Kroetsch at Niederbronn

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mentary colours, he has reversed Dawe's traits into their opposite and attributed them to Sinnott. He has even provided them with complementary infirmities, the hunchback protruding into the cavity of the lost eye.

In this moment of mystic and photographic revelation not only do we have a reversibility of functions, but we also have a reversibility of qualifications. The palaeontologist and the photographer are engaged in a similar quest for origins, along intersecting and reversible lines. Their quest also develops with the help of two vehicles. The travelling emporium of the vanished world finds its companion piece in the Ark as the pedlars reverse into white-bearded and black-bearded patriarchs. From dinosaurs to pedlars to patriarchs, this first confrontation underlines the essential sameness of the palaeontologist and the photographer. The man who collects bones and the man who collects images collect the same things: in Latin 'ossa' is synonymous with 'imago.'

Notes

1 This etymology was pointed out to me by Simone Vauthier to whom I express my gratitude. I also wish to extend my thanks to Mary Condé for her kind rereading of this paper.

Works Cited


within a logic supposedly constructed by and for men, yet while I read these intimate explorations of male sexuality, can I be a man?²

*Alibi*, the novel against which I am reading *The Puppeteer*, can be read as an arch pomo (historical postmodern³) discussion of sexuality. Pomo is one condition for the relatively empowered, in other words I would argue that it is not of relevance to the powerful or to the disempowered.⁴ It is a condition of conspiracy theory, with its corollaries of paranoia and cynicism, as against for example, utopia, a mode more favoured by the disempowered for its offer of hope. The rhetoric of pomo asks for the strategy of doublethink: Nietzsche's ressentiment, Freud's return of the repressed in neurosis, narcissism or psychosis. In *Alibi* Dorf is the person who puts into action the policies of the powerful: remembering to forget.

While Deemer in *Alibi* presents the clichés of western capitalism and male heterosexual desire, Dorf is the character who produces what the capitalist wants through the other cliché of masculinity—the rational, categorizing and analytical mind. Against the background of male desire which also includes collecting, buying, owning, privatizing, ordering chaos and turning knowledge into information, Dorf's 'Pilgrim's Progress' is gridded within a framework of feminist theories where the male gaze is returned on him by Karen; where the Oedipal family becomes the hunt for recognition that always eludes; where sexuality becomes multiple orgasm responding to the extended group body of a hermaphrodite.⁵ In effect, the women in this novel are never 'the Other'; they are simply without appropriate context and hence unpredictable.

Dorf's spa experiences, through the dislocating liminality of the tourist that is mimicked by the cultural tourism of the text, run through feminist theory, set him toward another male sexuality.⁶ He becomes a man who works in and indeed constructs a man's world, but doesn't want to be there, in an economically powerful world that has no significance. The versions of sexuality offered to Dorf gradually allow him to rescind power so that his culminating multiple orgasm is not something he does, but something done to him. Yet he is not allowed to retain the experience, and the text has him retreat into a hermit-like existence as if indicating that if you take this kind of sexuality from the liminal back into the social, there is no place for it. The cynicism of this stand leaves Dorf's travels, and the commentary of the theorizing, enacting a series of deferrals of power—no engagements but no losses, simply deferral.

If the novel *Alibi* can be read as if it were a huge psychomachia, offering two dominant versions of male desire and sexuality, buttressed by a variety of theories mainly from feminism but also from psychoanalysis and carn-ival, in contrast, *The Puppeteer* is a novel without conspiracy. The narrator changes: It is no longer evasive but shuttling, not juxtaposing devices from a variety of genres but mixing voice and so dislocating the sense of a posited speaker/writer/author. There is no disruption here but rather a braiding together of other voices between which a writer might shuttle. The characters change: Deemer is no longer without explanation, so Dorf has to take responsibility for his own actions. The pizza delivery is yet more evasion: a collection of beautiful icons incidentally difficult to bring together because they are immediately consumed as opposed to the stasis of the Greek icons that comes to dominate the latter part of the story.⁷ But the puppet performance is transformative, is different in kind. Deemer himself becomes subject to re-definitions. We watch the powerful become implicated in the web of self-consciousness; we see the neutrality of power as the biggest evasion. And there is also the possibility that just when the powerful get implicated this implication indicates their loss of power to elsewhere. In other words with *The Puppeteer*, the two main centres of power, the narrative and characters displaying power, are made subject to it.

