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Going Native in Robert Kroetsch's *Gone Indian*

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Article abstract

While many readings of Robert Kroetsch's *Gone Indian* focus on the text's postmodern structural devices, there is yet no reading that concentrates on Kroetsch's representation of Jeremy's "Nativeness." Such a focus allows one to explore the way *Gone Indian* exposes the falseness surrounding the rhetoric of ethnicity by dismantling binary oppositions and challenging the stable norms upon which processes of ethnic categorization rely. Gone Indian can be read as a post-identity quest narrative through which Kroetsch can resist the fixity of ethnic identities without erasing the politics of identity altogether. It is essential to ask, what is invested in the blurring of ethnic identities? By emphasizing the performative quality of ethnic identities, Kroetsch suggests the impossibility of any individual's claim to an authentic ethnic identity. This suggestion further complicates colonial rhetoric.

Going Native in Robert Kroetsch's
Gone Indian

JUSTIN D. EDWARDS

GIVEN THE TITLE of Robert Kroetsch's 1973 novel *Gone Indian,* it is surprising that critics have not read it as a text about the process of "going native," a process whereby the traveller of the narrative disrupts polemical notions of ethnic difference by moving between various cultural identities. Although Linda Hutcheon's, Peter W. Sinnema's and John Clement Ball's groundbreaking work on the instabilities of identity in *Gone Indian* touches on the text's breakdown of strategic essentialism,[1] there are no comprehensive readings that treat Kroetsch's novel as an exposure of the falseness surrounding the rhetoric of ethnicity. In fact, Kroetsch's text focusses on Jeremy Sadness, a New York graduate student who travels to Alberta where he puts on the clothing of a North American Native and adopts the stereotypical traits of "Indianness." In doing this, Jeremy illustrates the performative nature of identity. But he is also limited by the fact that although he is, at times, aware of the posturing of his disguise, he is not always conscious of its effects. Jeremy does not always see his identity as a performance; he believes that he can use his disguise to seek out the essence of a "true" Native self, and then take on the imagined qualities that might embody pure "Nativeness." Kroetsch, however, parodies Jeremy's search, suggesting that the quest for an essentialist notion of identity will lead to a dead end.

More often than not, critics have ignored Jeremy's identity performance in favour of an emphasis on the text's postmodern structural devices, particularly its lack of closure.[2] I do not want to suggest that Kroetsch's novel resists postmodern narrative playfulness, but I would like to concentrate on Kroetsch's representation of Jeremy's "Nativeness" to suggest that it subverts essentialist notions of ethnic difference, thus questioning the authenticity of ethnic identities. Central to my reading of *Gone Indian* is the assumption that the novel erodes distinctions between binary oppositions, which in turn subverts stable norms and collapses dichotomies based on ethnic categorization. Through its postmodern view of

identity, Kroetsch's text offers a reflection upon the political tensions that arise out of distinct ethnic differences and provides a critique of the inheritance of European-Indigene conflicts: as it warns us of the dangers of ethnic divisions, *Gone Indian* poses questions about historical attitudes that are based on the perceptions (or social constructions) of ethnic variations.

The Post-Identity Quest Narrative

Gone Indian, I would suggest, can be read as a post-identity quest narrative in that Kroetsch's novel frames the narrative search for identity in the form of a question. In other words, finding an identity in *Gone Indian* is not achieved by a plumbing of depths or an exploration of consciousness; an identity is located within the fantasized production that is performed and played out on the level of language. Truth as depth, as expressive inner essence, is reformulated as a fantasy spun from a reading of surfaces. By deconstructing the quest for identity, Kroetsch can resist the fixity of ethnic identities without erasing the politics of identity altogether. His narrative achieves this by reversing the conventional location of value in the depth/surface opposition, and surface is newly valued as the side that provides possibilities for self-invention and movement in the face of ethnicities that have been historically framed as essentialist modes of identity. This de-ontologizing reversal is present in the narrative structure: the quest formula that Kroetsch parodies is ultimately replaced with a multiplicity of shifting identities.

