the same essay that:

We conceive of external space as male, internal as female. More precisely, the penis: external, expandable, expendable; the vagina: internal, eternal. The maleness verges on mere absence. The femaleness verges on mystery: it is space that is not a space. External space is the silence that needs to speak, or that needs to be spoken. It is male. The having spoken is the book. It is female. It is closed.
How do you make love in the new country? (Kroetsch 1989, 73)

Insisting always on “uncreating [everything] into existence” (Kroetsch 1989, 63), Robert Kroetsch does not accept the traditional stereotypes and uninvents female characters in the *Out West* trilogy in a similar way that Ted Hughes features the Goddess of Complete Being. Thus, Kroetsch’s determination to step away from the traditional stereotypes is also obvious in his statement: “How do you make love in the new country?” or “How do you write in the new country?” (in “The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction: An Erotics of Space”) where he connects the erotic impulse with the writing process and expresses his idea to start the process of creation anew.

His idea that a new country requires an original way to deal with Nature, with the environment and with the process of writing is reflected also in the way he presents female characters in the *Out West Triptych*. Many of Kroetsch’s ideas, particularly the ones related to the obsession with the “original”, both in his novels and in his essays, become a common bond to D. H. Lawrence’s attitudes on life and literature. Thus, the British novelist, in his essay “The Spirit of Place” in *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923), connects the idea of freedom with the need for an original authentic relationship with the Other and says:

Men are free when they are in a living homeland, not when they are straying and breaking away. Men are free when they are obeying some deep, inward voice of religious belief. Obeying from within. Men are free when they belong to a living, organic, believing community, active in fulfilling some unfulfilled, perhaps unrealized purpose (Lawrence 12).

It means that, to feel truly liberated, men need to establish an original relationship not only with the new environment they come to inhabit in the New World but also with woman they meet there. In the same essay D. H. Lawrence explains the imperative need to slough off the layers of the old and reveal the new and original:

The uncanny voice of Iberian Spain, the weirdness of old Carthage, the passion of Libya and North Africa; you may bet the proper old Romans never heard these at all. They read old Latin inference over the top of it, as we read old European inference over the top of Poe and Hawthorne (Lawrence 7).

Analogically, male patriarchal European stereotypes of women were transferred to the New World during the process of its colonization. In his discussion of the Venus and Adonis myth,²

2) According to this myth Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and beauty, gives the Divine Child Adonis into the care of Persephone, Goddess of the Underworld. As he grows, Persephone falls in love with him and refuses to give him back



related to his account of the fate of the Great Goddess, Ted Hughes provides a valuable reminder of the historical process through which the Great Goddess came to be divided into two antithetical figures: “the Goddess of Benign Love and the Goddess of the Underworld”. The benign aspect was divided further into Mother and the Sacred Bride (Hughes 11). Generally, Mother and Sacred Bride appear as a single being (as Venus), in polar opposition to the Queen of the Underworld, known in Greek mythology as Persephone. Robert Graves makes similar observations in his study *The White Goddess* (1961) identifying the three aspects of the Goddess as the Virgin, the Muse, the Venus figure as the Goddess of love, sex and fertility, and the Hecate figure, the Goddess of the Underworld (Graves 386). However, it is important to note that Ted Hughes stresses the fact that “Roman culture was resistant to the virus of the Great Goddess in the form carried by the Greek Aphrodite and Adonis” (Hughes 9). By explaining the negative influence of Roman culture on the Western thought, William Spanos observes similarly the same thing in his book *America's Shadow* (2000) and claims that the origins of the modern West are not in Greek thought but in “Rome’s colonization of Greek thinking: its reduction of an always open – and ‘errant’ inquiry to *veritas*, the correspondence of mind and thing, that is, to correctness” (Spanos xix). In a similar vein, female characters in the Canadian prairie fiction, which reflects this process, do not display any of the qualities of the Great Goddess. They lack her unsuppressed sexuality through which life is renewed, and they are not free to celebrate love as the chief power through which wholeness of being is achieved.