The problem of power in *Alibi* is underlined by the way readers can find it in an easy gender tourism, one that takes feminism and some work on the grotesque, as the 'Other' for male sexuality—significantly not taking on homosexuality or the popular or race. Yet this other sexuality is only an alibi; Dorf is asked to leave the 'other' world of the mud spa; he cannot re-enter the social community. This is not an actuality for him but becomes part of the long evasive strategy, the semiotics of which are similar to Rorty's ethnocentrism and yet not openly problematized by the narrative (Rorty 1991). The gender tourism is like the global bazaar where you trade pieces of culture and ethnicity, and here sexuality; yet where the real economic power makes some traders, particularly white male middle-class traders, more equal than others. The potential connection with Rorty is especially troubling because of Rorty's appropriation of domestic tropes and the vocabulary of 'care.'
The Puppeteer is highly domestic, unusually so for Kroetsch, but rather than appropriation I find it pushing at the line where culture and ideology meet. Ideology functions by obscuring its grounds and culture by foregrounding them. The easier it is for culture to foreground, then the more likely it is dealing with something ideology doesn’t need any more. When culture wrests some element from the veiling of ideology, articulates it, you get the shock of the aesthetic, the sudden recognition of ‘fit,’ the ecstasy of something that seems ‘true’ because it sits so neatly into the interstices of social life: what we call ‘beauty.’ Kroetsch talks of this with the concept of ‘notation’ in ‘Frankfurter Hauptbahnhof’ where notation is ‘a prediction / a saying (assaying) of / what will be said’ (Kroetsch 1989, 198) with echoes not only of bpNichol but of Walter Benjamin’s ruins of allegory (1985, 181). The narrative that fears its own tyranny must occasion through notation, first, the ecstatic ‘now’ of recognition: the cyanetic energy of the hunt, the adrenalin surge of the poetic: the aesthetic. And second, it must occasion the ‘larger if not always enduring’ experience of transformational vision: the reader’s articulation or the performative. I take this to be not merely a transfer of responsibility to the reader but an occasion that constructs the possibility of repetition and a performative that puts the reader into an engagement with an actual and a social immediacy. In this poem the speaker defines himself by difference, provides a notation for himself in the form of a physical ‘double’ (which/who wears a hat, which he never does) a notation that shuttles back and forth between the speaker and the spoken selves.

In The Puppeteer Kroetsch is dealing with the line where culture and ideology meet on a version of heterosexual sexuality. I want to take just one image, the wedding dress, and follow through some of the narrative, generic and cultural expectations involved in the rhetoric of the text, to a point where it could become possible to talk about whether the narrative semi-otics are yet more gender tourism or not. The novel raises issues to do with cross-dressing, particularly the difference between transvestism and cross-dressing as they are emerging in theories of masculinity. More pertinently to myself, since I have chosen to be a heterosexual and also a feminist, I feel the need to engage with any notion of male heterosexuality that could move toward a feminist heterosexuality. And what could be more semiotic-ally obvious than the equation of heterosexuality with wedding dress.

The image of a wedding dress pervades The Puppeteer. Maggie writes the narrative to tell its autobiography, and a number of its rhetorical functions are set up in the initial pages of the book. First: it becomes a way of deflection. As for example, when Papa B and Maggie first meet, she is wearing the wedding dress but has forgotten about it, and so she misinterprets Papa B’s interest in her. He is recognizing the dress, not the person. Meanwhile, she is noticing his dress. The misinterpretations are a classic example of cross-purposes, let alone cross-dressing, perhaps a definition for marriage and wedded life. Or, for example, when Maggie and Ida and Josie go to the hotel at Deadman Springs, the reader has been led to believe that Deemer is after the dress, so when Maggie hangs it up in the hotel there’s the suspense of wondering what will happen—will it be stolen, savaged, destroyed? But Jack Deemer doesn’t want the dress, he wants Papa B/Dorf; and then we find he doesn’t want Dorf but Julie Magnuson; and then not Julie Magnuson but the image of god ... and deferred desire becomes fetishized into the dress.

This is to allow the dress to set up and attempt to satisfy narrative and generic expectations: we are even told at the key point of the visit to the hotel, about the trout embroidery that is traced all over the dress, calling up the association with trout fishing—the lure, the play, the setting of clues as red herrings. Later on we discover that the beads and the embroidery are at times focused on the detail of a postage-stamp sized wedding dress caught in the swirl of other notes, at times it is the delicate colouring of the trout, at times the animal wilderness passionate and/or bruitish of the beaded images. Like the written words to the reader, the dress becomes a text appropriate to each character whether it be Josie, Maggie, Fish, Papa B, Julie Magnuson or Deemer himself.