From a position that focusses on the corporeal surfaces of ethnicities — costume, performance and other modes of self-styling — Jeremy Sadness produces a fantasized inner depth for himself and for the other characters passing through the space of the imagined Western frontier. This self-styling is filtered through two highly questionable sources: the narrative is reconstructed through Jeremy's tape recordings — a form of technology that enables Jeremy to create numerous selves through the possibility of erasure and editing — and the "explanation" of these recordings by Professor Madham, who attempts to impose logic and teleological order upon his student's experiences (2). The polyphony and parody arising out of these varied voices may be seen as an exploration of two narrative traditions, one textual and one oral. Those sections of the text composed by Madham exist in the epistemological regime of the hermeneutic narrative; he is implicated in the Euro-American perspective that seeks out ontological certainties in textual form. His "transcription"/

translation of Jeremy's oral story into textuality looks for a transcendental subject that would serve as the source of meaning and thus reproduce stable, continuous identities and "truths" (1). Jeremy's tapes are, however, inextricably intertwined in the performance of identity, for they express a recognition that uncertainty pervades narrative and that identities must be conceived as unstable and discontinuous. This oral performance of narrative — his "inability to get things down on paper" (1) — is linked to Jeremy's performance as Indigene in that it connects him to a tradition of indigenous storytelling, a tradition that, as Peter Dickinson points out, is always caught up in "tricky negotiations" of identity (177).[3] For Madham, the written text is everything: he wants Jeremy to write his dissertation and provide a narrative that would fix Jeremy in a stable position. But Jeremy resists this and opts instead for the common equation that conflates orality with the natural. That is, he adopts the oral tradition, in part, because he assumes that it will put him in touch with the untamed natural life that he is searching for in the northwest. The assumption here is that "oral speech" is natural and that "writing is artificial" (Ong 82), an assumption that, as Terry Goldie points out, leads to the myth that orality produces "a different order of consciousness, one which makes the Indigene so clearly Other" (110).

Here, Kroetsch once again parodies the fact that Jeremy buys into this myth of orality in his search for an essential (natural) self. But Kroetsch's experimentation with the inscription of orality into text is also a reaction to the profound gulf that is often present in the distinction between textual and oral communication. For example, at the level of narrative development, Jeremy's oral testimonies show a recognition that speaking has a much more subjective presence than writing, for the spoken word is not "bound up directly with 'reality'" (Goody 46). Here, the language associated with orality — "bound up" and "reality" — suggests that the oral resists fixture in reality, and as such provides an alternative to fixed notions of identity. This fluidity associated with the oral tradition, then, opens up a space from which Jeremy can explore various subject positions under the rubric of many names and guises. Jeremy's oral stories, which destabilize the outmoded mythic structures inherent in the ontological fixity of "authentic" or "essential" representations, force us to reimagine both narrative and cultural communities.

Kroetsch's text plays allusively with a narrative genre that is organized around the gradual elimination of hesitation, the establishment of the truth-value of Jeremy (the witness's) oral discourse and Madham's desire to textually inscribe "what really was." The quest narrative — a composite

of the generic qualities associated with travel writing and adventure fiction — would perhaps be a logical route for a narrative investigating, as *Gone Indian* does, the allusiveness of the imagined frontier. But Jeremy's oral narration prefers the displacement of identity — "I couldn't remember my name," Jeremy says when he reaches the Edmonton International Airport — to the discovery of the quest, and his narrative takes a course in which "the possibility of transformation" cannot be resisted (6, 7).

Jeremy's travels, instead of uncovering truths about a sense of place and a sense of self, result in a loss of identification. "Our dear Jeremy," Madham states, "lost his suitcase. More precisely, he opened a suitcase for the waiting customs official, and found the suitcase he had claimed was not his own" (6). The loss of his identification and clothing becomes a symbolic loss of self, which in turn sets up the adoption of his first identity, that of Roger Dorck, barrister and solicitor. Jeremy's transformation into the "dorky" lawyer is, however, short lived. For the quest narrative that would solve the mystery of mistaken identity by uncovering a "true" self remains an evoked absence, an explicitly evaded route. As a result, within the narratological lexicon, the quest in *Gone Indian* constitutes a paralipsis, an omission of information that is necessary for unearthing identificatory essences. Gaps in information echo the gaps in identity, and Jeremy's identity performance as Roger Dorck soon shifts to that of the imagined Indigene.