In Robert Kroetsch’s *Out West* novels female characters who are represented as inclosing and domesticating types are opposed to liberating, renewing, fertile types of women. Male characters very often abandon a woman represented as a limiting force and run away into the open spaces of the wilderness. Running away from a woman is an escape from the constraining falsifying conception to which Woman has been reduced, as well as from the prison of one’s own conventionally perceived identity. In fact, it is an escape from the intended and imposed identity which imprisons both male and female characters. So, both male and female characters lack an authentic relationship to themselves. They fail to know themselves through close bodily contact and are unable to remain faithful to their true authentic selves because they have never discovered them. Robert Lecker and Peter Thomas associate female characters such as Martha Proudfoot or Bea Sunderman with death, closure and stasis, explaining that male characters flee all constraints, one of which is Woman.³ But if we dig under the surface, and that is what Kroetsch wants us to do, we can see that Martha Proudfoot and Bea Sunderman are presented as life-affirming rather than life-denying forces. Madham in *Gone Indian* recognizes: “Perhaps what really matters is the warmth each finds in the other body. Two bodies.

to Aphrodite. Aphrodite appeals to Zeus for justice, and it is finally arranged that she shall have Adonis for one part of the year, and Persephone shall have him for another part.

- 3) For example, Robert Lecker says that “Martha Proudfoot becomes the female figure opposed to the all – mastering phallus, a paradoxical embodiment of the home place as grave. [...] Here, as in many Kroetsch’s works, Woman brings death, stasis, and closure” (Lecker 49). As of Bea Sunderman, he says: “If woman represents an apocalyptic Home (and the only homes in *Gone Indian* are those dominated by women), Jeremy represents the resistance to what Kroetsch has called the act of being “unhorsed into housedom”, that is, the desire to escape those levels of closure – and enclosure – characterizing Kroetsch’s female characters” (Lecker 69). Similarly Peter Thomas says: “Persephone and Demeter, certainly, are implied by the crocuses associated with Jill and Bea’s ‘smell of earth’, but these familiar figures are accommodated to a more deathly primordial ground” (Thomas 79).

Warm. The rest is fiction” (Kroetsch 1999, 157). These fulfilling flesh-and-blood relationships can be achieved only if the veil is lifted, the layers of the inherited stereotypes are discarded and one’s “deepest self” recognized and obeyed. D. H. Lawrence explains what “the deepest self” is in the context of what he saw as America’s failed quest for freedom and independence from the Old World. “The true liberty,” says Lawrence, “will only begin when Americans discover IT, and proceed possibly to fulfill IT. IT being the deepest *whole* self of man, the self in its wholeness, not idealistic halfness. [...] But if we are living people, in touch with the source, IT drives and decides us” (Lawrence 13). Once again D. H. Lawrence connects the idea of freedom to the achieved wholeness of being, to the life “in touch with the source”, to human beings who are “original” because the originating energy of the universe flows through them unimpeded.

In the first *Out West* novel *The Words of My Roaring*, an opposition of this kind exists between the two female characters John Backstrom is involved with. John’s wife Elaine Burkhardt, is the domesticating inclosing type and with her Johnnie can not achieve wholeness. On the other hand, there is his lover Helen Persephone, who is an inspiring Muse and to whom he turns in order to fulfill his political goals. There is no fully satisfying relationship with either, but Helen seems to be closer to the goals of John Backstrom’s campaign which, although political, reflect in transposed fashion some of the oldest fertility rituals.

John’s lawful wife Elaine is pregnant and is fixed to the house. The moment John sees her he links her to it, or more precisely to what the house seems to him to be – “a funeral home”: “The day I met Elaine Burkhardt,” he says, “I sensed her poor old mother’s house might make an excellent funeral home; thus, again, another in a long series of failures of perception” (Kroetsch 1966, 95). In a whole range of works from the Victorian era, European civilization was seen as a house turned into a ‘funeral home’. Even Virginia Woolf employs the metaphor while discussing the challenge which the narrative techniques of Joyce and Conrad presented to the style of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy. In her essay “Modern Fiction” (1919) she compares the use of stereotypes and conventional methods in literature to a narrow room from which life has escaped and points out to the necessity for new forms, compared to new rooms, which should enlarge our sense of being and set us free:

It is possible to press a little further and wonder whether we may not refer our sense of being in a bright yet narrow room, confined and shut in, rather than enlarged and set free, to some limitation imposed by the method as well as by the mind. Is it the method that inhabits the creative power? Is it due to the method that we feel neither jovial nor magnanimous, but centered in a self which, in spite of its tremor of susceptibility, never embraces or creates what is outside itself and beyond? (Woolf 89)

John Backstrom experiences his marriage the way Virginia Woolf felt about inadequate fiction: neither jovial nor magnanimous. He does not find his wife Elaine life inspiring. On the contrary, she immobilizes him and he soon starts searching for a different woman. In the novel Elaine is always in the house, and although she is sometimes “a positive genius” (Kroetsch 1966, 179) as John admits, John experiences her as a restraining pressure and wants to escape. “But I really feel free on the road,” he says. “I feel all the pressures let up and I’m rolling along, going somewhere and doing something; my mind starts to travel and whirr” (Kroetsch 1966, 178-179). He feels more liberated and free when he goes away from her.



On the other hand, Helen Persephone is connected to a garden where she makes love with John “seven nights in a row” (Kroetsch 1966, 157). For Backstrom, Helen is a love goddess, a life inspiring force and the embodiment of his love. In a passage which contains a few powerful echoes of D. H. Lawrence, he says: “She was the garden, the forest of my soul; a forest tangled and scented. A forest wild. She was the turf and torment of my raucous love. My own wife, that bundle of consistencies, is all straight hair at one end, a twist or two at the other. H.P. was the paradox of my dreams” (Kroetsch 1966, 208). Similar ideas and images are used by D. H. Lawrence in his essay “Benjamin Franklin” in *Studies in Classic American Literature*. There Lawrence insists that “the wholeness of a man is his soul. [...] Why, the soul of woman is a vast forest,” he says, “and all Benjamin intended was a neat back garden. [...] Who knows what will come out of the soul of man? The soul of man is a dark vast forest, with wild life in it. Think of Benjamin fencing it off” (Lawrence 16-17). For Kroetsch’s John Backstrom, Helen Persephone is the untamable dark vast forest and embodies the paradoxical forces of life. She is beautiful and innocent like Demeter. Backstrom notices: “I hated her innocence. [...] I cannot resist beauty and innocence. I cannot contain the lingering of my own flesh. I must foul and stain beauty wherever I find it. I must corrupt and destroy it” (Kroetsch 1966, 63). She is the virgin queen who Backstrom must possess and who his primitive sexual energy craves and usurps. During the night she turns into Persephone, the goddess of the Underworld and of sexual energy, whose love and vitality fuel Backstrom’s political victory. Backstrom in a way usurps her power, because the fruit of his love is political victory, not something evidently related to Helen Persephone’s fertility. In that sense he turns away from his love goddess and betrays her. He is not Adonis who serves his Goddess. On the contrary, as an undertaker, he takes what is “under himself. The most terrible courting” (Kroetsch 1966, 142).

The hero of *The Studhorse Man*, Hazard Lepage, also turns away from his love goddess, his fiancée, Martha Proudfoot. Martha embodies the mighty female principle, the mystery of life. At one point in the novel when Hazard almost dies she kisses Hazard and brings him back to life. She is the mighty Aphrodite, or the Roman Venus, whose love, as Shakespeare observes in his poem *Venus and Adonis*, is not requited by her Adonis/Lepage. Hazard is in quest of a perfect mare for his stallion Poseidon and neglects his own relationship with ‘his intended’ Martha. He avoids a woman like Martha and runs into an entrapping woman like P. Cockburn. Unlike Martha Proudfoot, P. Cockburn is an artist and a curator who turns people into models and lifeless replications: “She made a specialty of life-sized wax figures, and had made for the museum a number of models of illustrious Albertans” (Kroetsch 1977, 31). In line with her work she literally immobilizes Hazard. Hazard ultimately escapes her because she tried to turn him into what he was most terrified of – his own image. But he also escapes Martha who is P. Cockburn’s opposite.