Second, we find that the dress allows Maggie to ‘hear the story she intended to tell.’ This is particularly interesting because Maggie has different discourses. She wants to write the autobiography of the dress: her husband corrects this to ‘biography,’ missing entirely the performative medium that is given by the dress, and Papa B says the dress can tell its own story. The ambivalence this instigates about the stance/position of autobiography pervades the narrative strategy. When Maggie puts the dress on her voice is infused by other voices, particularly Jack Deemer’s, that intrude more and more as the novel progresses. At first the Deemer-voice can be recognized simply by the disjunction between a cynical
narrative commentary and the bland reported conversation that Maggie uses as a character. For example: ‘Why didn’t he get on with it, whip out a knife from under his cassock? The waiting was brutal. Like having a loaded gun for company. “It’s fresh. Want a croissant with your coffee?”’ (9-10). The commentary being melodramatically out of place with regard to the speech. His voice also interjects overt comments that underline the braided discourse, such as the opening of chapter 2: ‘Maggie Wilder is writing this. Reading over her left shoulder, I become a loving supporter’ (17). Maggie and others often seem privy to information they could never have known so that by chapter 3 this other voice says ‘As you have no doubt guessed, I am Papa B’s Jack Deemer’ (30).

Deemer’s voice, through Maggie, moves from an originating authorial voice that we don’t trust because it presents itself as self-serving—at one point Deemer has Maggie dream about him—to a highly consistent character that is arrogant, prideful and pompous. But we never figure out Maggie’s voice: it’s difficult for the reader to know what she will say or if she’s the author of Deemer or a character of Deemer’s mind. One of the strategies of narrative braiding is the subtle doubling of vocabulary. A minimal instance of this is found in the description, possibly from the Deemer-voice that foregrounds itself during the opening section of chapter 3, of Ted Bludgett, acting ‘with all his care and incompetence’ (31). A few pages later this is replicated from a more Maggie-centred voice that refers to Bludgett’s ‘careful or careless presumption’ (39).

Another braiding strategy is worked into perceptual description. At the start of chapter 7 there is a backward and forward play between clear recounting of Maggie’s returning to Vancouver which is distanced from her own immediate voice through a use of reported speech, and a more loosely textured prose description of present process that mimics the qualifications and hesitations of the tired mind in its complex clause structure and phrasal interruptions:

Maggie made a cup of coffee and then decided to drink it in the bathroom upstairs while she prepared to collapse into bed. The door to the attic she noticed, climbing the stairs, was open. (85)

The passage moves into distinctly Maggie-focused self-questioning, only to be suddenly interrupted by ‘I, Jack Deemer, would have given a million dollars to be in Maggie’s place that late night’ (86). Even more obvious a narrative device, but written with tight skill and delicacy, the whole of chapter 8 negotiates around Maggie’s actions as the writer of this work. She writes down notes, makes lists, types as she thinks; and in this process of the action of writing she sometimes says the things she wants to say and sometimes doesn’t, or at least the reader sometimes finds them and sometimes not. What we watch here is a writing about articulacy and how much resists being said or simply elides under or into something else. Yet the text moves softly into Deemer’s voice, focused through visual image toward much more defined and limited observation.

Although the narrative becomes more consistent toward the end, Deemer’s voice continually intervenes and the writer foregrounds the intervention: for example transferring Deemer’s snide comments on his Greek dwelling, as a ‘house’ not a ‘villa,’ directly onto Maggie’s recounting of seeing the dwelling a little later on (229). The interventions render the text ambivalent even to the point of confusing Maggie with Julie Magnuson (205-206). Yet the ambivalence never collapses the voices into one speech. Deemer and Maggie disagree about interpretation—for example Deemer suggests that Julie Magnuson’s pursuit of the wedding dress is set up to hurt Maggie, while Maggie ‘insists’ that the remarks were meant for Deemer. Furthermore, in a broader narrative framework the possible control over both text and reality attempted by Deemer, who ‘gives permission’ to Maggie to be other people, is implicitly undermined by the complex ways that other characters both textualize her, as in Karen Strike’s photograph or Papa B’s puppet, and attempt to control her life from husband Henry Ketch, to Bludgett who is easily resisted, to Papa B and possibly most interestingly to Fish, who both suggests and provides itineraries for her as well as being the unseen supporter of her body in the photograph, and who is described by Deemer as ‘using’ all the women although Maggie ‘was blinded by her own words’ (183). Maggie’s writing both articulates and obscures, even though it is possibly only obscurity from Deemer’s point of view.