Jeremy's layering and sampling of identities leads him to "a new possibility" (11) in his desire to "be Grey Owl" (6): in the airport he puts on jeans, a fringed buckskin jacket, beaded moosehide moccasins, and arranges his hair into braids. But this costume is recognized as a performance of "Indianness," for Jeremy acknowledges that the clothes are a disguise, and that he is escaping the Customs Officer "disguised" as himself (11). It is significant that Jeremy's remaking of himself in the guise of the stereotypical Indigene occurs in the airport, a place where "customs" are powerful and where identities are policed, verified and recorded. Once Jeremy conforms to the "customs" of stereotyping by performing a role that fits into the national imaginary of Native "authenticity," he is freed from the Customs Officer.

But in Edmonton's airport, existing as it does on the border of the frontier (where, as the epigraph suggests, "the bonds of *custom* are broken"), nobody is as s/he seems. While being held by Customs, for example, Jeremy meets "a beautiful blonde" who also wears a stereotypical "beaded Indian headband" (8). However, when she is asked to strip, her gender identity falls away with her clothing:

> She takes off her tattered mink coat. And her tattered red sweatshirt with its motto: Whatsoever is Truth.
>
> And her snowboots.
>
> And her old-fashioned patriotic plaid skirt, the Maple Leaf tartan yet, one of the authorities observes.
>
> And then she takes off her tits.
>
> You heard me, Professor. Her sculpted and aerodynamic tits. And then she takes off her gold bracelet and her skirt-petticoat and her jockey shorts.
>
> Maybe the cock and balls are fake too, I don't know. This is a peculiar land, Professor. Illusion is rife. (8)

This unnamed character's clothing announces the fragmentation of identity — "Whatsoever is Truth" — just as his/her gender performance fractures Jeremy's claims to read the identity that he assumes is clearly written upon "her" clothed body. Like the clothing that transforms Jeremy into the imagined Indigene, the cross-dresser uses women's attire to show that "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 53). Such transformations, whether they be in terms of gender or ethnicity, focus on the surfaces of the characters — clothing, hair, skin — to resist searches for "inner depths" or centred subjects. Jeremy and the characters who surround him do not acquire depth and solidity as a result of excursions into otherness but they are, rather, dispersed in scripted performances of the Indigene and women. As a result, the discrete identities that are necessary to a dialectical resurrection of the boundaries of a gendered or ethnic self are lost to an organizing principle of shifting signification.

Going Native

In *Gone Indian*, then, the crossing of national borders engenders the crossing of other boundaries. Such images are explained by Dennis Porter's comments on travel writing; for him, the travelling subject remakes him- or herself through the transgressive possibilities that arise out of being displaced from "home" (12). This comment speaks to Jeremy's attempted remaking of himself by adopting what he believes to be North American Native clothing in the Edmonton International Airport. For Jeremy, "a child of Manhattan" (5), the frontier — the lost home of so many Americans — beckons, and, according to Madham, Jeremy has al-

ways dreamed of the "far interior" of the "northwest frontier" (6). To become part of this new landscape, Jeremy adopts the Native images that he has always imagined constitute the Indigene. His misguided belief that wearing these clothes will be the first step toward uncovering the essence of "Nativeness" is also reflected in the fantasized binary system of "Cowboys and Indians" (Europeans and Native Americans) that Jeremy recalls playing as a child in Manhattan. "You be the Indian, Sadness," his friends say, "We'll hunt you down. No matter where you hide, we'll hunt you down. We'll kill you" (94). This role-playing is echoed when Jeremy emerges from the air terminal; he finds himself driven to Notikeewin by a taxi-driver dressed in a large "cowboy hat" who instructs Jeremy to "saddle-up" and tells his taxi to "giddyup" (14). Moreover, the driver/cowboy assumes that Jeremy comes from a northern Native reservation, and asks him if it is his first time travelling to the south (15).

These imaginary notions of the frontier and its Indigenous communities allow Jeremy to enter the imagined world of the "far interior" that he has conjured. As a result, the movement of the narrative gestures toward a merger of European and Native American culture through the eradication of discourses of difference that have historically separated them. This occurs because Jeremy is rarely in control of the boundaries between imagination and authenticity, inside and outside, self and other, that would secure for him the fixed position of the travelling observer. When his voice is present in the fragmented narrative, the distinctions between subject and object are blurred and fantasized subjects are produced. If, as Tzvetan Todorov suggests, the effacement of limits between self and other is a common characteristic of fantastic literature (120), Jeremy's fantasy of the frontier is centred on the self, suggesting that the other is absent from the scene of fantasy. In the self-centred form of pleasure within the fantasy, then, the object of desire is abandoned, and the subject does not so much occupy a desiring position as get caught up in the sequence of images.