It is Demeter, the narrator of the novel, and not Lepage, who watches Martha emerging out of the lake in the twilight, and who appreciates her beauty and the mystery of her sexuality. He records:

But then, to my great relief, she appeared from the threatening darkness. [...] You must join me in imagining what I saw – she was naked as the lake’s surface itself. [...] She pretended not to see me as she touched her own soft body with curious hands: she cupped a tipped breast as if to taunt the

broken circle of the moon; she brushed the dinging drops of water from the round perfection of her belly; she bent and scooped in her soft white palm a sweep of water and gushed it into the private shadows of her naked body (Kroetsch 1977, 31).

14

Martha is described like Aphrodite born out of the sea foam. Her beauty and sexuality are also connected with the Moon and water. Water represents the state before creation, the undifferentiated source of being, where Martha's dormant fertility and primeval sexuality dwell. Martha is not able to fulfil her potentially creative role with her fiancé because Hazard rejects the idea of staying with her. She is his Muse, "a dreamed woman" (Kroetsch 1977, 17). Instead of embracing her, we read that Hazard embraces "the hard bones, dreaming the flesh, embracing already a dreamed woman, the soft large breasts of Martha, those breasts no man could drive from his dreaming – he was afloat and drifting on a great tangle and raft of pale and hardened and dream-soft bones" (Kroetsch 1977, 17).

The real flesh-and-blood woman who finally appears in the third *Out West* novel *Gone Indian* is Bea Sunderman. Her name derives from Beatrice and suggests that she is the one who should make the main hero, Jeremy Sadness, happy, to whom she should give "perfect blessedness or happiness" (*Webster's New World Dictionary*). Again, at the beginning of the novel who she is and what she represents is beyond the power of comprehension of Kroetsch's hero. Jeremy experiences her as an imprisoning rather than a liberating force. At first, Bea is identified with her house, Worlds End, the interior of which is "an imprisoned garden" (Kroetsch 1999, 32). Unlike the garden in *The Words of My Roaring* which is "green and lush" (Kroetsch 1966, 160) where roses bloom and cherries blossom, Bea's garden is enclosed and controlled by time. The house is full of clocks which do not tick, do not show time: "someone didn't trust the sun" (Kroetsch 1999, 33). Many critics, including Robert Lecker, suggest that the house 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" (Lecker 69-70). But to identify Bea as "a representative of the female claim in time" (Thomas 72) is wrong because time stops when Bea's lovers Robert Sunderman and Roger Dorck leave her and her house. It is men's relationship toward Bea, or to woman, that matters, and not Bea herself. Her two lovers Robert Sunderman and Roger Dorck turn away from Bea and ruin the harmony that should exist between man and woman. Robert Sunderman, Roger Dorck and Jeremy are looking for a new identity. Only when Jeremy returns to Bea's house on his Sleipnir does he manage to experience Bea's house not as trapped Eden but as a pre-Edenic darkness, where creation is possible. By relating properly to Bea during their sexual union, he heals his impotence and gains his psychic well-being. By changing his inner vision of Woman, Jeremy identifies Bea with a healing and liberating force, and not with an inclosing, controlling and entrapping one. Only then does time restart in Bea's house because Jeremy has managed to achieve an original authentic relationship with a woman. He is not escaping any more but has learnt how to accept her.

While making love to Jeremy, Bea, "that invisible woman," suddenly becomes 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 rolling 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 (Kroetsch 1999, 155).

The true relationship with Woman which Jeremy establishes through sexual love makes it possible for him to get in touch with his true self, his “deepest self” and for Bea to be transformed from an inclosing and controlling force to a life-giving force. She becomes “the Columbus quest for the oldest New World. The darkest gold. The last first” (Kroetsch 1999, 156).