The story that Maggie intended to tell can perhaps only be told if she is wearing the wedding dress, since with the dress on by her own choice she becomes both the image of the ‘collected’ woman that Julie Magnuson claims she became when she wore it when Deemer married her, but also the person who has dressed willingly for transformation. As
the writer she, a woman, is subject to the patronizing comments of Deemer that she wants to make order out of chaos she regrets (245), but is also able to nurture him through to a possible change in the grounds for his actions by passing on to him the wedding dress. At one point Deemer says that Maggie wants to protect his life (198) and as with many of his pronouncements this one has elements that make sense: if she doesn't write, his living story cannot be told, his possible change cannot happen. Maggie is writing the present; her stories get written while waiting and become what she has to do.

In the process Kroetsch the writer has constructed a most extraordinary narrative voice that comes close to overwriting the writer. The authorial voice is displaced onto a character whose life is being written by another character. The second character (Maggie) is writing her own life, knowing that part of it is subject to the control of the first character (Deemer). The strategic first-hand autobiographical interventions made by the first character into the text of the second could only be made naturalistically if he edited her texts. But given the dominant motif, they could also be a sign of narrative cross-dressing: that the two characters are in the same narratorial place but behaving/telling/narrating as very different people who know each other partially but not entirely—even as most individual friends or companions partially know each other. The effect is a radical dislocation of authorial voice: not by way of the clear definition of narratorial stance which signifies position (Eliot), nor by the structural separation of say narrator from supernarrator or editor (Thackeray) or narrator from character (Orwell), nor by the location of narrative in character or between/among characters (Woolf), nor by the shifting of character into voice (Joyce), nor by the multiple overlaying voices that comment on each other (Pynchon) or leave gaps for a reader to fill (Carter), nor by the ironic strategy that erases a common-ground and asks a reader to replace it (Cohen), nor by parody.

What happens in this writing is that generically specific concepts of author, narrator and character are encouraged to shift their location, at times to braid together and at others to stand off against one another. Of particular interest is the focus on elements of modern autobiography, itself generically recognized by many devices and techniques held in common with the realistic novel with the development of which it is roughly contemporaneous. Essential for current response to autobiography is a notion of authenticity: fictional device immediately dissolves the patina of intimacy that autobiography promises. Deemer's voice is established from the beginning by way of obvious visual imagism such as the Japense print on the calendar, soon to be followed by the intrusions of the first-person direct address. In contrast Maggie's voice could either be itself a character in classic realist novel, or it could be a self-reflective voice narrating-in-process. The book opens with: 'The pizza man. That was the first name for him. What made him look so silly at first, there on the porch with the rain behind him, was his hat' (1). The sentences could be reported internal thought or narrated present consciousness; only the register of the word 'silly' weighs the reader to the latter.

Deemer's voice quickly acquires the clarity of an authorial stance related to fictional narrators, while Maggie's carefully constructed 'authenticity' articulates expectations of the writer writing autobiography. Each voice ends by contesting the 'origin' of the other. Deemer bit by bit with every contradiction and expression of cynical underconfidence turns from author/observer/narrator into character, and is literally given a place/physical space in the story as this happens. Maggie, who presents herself as an autobiographical 'I' from the start with all the expected details of age, family life and intent, acquires the apparent randomness of everyday acquaintance. This voice rarely makes authorial comments or self-regarding observations (but see 218). As the two distinct narrative positions braid together, the reader's response is continually called into question because it is rarely clear whether the fictional or the authentic is in play.

What gets distanced in the process is the notion of the writer of the book: readers are used to engaging with narrator-character overlay, even writer-narrator-character palimpsests; but when a text mingles two strategies with quite different truth claims on reality, even if we recognize the constructed work of those claims it is difficult to disentangle those strategic bearers of the text to the point where the reader could assess response.

One example among many of the finely drawn line in generic expectation can be found in chapter 9, when the Deemer-voice comments on the fear Maggie feels when faced with Papa B's puppet performance. He says:

I am at seventy hardly an old man. Yet again men are the butt of the joke in many a performance. Senex something or other. But, old or not, I guessed what Maggie
had not been able to guess about herself. She could not, that second night, bear the directness of the puppet's approach. One of the puppets was asking her simply to play herself, and Maggie found the assignment impossible. (122).

