

Review:
Nicole Markotić (ed.), 2017. *Robert Kroetsch: Essays on His Works* (Oakville, ON: Guernica Editions)

Ahmed Joudar
University of Szeged

The volume, edited by Nicole Markotić, is a collection of essays dealing with Robert Kroetsch's works. The contributors discuss some of Kroetsch's novels, his poetry, and his critical writings to show the extent of his influence on Canadian literature. The volume consists of two parts. In the first part, there are eight critical articles which start with the introduction of editor Nicole Markotić. In his article, Markotić deals with Kroetsch's concept of *self*. He makes a comparison between 'us' and 'others' based on Kroetsch's writing. Thus, he discusses how Kroetsch uses the first-person subject 'I' in his poems, which reflects the absent picture of the narrator. Markotić also discusses Kroetsch's view of selfhood; he believes that the idea of *self* falsifies the writer's identity. He mentions Peter Thomas's accusation, where Thomas (1973, 54) argues that Kroetsch is 'a writer [who] either celebrates or triumphs over his origins, in which he chooses either to authenticate the otherness of his known world or absorbs it into the dance of self. For Kroetsch *Alberta* is an utterance in the first person'. Otherwise, Thomas (1996, 8) says that Kroetsch's works are a 'myth of self-renewing individuals'. The important idea that Markotić mentions in his essay is that Kroetsch's desire is for the writers and the readers to engage the identity of the past with the present.

The second essay, Anna Mandel's 'Uninventing Structures: Cultural Criticism and the Novels of Robert Kroetsch', successfully places some of Kroetsch's novels in connection to the works of Atwood, Cohen, Lee, Mitchell, and Ondaatje. Mandel claims that Kroetsch used parody, farce, myth, and metaphor to reflect history through his fiction. Ryan Fitzpatrick in his essay 'Does the city give us the poems? Or do the poems give us the city? Robert Kroetsch's *Spatial Assemblages*' discusses the spatial and poetic instabilities in Kroetsch's poem 'Seed Catalogue'. Fitzpatrick asserts that the locations of Kroetsch's poems are in-between distrust of an inherited

and overarching system. Therefore, Kroetsch's poems take part in complicating spatial production. He focuses on examining the cultural creation in Kroetsch's poem 'Seed Catalogue' which stands in the face of global or national space. He concludes that the ambivalence between *tradition* and *getting lost* is part of a complicated process in which 'tradition is not automatically bad and getting lost is not automatically good; rather, they both form practices that respectively stabilize and destabilize space' (73).

The next essay, in which George Bowering analyzes Kroetsch's 'Stone Hammer Poem', focuses on linguistic and formal usage. Bowering draws the readers' attention to focus on the field notes as the verb rather than the noun which Kroetsch uses in the poem. He asserts that the narrative impossibility in Kroetsch's writing of telling the self to recover the language which he describes as 'the earth of thought' (84).

In 'What the Crow Said: A Topos of Excess', Christine Jackman clarifies that the characters in the novel create 'grand fictions to account for things' (98). Jackman investigates whether Robert Kroetsch destroys or perpetuates binaries (feminine: masculine, light: dark). She recognizes that the binaries are not denied but that they have a dynamic relationship. Jackman also mentions that Kroetsch does not write only for the event, but he writes for both text and place where they act together. Jay Gamble in the essay "'The Shape of All Nothingness": Narrative Negativity in "I Wanted to Write a Manifesto"' discusses Robert Kroetsch's essay 'I Wanted to Write a Manifesto' to show to the readers how Kroetsch became a writer and explains his relationship with language. Gamble clarifies that Kroetsch's essay is located in-between creation and deception because the writer wants to write a manifesto but then produces an anti-manifesto.

Critic Jenna Butler in her essay 'Unbodying the Bawdy in Robert Kroetsch' criticizes Kroetsch's notion of 'body'. Butler clarifies that Kroetsch focuses in his texts on 'the body's propensity to alienate both women and men from themselves' (130). She mentions Raymond's words in *The Hornbooks of Rita K*, which makes a connection between the past and the present. Then, Butler clarifies that Kroetsch's writings discovered the body as a frontier between the past and the present. Butler refers to Kroetsch's using humour to allow the readers to access to 'the deepest human unbodying' (143). The essay written by Catherine Bates, titled 'Autobiography as Decoy in "The Puppeteer"', focuses on the relationship between the writer and the reader in the works of Kroetsch to elaborate that fiction is a master

which makes individual feel real. Bates opens her essay with an ambiguous statement: 'Kroetsch is a liar' (147) based on Kroetsch's view that 'every coherent story is a lie' (The Remembrance Day tapes, 42). She discusses the relationship between the writer and the reader in the production of text.

The second part of the book is a series of twelve critical essays under the title 'A Flight of Lemons'. These essays focus on Kroetsch's poem 'Sketches of a Lemon'. The authors present twelve different readings of one poem, in which they try to identify permutation of postmodernism. These articles focus on the ways of Wallace Stevens's of 'Looking at a Blackbird', the exceeding of language and the limitation of imagery, the matter of tone to prove that Robert Kroetsch is a postmodern poet, the link between the world and words, and Kroetsch's playing with the words of the poem as the word *lemon* in the poem and its links to the season and its infinite duration, the accessibility and cleverness which combined in the syntax and diction of Kroetsch's breathing. One of the writers refers to the term *sketches*, which was used in the title of Kroetsch's poem. It shows that Kroetsch wrote a series of 12 sketches for his poem, but he did not complete them, while another writer tries to dissect the poem and scrutinizes its relationship with blackberries. The writers of these twelve different pieces on Robert Kroetsch's poem 'Sketches of a Lemon' give us different perspectives as well as discuss the diversity of meanings which the clever reader can taste.

The final part of the book is a conversation with Robert Kroetsch by a group of creative writing students, in which they discuss various topics such as the function of narration in poetry or the role of the physical landscape in creating ideas in the writer's mind. They also discuss whether the way of writing poetry is different if it depends on historical documents.

In sum, this collection of essays represents a kind of explicit illustration. It guides the reader, because Kroetsch's writings are exceptional in form and content. It is an excellent work illustrating the hidden aesthetic in the work of Kroetsch, which some writers did not deal with or dealt with in different ways.

90 | Review:
Nicole Markotić (ed.), 2017. Robert Kroetsch: Essays
on His Works (Oakville, ON: Guernica Editions)

Works Cited:

Peter, Thomas. 1973. 'Keeping Mum: Kroetsch's "Alberta".' *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 2.2: 54-56.

Peter, Thomas. 1996. Robert Kroetsch and His Works. Toronto: ECW Press.