She is the true treasure and the goal of the quest for the New World. The quest in the conventional sense was a failure since it did not produce any healing new relationships but turned to be a mere repetition of all the sins of the Old World, relocated and imposed on the Americas. New values and treasure should have been discovered anew in the new environment, and not looked for through the stereotypes and conventions of Old Europe. Such inherited and imposed models of identity imprisoned both Bea and Jeremy. They were trapped in the restrictive conceptions they had of themselves and of each other. Only when they overcame these false images of themselves do they manage to reach their “deepest self” and establish a true relationship with each other. Commenting on the harmful impact of traditional roles imposed on men and women in one of his interviews, Robert Kroetsch said: “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” (Twigg 112). In the novels of the *Out West* cycle we see the breaking of the self-inflicted definition of maleness gradually taking place.

By suggesting the importance of a creative, authentic relationship between the sexes, based on the mutual achievement of wholeness of being, and by expanding that into a paradigm that should include all the relationship between the self and the world, Robert Kroetsch managed in his *Out West* novels to redefine the male/ female relationship and not merely to describe it in terms of the old stereotypes and inherited role-models which spoil it. In the interview with Alan Twigg, Kroetsch states that “[he] is intrigued by the idea of bringing back together not only male and female, but also the self with the total relationship with the world” (Twigg 111). The *Out West* novels explore the Prairies after the Depression in the 1930s. It was a period when the conflict between inherited British and American experiences concealed within the Canadian experience started to be resolved and when, according to Kroetsch “a new concept of self and a new concept of society” (Twigg 115) started to be invented. Kroetsch observes that

Flightless as snakes, we read flatly what cannot be flat. The
open prairie conceals a chasm. How does one dare walk
through tall grass? (Kroetsch 2001, 23)

At the core of Kroetsch’s new version of the self lies the quest for a successful male/ female relationship based on the recognition and acceptance of Woman as the space that contains everything. For Kroetsch she is “the darkest gold”, “the last first”. Discovered at the end of our

many mistaken quests, she is recognized as indistinctly remembered first, the source and the origin. As T. S. Eliot puts it in "The Four Quartets":

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, remembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning. (Eliot 145)

Female characters in Robert Kroetsch's *Out West Triptych* are uncreated and represented as powerful life-giving forces which resist conventional constraints and oppression. Even when they are constrained and closed within a house they serve as a foil to the vitality, originality and creativity they could represent. As part of man's whole being, female characters are often subjects of male quests for wholeness. It's usually the layers of imposed meanings, stereotypes and conventions which confine female characters and prevent them from expressing their true self. Thus, by discarding the layers of inherited meanings, Robert Kroetsch deconstructs the conventions and uncreates his female characters as liberating and renewing forces revealing at the same time their hidden authentic self anew.



Works cited

- Eliot, T. S. *The Complete Poems and Plays (1909-1950)*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1971.
- Graves, Robert. *The White Goddess*. London, Boston: Faber & Faber, 1986.
- Hughes, Ted. *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*. London: Faber and Faber, 1992.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Kroetsch, Robert. *The Hornbooks of Rita K.* Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 2001.
- _____. *The Lovely Treachery of Words*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- _____. *The Words of My Roaring*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1966.
- _____. *The Studhorse Man*. Markham: PaperJacks Ltd., 1977.
- _____. *Gone Indian*. Toronto: Stoddard Publishing, Co. 1999.
- Lawrence, D. H. *Studies in Classic American Literature*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971.
- Lecker, Robert. *Robert Kroetsch*. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1986.
- Rudy-Dorscht, Susan. "How the Studhorse Man Makes Love: A Post-Feminist Analysis." *Canadian Literature* 119 (Winter 1988): 25-31.
- Snyder, J.R. "A Map of Misreading: Gender, Identity and Freedom in Robert Kroetsch's *Gone Indian*." *SCL/ECL Studies in Canadian Literature* 18. 1 (1993): 1-17.
- Spanos, William V. *America's Shadow: An Anatomy of Empire*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- Thomas, Peter. *Robert Kroetsch*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1980.
- Twigg, Alan. *For Openers: Conversations with 24 Canadian Writers*. Madeira Park, B.C.: Harbour Publishing, 1981.
- Van Herk, Aritha. *Biocritical Essay*. <http://www.ucalgary.ca/library/speccoll/Kroetschbioc.htm>
- Woolf, Virginia. "Modern Fiction." in David Lodge. ed. *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*. London and New York: Longman, 1984.