The passage opens with a topos of humility: the speaker is, at seventy, socially defined as old since he has his three score years and ten; so his claim to 'hardly' be old is a sign of self-deception, immediately borne out by the elision of the word 'old' from the next sentence which the third sentence's 'Senex' makes clear is implicit. The half-aware, self-convincing self-deceiving technique, is all too human. When we then move on to the next part of the passage we are looking for similar ambivalence. However, in an authoritative contrast, not heralded or sharp but modestly modulated, we are told firmly that this character 'guessed' something about the other that she did not know about herself. Not only is our response predisposed to accept this judgment because of the move from ambivalence to knowing authority, but we have ourselves just guessed something about the speaker (his age) that he did not know himself. The ambivalence of the humility topos is precisely the kind of humanly recognizable self-deception that can mark an authentic voice, while the knowing if modest authority is more typical of the first-person fictional narrator. The reader's progress through the passage encourages a transfusion of trust conventionally given to the authentic voice, onto the fictional, a transfusion that is without substantive reason. Yet our awareness of the character of this voice as arrogant and potentially deceptive/deceiving is not necessarily clear until much later on in the narrative telling. This remains one of an accumulating number of pockets of response increasingly in tension with the readers' understanding that this authentic voice is not to be trusted.

But why should the reader worry about assessing their response to the mixed truth claims? Any reader can impose a clear critical line: eg: Kroetsch the writer constructs the character Deemer as a larger-than-life, highly defined 'character' who is then made the narrator of Maggie's attempt to write autobiography: it the structure of Wuthering Heights. But the text does not work this way. Deemer is affected by the narration of Maggie's autobiography, implicated in it and changed by it. Maggie is not only at/ under his control. The reader's next line of response could be to take the implicit message of the contending truth claims and simply play exegetical games. Yet when a text addresses issues as important as capitalism, gender, sexuality, logic and beauty, to take the text as clever play is to reduce it to tourism. In this predicament, the reader who in any event may not want to impose response but undertake engagement, has to be able to participate in the context of the generic debate. The sign of the braiding of both the narrator and writer is their action of putting on the wedding dress, and in this sense I too am wedded to the text.

The wedding dress is put on by both a man and a woman, and allows each to hear or tell a different story. Overtly we read the story of the woman but implicitly by the end we have also begun to hear the story of the man—not the man who finds hermaphroditic bliss, but the man who remains until the end a 'collector,' the sign of capitalist masculinity, who is now collecting gender, specifically womanhood, in his pursuit of a woman's life. At the beginning of the writing, however, it is Maggie who puts it on and the third rhetorical function that the wedding dress encourages is that it allows a character/narrator not only to hear or tell but also to respond. For example, Maggie cannot respond to Papa B's puppets unless she is allowed to be someone else. At first she becomes Inez in the puppet story, the successful and powerful careerwoman. When she is asked to be herself she runs out for two days only returning with the dress, which allows her to answer. At this point Maggie and Papa B sense the presence of a stranger—Deemer immediately and arrogantly suggests that it's him (123)—and this may be a stranger in the sense of a 'third place,' the difference and change that comes about when people choose to respond to each other. It is also a sexual response, but is focused not on penetrative heterosexuality but on touch and breath and taste, the trying out of new names. And Maggie's response allows Papa B to tell his own story.

Maggie says that every autobiography is a decoy—even the autobiography of a wedding dress. Not deferral, which denies life, but decoys which allow us temporarily to try out difference and even, possibly, to change our lives. In this sense the entire text is a decoy; all artificiality, all articulation that permits externalization and communication is a decoy. It puts us and others off the track partly because if you could say or re-present your reality you would be hunted down, partly because reality is impossible to re-present except through decoys, partly because the hunt for a recognition of reality which is the beauty of aesthetics is constantly misleading, and partly because the stasis of such recognition is in itself a decoy for the temporality of life: decoys become markers of
possibility, they perform bits of oneself, and have the potential to transform in the process.

In this text we cannot know who is the decoy, who is the hunter; who is a decoy for the other's reality? Can we recognize it? does it change them? or us? Maggie also says that you have only one life, so the decoys we make become that life; our performances become ourselves. Whether you read or write, the participation in the text changes reality. For Maggie, wearing the wedding dress changes her life: she puts on someone else and she does it twice. When she buys the dress she is told that it might bring bad luck, and she marries with a sense of the excitement of danger. What she finds is that the danger is the banality of ideology. The second time, as a writer/maker/constructor, she doesn't just don the dress as a receiver of accepted signification, but she hails it into the transformative performance that allows her to challenge that significance. It allows her to respond and to change.