The internalization of these fantastic images by Jeremy-the-traveller facilitates his "going native." According to Marianna Torgovnick, "going native" is a process of "dissolution of subject-object divisions" so that the individual of one culture merges with another (5). More often than not this scenario takes place along a continuum that places the "civilized" traveller at one pole and an "uncivilized" society at the other. The traveller, then, chooses to throw off his or her "civilized" identity by joining with the Othered group. Imperial projects inform the rhetoric surrounding this dissolution, but Torgovnick reminds us that "going native"

constitutes a "utopian desire to go back and recover irreducible features of the psyche, body, land, and community — to reinhabit core experiences" (5). Seen under this light, Jeremy's dismissal of the university job interview and his rejection of Madham's advice serves as a repudiation of Western rationalism in favour of his "primitive self reasserting itself" (Kroetsch 83). As Jeremy tells us, that part of himself composed of Jeremy Bentham — the rational, utilitarian thinker — gives way to his need to "seek out the wilderness" (83). Here, Jeremy implies that he is finding an authentic self, that the wilderness is providing him with an access route into an identity that holds more authenticity than that of the academic-Jeremy-from-New-York. But, within the context of the post-identity quest narrative, Kroetsch parodies Jeremy's misguided assumptions that identities are stabilized within a fixed notion of the self. That is, Kroetsch pokes fun at Jeremy's belief that he must choose between identifying with the rationalism of academia or with the primitivism conventionally associated with "Nativeness" and the wilderness, for Jeremy acts as if the two identities are mutually exclusive categories.

In fact, Jeremy's desire to seek out the wilderness results not in a "true" or "authentic" conception of self, but in an effacement of identity. While competing in the snowshoe race, for instance, Jeremy says that his "mind was the landscape" and that he "was free of [his] body" (88). The merger of his body with the landscape is threaded throughout his oral history: "My mind was as clear as the sky itself," Jeremy tells us at one point (89). And certainly the images of death by drowning and Jeremy's (faked?) suicide gesture toward his ultimate union with the elements. The "emptiness and loneliness" of the frontier, then, is equated with the emptiness associated with assertions of truth and fixed identities (15). Even Madham's reading of the relationship between Jeremy and Jill Sunderman results in his comment that the two characters "were moving landscapes," "formless and silent" (57). The coupling of identity with the land implies the narrative's exploration of the landscape of the self, an exploration rooted in the process of going native. That is, the effacement of self and other in the rejection of Western rationalism and other "oceanic" impulses is, according to Torgovnick, often accompanied by "profound connections between humans and land, humans and animals" (4). Links between these effacing experiences and perceived "primitive" peoples is neither trivial nor incidental in the Western imagination.

Exemplary of this process is Jeremy's Indian hero, Grey Owl, whose *The Men of the Last Frontier* (1932) was read as a tribute to the "wilderness man" (Francis 131). Grey Owl, who, upon his death was revealed to

be Archie Belaney, born in Hastings, England, not only "went native" but he also merged landscape with identity in that his contribution to the tradition of nature writing was inextricably bound to his false Native identity. It is therefore apt that Grey Owl's comments about the frontier and identity inform Jeremy's relationship to the land: "I thought of Grey Owl's advice," Jeremy says: "if you get lost at night — stop; build a fire; wait for daylight" (15). Being lost in the wilderness echoes Jeremy's lost suitcase and his shifting identities, losses that imply his connection to the "passing" identity assumed by Grey Owl.