The wedding dress not only allows her to respond to Papa B but also to Julie Magnusson, and through the dress the two women exchange stories of the women they might have become. Maggie then moves the dress on to Deemer, and he doesn't know whether this is to frighten him or to reveal something. Deemer eventually puts it on as a disguise, in echo of Papa B's dress which he describes as a 'discard' and Maggie (Deemer) hears as 'disguise.' And then these two male characters, the versions of male sexuality in Alibi, each in a dress, face each other for the first time in the last pages of the novel, before Dorf 'dies' and Deemer is left to roam the island with Maggie: he as a woman in the dress, shaving every day to look the part, and in search of the icon with the image of God as a woman.

There is in this the appalling possibility that Deemer is merely appropriating a woman's form because he thinks: maybe if God's a woman he'd better be on the right side. It is just the trivial, banal kind of thing he would do. But it is also possible that as with Maggie, Papa B, Julie Magnusson, the dress is transformative, not an enduring state but like decoys, transformative. There are here no longer the pluralities of Alibi but in effect a notion of social practices that do culminate in recognition of moments of cultural significance wrested from ideology but also are interrupted by moments of individual transformation which cannot usually be articulated as significant precisely because they partially dismantle signifying practices — can only be described—scripted out and away from significance.

The significance of wearing the wedding dress, away from which the performance scripts/acts, is quite different for a man and for a woman. The dress comes loaded with notions of female heterosexuality which it is one thing for Maggie to work through and quite another for Deemer to acquire. Maggie is working through to the other side of something that she is in the middle of; Deemer is trying out someone else's way of life and you cannot do this casually because of the risk to them, never mind the risk to oneself. Furthermore, I don't believe it is possible for individuals to move beyond banal appropriation, or beyond recognition of significance, to transformative moments without: a supportive community—so what in this narrative would that be?

The ambivalence of the ending is a problem in the reading, focused by the potential in the text for reading for theory tourism in cross-dressing. What I would like to consider are three approaches to gender study through cross-dressing: fetish theory, the carnivalesque and Kabuki, to sort out whether they can guide my response. The presentation of these two men in women's clothes could be a manipulative appropriation of transvestite theory, particularly the notion of two people living in one body. The basis of standard male-to-female transvestite theory has been that it's a power centre: that the moment of revelation occurs when the man can reveal that he is still a man despite the feminine (1992, 96). There are other problems, other potential abuses of power that have been theorized concerning the use of transvestism within misogynist elements of homosexual communities or concerning the unselfconscious use of other cross-dressings—for example a fashion in the 80s for wearing Fascist uniform which has acute implications for Jewish or black homosexuals.9

However, within recent homosexual theory there have been attempts to look at cross-dressing as positive, attempts that have not been made in theorizing of heterosexual masculinity. Writers such as Mark Simpson (1992) or Marjorie Garber concern themselves with such issues. Both these writers focus on the fetish and discuss the very different positions held by male-to-female and female-to-male cross-dressing. The former is perversion, for no one would want to be female; while the other is a fetishization of desire. Garber in particular theorizes each as a fetish in her attempt to look at the constructive practices of
The problem with fetish theory arises from its development out of the split between the symbolic and the imaginary in Lacanian versions of Freud, which renders it either as a commodification of the subject or with the dislocation of the subject into desire. As commodity the fetish is banal, potentially abusive and 'bad'; as desire the fetish is repetitive, it becomes desire on the move, in exchange, designer desire that is 'good.' Yet in effect, you can't tell the difference between commodity fetish and desire fetish, between an economy of the same or of different, without social context.

Indeed, if I take the clothes that I usually wear—trousers, jacket, shirt, shoes—I could be seen as a walking fetish; but is this a neutral academic commodity, or clothes embodying back versions of masculine desire to a predominantly male academic audience? I, certainly, wear these clothes as banality. In the British academic world where heterosexual women are profoundly threatening, these clothes allow me to neutralize or neuter, to denaturalize, indeed to denature or sterilize sexuality. Yet I am aware that this in itself could be seductive. The significance of cross-dressing is ideologically constrained but specific to social context.