Passing Fictions

If, as Daniel Francis suggests, Grey Owl is one of the most famous people ever to "go native," Jeremy's adoption of Grey Owl as a role-model is based on the symbol of Grey Owl as the effacement of Western rationalism and the performance of identity (135). In fact, Grey Owl's career was founded on the oral stories that he performed to packed audiences in England and North America, during which he would assert his authenticity by proclaiming, "I feel as an Indian, think as an Indian, all my ways are Indian, my heart is Indian" (qtd. in Smith 166). The stridency of these claims calls attention to the constructedness of identity. And the success of Grey Owl's performances was based on his ability to look so much like what Whites thought a Native American should look like. Just as Jeremy uses a Native costume to perform his Indian identity, Grey Owl braided his hair (which he died black), darkened his skin (which he coloured using henna) and wore traditional Native head-dresses and clothing. Moreover, Grey Owl's public lectures usually consisted of stories about animals, canoe trips, and the rugged landscape that lay beyond the borders of "civilization." While these oral tales fit into White visions of an imagined Indian, Grey Owl also critiqued the "remorseless clang of modern technology" and the "destructive nature of industrialism" (Windsor 232).

Just as Jeremy "goes Indian," Grey Owl's oral performances underwrite his very being as a British gentleman: in the layered utterance of his narrative is an assertion of identity that frees him from the confines of modernity and Western rationalism. For Jeremy, then, Grey Owl's story mirrors his own struggle to locate identity, to find some ground on which to effect his self-conscious movement from New York graduate student to the "wilderness man" of the lost frontier. Jeremy's and Grey Owl's Native performances are thus significant because they challenge legal defi-

nitions of categories based on race and ethnicity: Canadian law classified a North American Native as someone who had "a drop of Indian blood" (Francis 132). But by putting on Native clothing and performing the stereotypes of "Nativeness," Jeremy, following Grey Owl, inadvertently exposes the falsity of a culture that insists on singularity, on bounded categories. By incorporating multiple identities, Jeremy and Grey Owl (whether they intend to or not) unsettle the smooth surface of a society that relies on unified or fixed notions of selfhood, and that treats identity as one-dimensional. As a result, the performances played out by both characters question authenticity, interpretation, and the binaries that establish the normative constructions of "centre" and "margin."

But Grey Owl is not simply invoked by Kroetsch as a symbol of identificatory performativity; he is also used to explore the absurdity of stereotypes. According to Grey Owl's biographer, Donald Smith, even Grey Owl's drinking was seen as confirmation of his Native identity. "I'm sorry to hear that Grey Owl has been indulging too freely in liquor," wrote a government official; "as a matter of fact, with so much Indian blood in his veins I suppose it is inevitable that from time to time he will break out in this connection" (qtd. in Smith 157). Similarly, the narrative of *Gone Indian* repeats simplistic stereotypes to undermine them as fictions, evading "truth" or "authenticity." Jeremy, for instance, assumes that his stereotypical Native garb will open the world of the Indigene to him: "I sat in my buckskin jacket and my braids and moccasins … [like] all those slicked-up stoic Indians … I was a Native" (64). Here, Jeremy's stereotypical posturing reduces traditional Native clothing to the level of fashion pieces, and, as a result, he is not given access to Native life. In fact, Jeremy's alienation from the Native community is signalled when a young Cree child asks, "Why is his [Jeremy's] hair that way?" (65). For Jeremy, long hair and braids are an essential component to his notion of the "true Indian." But this stereotype is questioned by Mr. Beaver, a Cree character who is "a lean, wiry fellow with a brushcut" (65). The breakdown of the cultural currency associated with the imagined Indian, then, involves not one but multiple intradiegetic images of "Indianness." The Beavers (a Cree family), for example, do not offer pictures of the essence of the Native, for they are not presented through their "inner beings" but through corporeal surfaces that are made up of contingent, accidental effects. The narrative's images of Natives, then, are not static landscapes but narrativized portraits. Our relation to the Beavers consists neither of an identification that consolidates a sense of authenticity nor of a stereotype.

Jeremy, however, continues on his quest for the "real" Indian. But the framework of the post-identity quest narrative leaves Jeremy's search unfulfilled: the Beavers are a disappointment to him, and he denies their own reality by accusing Mr. Beaver of "throwing the race" (81). For Jeremy, the thrown race holds the shifting signifier of the dog-sled race at the Notikeewin festival — which Mr. Beaver intentionally loses — and the loss of the racial stereotypes in Beaver's rejection of White impressions of "Indianness." Lines such as "it was the ending of the race" (79) thus carry political weight by implying that it is the end of a imagined Native American culture, a culture which Jeremy believes is "vanishing" (79). Beaver's dismissal of racial/ethnic stereotypes, flying in the face of a "thrown race," forces Jeremy to assert his own "Indianness" by stating that he will show "that fucking dumb redskin … how to win" (81). Here, Jeremy assumes the possibility of complete indigenization, as well as the possibility of an subject: he believes his ability to "cross the line," to "go Indian," can win back lost ethnic identities and teach Beaver how to be the "real" Indigene (79).

Jeremy's search for authenticity is accompanied with the assumption that identity can be read on a person's body. Such assumptions are, however, questioned and parodied by Kroetsch throughout the text. At the beauty contest, for example, Jeremy is compelled to judge three contestants who appear to him to be identical:

> Those three princesses were within one-hundredth of an inch of being the same height. They must have been within two hours of being the same age. They were dressed in matching long white gowns and carrying identical bouquets of roses; just to insure, no doubt, that the judge would not be influenced by mere appearances. (111)

Even at a beauty contest one cannot rely on appearances for establishing identity. Difference cannot be read upon the bodies of these "identical triplets"; they are identical signifiers for a vague signified (111). The arbitrary nature of the judging process, then, causes Jeremy to impose order on the carnivalesque contest by turning to a numerical system: "I wrote on the pad in Roman numerals: I II III" (112). But Jeremy soon realises that the use of such signification is inadequate: "to use numbers was to prejudge" (112). The theme of arbitrary identities and the impossibility of reading the body is furthered when Jeremy uses chair colours to distinguish the contestants: "Quickly I scratched on the pad: RED, YELLOW, BLUE" (113). This reading system, too, breaks down when Jeremy cannot remember who originally sat in each chair; the signifying chain no longer holds and difference is thwarted.

Jeremy's (mis)reading of the women's bodies gestures toward a space where language holds no meaning. To overcome this problem he chooses to turn away from the oral nature of the narrative and revert back to textual inscriptions, which reassert the rules of grammar by restructuring the signifying system to write difference upon the bodies of the contestants: "Something in me wanted to write in the margins of those lives: Awk. Frag. Emph. Cap. Fig." (114). Here, Jeremy tries to impose his own reality on the women by rewriting their lives and recreating their existence. Such a move turns to the written word associated with Madham and the rational world of the academy. But Jeremy soon finds that the repetition of Madham's life in the processes of grading and the imposition of order and classification based on difference prove to be futile. "No details," Jeremy explains, "I could not summon up the distinguishing details" (115).

Just as Jeremy tries to read the bodies of the beauty contestants and Madham composes the body of the text, the contestants of the snowshoe race try to read Jeremy's ethnicity. They try to confirm their readings of Jeremy's body by asking, "Where are you from? … Wouldn't be from the Hobbema Reserve, would you? You part Indian or ain't you?" (90). Jeremy's body cannot be read in a definitive manner, and the White response to Jeremy's refusal to assume a stable identity is to assault him:

> 'You fucking Indian,' he said. He swung again. 'You come in here you want trouble, you fucker, I'll give you some fucking trouble.'
> I saw the blow coming. (92)

Here, the fight and the hatred rendered by the defeated competitors is bound up with racism and the assumption of stable signifiers; the men, that is, assume that the Native costume Jeremy has adopted carries a cultural background that can be read on his body. Such assumptions, however, call attention to the impossibility of distinguishing between a White New York graduate student and a Canadian Native. These (mis)readings of Jeremy's ethnicity are confirmed by Daniel Beaver, the Cree character, who tells Jeremy, "They took you for an Indian … You look like an Indian" (93). The impossibility of deducing Jeremy's identity based on an assumed ethnic difference inscribed upon his body contests the assumption of a "natural" binary difference, suggesting that such difference in itself is a construct. Such confusion serves as an inquiry into the ontological status of ethnic divisions: what do ethnic categories really mean? the narrative asks.