A second set of ideological constraints for cross-dressing, different but parallel to the fetish, is that of carnival or the grotesque—particularly the clown which is itself a useful institutional performance, as Deemer notes of Karaghiosis the slave or fool become the master puppeteer (126). Do we read the ambivalence at the end of The Puppeteer as these two men trying to disempower themselves in standard carnivalesque style? This would be the defining pomo gesture of the relatively empowered at play—moving toward a relative disempowerment, a temporary displacement of power. Quite apart from the political implications of doing this by way of women's clothes (try thinking of the implications if clothes signifying a racially disempowered group had been used), the action is within a closed system. Theory on carnival presents it as preserving the conventional: either in a temporary release of disempowered anger, or as carnival events are repressed in the 18th to 19th centuries in a policing of that anger (Stallybrass and White 1986), or as with Bakhtin in what happens to popular anger with the occurrence of enfranchisement and the supposedly equal access to power by all (Holquist 1981)—which latter gets contained by sidelong it into 'vulgarity.'
as Bludgett, George, or Henry are portrayed in this way. The women provide each other with a domestic/supportive community as they work, yet the men, who frequently consume in private, lack such a community, often only receiving support from other women. Papa B is an exception because the labour of his puppet theatre brings Maggie and then all her women friends together into a performative community; and like Maggie with the dress, Papa B then hands on the puppet strings to Bludgett. Most troubling, Deemer's wearing of the wedding dress seems to insist on Maggie's support and breaks up her earlier domestic group, as if the wearing of the dress by a man necessitates the loss of women's community.

Cross-dressing theory foregrounds the way that social context is vital for understanding significance, otherwise the rhetoric of the wedding dress will remain banal and appropriative. But part of the reading of this narrative is to do with the way that the sign not only affects the human being, but the way the change in the human being, and the performed difference, affects the weight of the sign. Deemer wears the wedding dress away from heterosexual femininity, putting at considerable risk the women's communities around him, at the same time the act of wearing it reduces its power. Parallel to the de-mystification of the dress is the growing figurative emphasis on Artemis, the bear, the nurturer, the North Star, the big dipper, the arctic, Joan of Arc but also, Diana the hunter. Julie Magnussen is all of this. Maggie sees 'or rather realized that she had seen' for again the event resists significance, an icon whose lips 'whispered her a message' in the church built above the temple to Artemis. Like the male binary of Apollo and Dionysus, Maggie leaves the vision behind in the village of Appollonia on her way to Artemis. In the process she is able to pass the dress on, but also in the process she leaves behind the support of women with their domestic structures and becomes the nurturer; the dress becomes a travesty. Given the overt gender politics of the narrative, these two uses of theory: the man putting on woman's dress and life, and the woman recast not within a domestic community but into the nurturer: could easily be read as a generalization, and generalizations raise acute questions of textual ethics. The questions could be rationalized by an analysis for example that claimed to recognize cross-dressing theory as masculinist anyway, and hence the novel's generalizations only apply to men; or an interpretation that reads this cross-dressed man in search of Artemis as an inversion and interrogation of the cross-dressed men in *The Bacchae* who approach Dionysus in an attempt to find out why women serve him: this man wishes to know why women support and love themselves. But the semiotics of the wedding-dress tell against such exegesis.

Robert Kroetsch is seriously engaged with the history of ideas. His work deals largely in sexuality and gender against grounded notions of power, appropriation, ownership, private and communally held property; and it addresses a wide field of contemporary critical and philosophical concepts that may be used but also may be abused. A reader of the texts is faced with the same question, how does the critic use the literary text without abusing it. There is an ethics of textual engagement that we are expected to respect, which changes with genre, canon and literary culture of the writer or reader or text, and depends upon education, publishing, critical assessment, the whole long-term historical environment of the engagement. The engagement has become so much more complex since the education system has extended entrance to people of different religion, class, colour and gender more and more over the last few decades. The promise of the franchise, which supposedly extends to all equal access to power, is in practice impossible, and the representative democratic systems which regulate contesting voices raise questions of legitimation, struggle and the re-casting of power. Just so the enfranchisement of knowledge which supposedly makes 'knowledge' of equal access to all in practice leads to people making knowledge in different ways that are not all acknowledged, people making different knowledges. There are again contesting voices that raise questions of legitimation, struggle and re-casting knowledge. Issues, including that of the 'appropriation' of voice, raise acute ethical questions which derive in turn from immediate moral practices. Yet the ethical dimension which implies that a standard of behaviour has been reached, is always dangerous because agreements about standards are made on the basis of grounds that may change.

This novel suggests that art also works in this way. The concept of the artist as a legitimate but unsettling figure within nation-state ideology has been part of the political structure of post-Renaissance Europe and its cultural colonies. The aesthetic of beauty, the sudden recognition of fit we call truth, that mediates significance to and fro between ideology and culture, is tied to the artist of relative empowerment. This person by definition has certain privileges and is part of an ideological structure
that gives them power within culture. Complicit within, yet working to challenge the power of representations, the relatively empowered artist does wrest significance from stasis/status quo, both guided by and guiding the face of the state: neither remembering the construction of the status quo which would place the artist in the impossible position of seeing no significance, which is the pomo, nor forgetting the construction and removing into a passive banality, but the simultaneity of remembering to forget.

With the enfranchisement of art, more people become relatively empowered so that recognition of truth multiplies into plurality. But also the activity of the artist changes—no longer a spur or goad to ideology and culture of the empowered, the artist can refocus on individual/group practices that recognize a range of positions of power and knowledge. Art becomes the place where we seek out strategies and stances that encourage us to remember to re-member, and hence where we have to change. The transformative vision of performance carries no specific significance, it can only offer a way of re-presenting a particular reality that makes possible change through performance. One can argue that this working of art has always been in place, and has typified artists from disempowered groups or artists working in political systems other than the nation-state. That it is possible is particularly important in the world Kroetsch's novel describes of increasingly global economics, and it offers by analogy potential alternatives to existing structures of knowledge and power.

I would want to argue for this reading of The Puppeteer because although the use of gender theory and the domestic does, on at least one reading, raise questions of transgressed textual ethics, the text also offers the potential for performative re-membrance. It is striking how inadequate the seductive adrenaline surge of the theory junkie becomes with this text. Recognitions of fit are continually traversed by other stories that need to be heard, and which surface through the mimetic gaps of other performances, other autobiographies. My focus on generic strategies of narration however sophisticated these strategies are, has excluded the story of Papa B, or the story of Bludgett, or the story of Julie Magnuson, or the story of Josie—all of which are also told, all of which play with other notions of sexuality and different approaches to community-building work. In stressing this reading I also stress not my ability to think and analyse 'like a man,' but my willingness to try the writing on in an attempt at domesticity. Being wedded to the text is loving work.

Notes

1 See L. Segal (1990) for a clear appraisal of the social construction of masculinity. Unfortunately, this essay has not had time to engage with Segal's latest book Straight Sex: The politics of pleasure (Virago 1994), which offers pertinent and helpful analyses.

2 See R. Braudotti's list of questions in ‘Envy: or with your brains and my looks,’ in Jardine and Smith (1987).

3 Pomo, as the ahistorical game proposed by J. Lyotard (1986), can be distinguished from the historical postmodern outlined by many Canadian critics, particularly L. Hutcheon (1988) and F. Davey (this collection).

4 This is argued at greater length in L. Hunter, Outsider Notes (Talonbooks, in press).

5 The ground work in these fields has been done by among many others Laura Mulvey on the male gaze and film, Juliet Mitchell on feminism and psychoanalysis, and Hélène Cixous's early writing on alternative women's sexuality as hermaphrodisim.


7 The fleetingness of acting which misted early structuralist critics into privileging drama, and even brought T. Eagleton to valorize the dramatic as a metaphor for ongoing process, is parallel to this valuing of food ephemeralism.

8 See T. Cave (1988) for an illuminating replacement of the oedipal with the hunt.


10 For further theorizing see L. Hunter, 'Bodily Functions in Cartesian Space,' in Outsider Notes.

Works Cited

Artifice and Desire: Narrative Striptease in *The Puppeteer*

Brian Edwards

1. Back to Barthes and Derrida

Is not the most erotic portion of a body where the garment gaps? In perversion (which is the realm of textual pleasure) there are no ‘erogenous zones’ (a foolish expression, besides); it is intermittence, as psychoanalysis has so rightly stated, which is erotic: the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing (trousers and sweater), between two edges (the open-necked shirt, the glove and the sleeve); it is this flash itself which seduces, or rather: the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance.¹

Acknowledging seams, edges and resistances in language and the inevitable duplicity of texts as sites of exchange, eroticizing the metaphors, post-structuralist Barthes emphasizes the particular *frisson* of the glimpse. If the art of corporeal striptease is a process of gradual and decorous revelation, it is also a play upon mystery since it promises always that there is more than meets the eye, that final things are withheld however many garments hit the floor. The art of narrative striptease depends alike on provocation and partial recognition, deferral and incompleteness, on the agreement that there is always more to come as texts beguile readers and as readers practice their writerly inscriptions at the site of textual exchange. The text, Barthes suggests, ‘needs its shadow: this shadow is a bit of ideology, a bit of representation, a bit of subject: ghosts, pockets, traces, necessary clouds: subversion must produce its own chiaroscuro’ (*Pleasure* 32). Set against notions of completeness, and such debilitating ideas as whole truth and final meaning, these perceptions are clichés of post-structuralist descriptions of language as discourse and texts as variable invitations to continuing communication. There are immediate associations between Barthes’s ideas of the ‘writerly text’² and ‘the staging of an appearance-as-