The fight engenders Jeremy's final journey toward Nativeness. The Beavers dress Jeremy's wounds and dress him in their own "moosehide

moccasins" and "a leather jacket [of] … the golden brown Indian-tanned moosehide" (97, 98). This external appearance, this guise, is accompanied by a parodied internal conversion in which Jeremy returns to a primal state in the darkness of Daniel Beaver's pick-up truck: "He [Daniel] opened again the canvas flap that covered the rear end of the truck box. 'You can climb in here with the dogs'" (99). This scene sets the stage for Jeremy's primal experience, for he becomes "surrounded by the jaws and assholes of nine hungry sleigh dogs" (108). Jeremy's submission to the darkness of the truck calls upon the spectre of the quest story: the archetype of the womb, a place that is invoked as a source selfhood, is sought out for its potential uncovering of the lost essences of the primal self. But once again the search for the self is undermined through the narratological exposure of the constructedness of identity. Jeremy's dark retreat engenders a vision, but it is a vision that is not his own; he dreams Mrs. Beaver's dream. The "total darkness," then, produces the mythical heritage of Mrs. Beaver's life as it is filtered through a white man; as a result, Jeremy's inner self remains an invoked absence as he temporarily assumes the guise of Mrs. Beaver.

It is this vision, however, that occasions his penultimate merger with the landscape in the desire to go Indian. Jeremy, dreaming of Mrs. Beaver's heritage, produces a dream in which he is one with the land — "the Wabasca valley, the Buffalo Head Hills … the Pelican Mountains" — that is being reinhabited by "twelve thousand buffalo" (102). The premodern, oceanic nature of this scene serves as a realization of Jeremy's desire to have his primitive self reassert itself. Here, Kroetsch is once again parodying Jeremy's essentialist notions of identity, which locate identificatory authenticity in a natural or primitive self.

Such parodies enable Kroetsch to play on the ethnic stereotypes discussed in Terry Goldie's argument that whites reify the indigene, and "the reified indigene is seen to put us in contact with pure prehistory" (148). Kroetsch, then, resists a closure to Jeremy's merger with "Nativeness" to show that stable identities must remain invoked absences. For Jeremy's primitive scene is not completely his own; it is a composite, a hybrid, of his perception and Mrs. Beaver's experience.

By way of conclusion it is important to pose the following question: what is invested in the blurring of ethnic identities? I would suggest that Kroetsch's breakdown of identificatory barriers does not lead to an appropriation of voice, for such a reading would be too simplistic, relying on the very binaristic categories of ethnicity that the text wishes to complicate. By making ethnic identities performative, Kroetsch suggests the im-

possibility of any individual's claim to an authentic ethnic identity. Such a move questions the rhetoric of colonial discourses that emphasize ethnic, racial, or cultural differences as a means of establishing superiority based on taxonomy. As David Spurr puts it, "the European role in colonial territories depends on the clear demarcation of cultural and moral difference between the civilized and the uncivilized" (32). Kroetsch, then, seeks to blur ethnic demarcations and therefore complicate colonial rhetoric within the the frontier, a space of physical conflict based on cultural difference. Thus, for Kroetsch, the frontier offers a significant alternative to colonial discourses of identity: it is a space where he can explore the very idea of the "authentic" and the "fantastic" — of where the boundary between imagination and reality collapses. For instance, when Jeremy is repeatedly mistaken for a North American Native, an important question arises: what do ethnic categories "truly" mean? Such a question initiates an inquiry into the ontological status of ethnic categories and contests the assumption of natural binary difference to suggest that such difference is itself a construct.

In *Gone Indian* Kroetsch's representations of Jeremy's fluid identities illustrate the political importance of crossing boundaries, of traversing the limits whereby identity is conventionally fixed. Drawing the lines of these categories in order to cross them, Kroetsch sets in motion questions about authentic, essential identities. The fixity of traditional narratological processes, then, is undermined in the failed attempts to underwrite the subject's pursuit of an object: nowhere in the lettered utterance of the narrative is there an assertion of stable subjects or objects. But Kroetsch's destabilization of conventionally articulated notions of self and other unsettles the smooth surface of binary systems which work along single lines of analysis and which treat identity as one-dimensional, unicategorical.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

NOTES

[1] See Chapter 8 of Hutcheon's *The Canadian Postmodern*; Sinnema's "Quest(ion)ing *Gone Indian*'s Dialectic"; and Ball's "The Carnival of Babel."

[2] See Margaret E. Turner's "Endings Be Damned"; Walter Pache's "Aspects of Postmodernism in Canada"; and Jurgen Schafer's "A Farewell to Europe."

³ Dickinson's comments arise out of his fascinating reading of Tomson Highway, in which he argues that the Trickster figure in Highway's work links the oral performance of narrative to the interpretive spaces of the other.

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