



When North is South: Propinquity and the production of place and space in Robert Kroetsch's *Seed Catalogue* and Birk Sproxtton's *Phantom Lake***

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Abstract

Robert Kroetsch's Seed Catalogue, an autobiographical long poem about growing up in Heisler, Alberta, and Birk Sproxtton's Phantom Lake, a narrative approach to growing up in Flin Flon, Manitoba, appear to have little in common, but when read as textualized geography are strikingly similar. Concerned with the nature of place/space, Seed Catalogue maps and reinvents the Canadian Prairie in terms of European history and memories. Sproxtton's Phantom Lake, also made of segmented autobiographical and fictional stories, hearsay, memories, and traces, presents space metonymically, constructing a multilayered and "deep" map of a mining town in Northern Manitoba's Canadian Shield. As "deep" maps, both texts address questions of Canadian identity and culture, in particular, our identity as situated human beings.

** This article is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Birk Sproxtton.

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Just over a decade ago, co-editors Linda Warley, John Clement Ball, and Robert Viau noted in "Writing Canadian Space," a special issue of *SCL/ÉLC: Studies in Canadian Literature*, that much theoretical work remains to be done in...Canadian literary studies even though the critical lexicon is replete with spatial terminology and particular concepts that are specific to recurring Canadian representations of places, spaces, and spatialized identities, among them, the wilderness, the garrison, and the north. As they point out in their "Introduction: Mapping the Ground," critical readings of place/space are often imagined as exercises in literary cartography and "the texts themselves become maps to be read; innovative critical approaches are said to break new ground or open up new territories; and textualized subjectivities are articulated in relation to sites, zones, borders, centers, and margins." Today, our ongoing literary and critical preoccupations with place/space continue to express what Warley et al. identify as the need to articulate ourselves as *situated* human beings. The critical mapping of Canadian texts as parts of our cultural geography is a complex business, in part, because many of these textualized human sites, socio-spatial in nature and often located in uncharted places, do not appear at first to be compatible with Henri Lefebvre's observation in *The Production of Space* that "(social) space is a (social) product" (27). However, as Reinhold Kramer argues in "The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem as System: Friesen, Atwood, Kroetsch, Arnason, McFadden," in recent long poems it is possible to discover mappable cultural forms since neither the parody of older forms nor destabilizing of other ideas creates unmappability" (102).

As Kramer notes, whatever forms they may take land-based works of Canadian literature are mappable. In *Vertical Man/Horizontal World*, Laurie Ricou points out that man may be "an intrusion" in the absent stillness of the literary landscape of the Canadian West, but his relationship with the prairie, that imagined geography which is so often "defiantly irreducible", is a socio-spatial matter which makes the reader "become aware of an increasingly profound imaginative study of man in his physical environment" (1, 138, 19). Here it should be noted that Ricou's notion of Canadian literature as the imaginative study of man in his physical environment, or, if you will, works of Canadian literature as textualized landscapes, complicates the delineation of physical geography itself. Indeed, it is questionable whether such delineation is possible in the field of Canadian literature. After all, as Edward Said points out in *Orientalism*, imaginary landscapes are also social and cultural topographies, because "geographic boundaries accompany the social, ethnic and cultural ones in expected ways" (54). Thus physical geographies themselves can never be considered *simply there* (Warley et al.)—Henri Lefebvre argues, space itself is not a neutral backdrop against which human activity occurs: the human living site is a construct which is *produced* through signs — in short, place, space and other geographic concepts which contextualize social identities and social relations. Or as Warley et al. point out, "in the Canadian literary context space and place have always mattered."

Because textualized space is a (social) construct, however different the ways of seeing time and space together—however varied the interplay of history and geography, and the 'vertical' and 'horizontal' dimensions of being in a world free from the imposition of inherent categorical privilege may be—it is not surprising that there is often a closely-knit relationship that exists between the activity of establishing human sites and mapping in works of Canadian literature. In "The Moment of the Discovery of America Continues," critic, novelist, and poet Robert Kroetsch notes that this relationship is the result of

attempting to write in “a new country” (5). “Like the homesteaders before us,” Kroetsch says, Canadian writers responded to the difficulties of “finding names for the elements and characteristics” of the Prairie by coming back “uneasily but compulsively to landscape writing” (5). “How do we lift an environment to expression?” Kroetsch asks, “How do you write in a new country?” (6) In “No Name Is My Name,” he answers his own questions, revealing that writers, who, in a new place, conceive of themselves “profoundly as namers” (41), are, at base, map makers. Writers, Kroetsch says, “name to create boundaries. They name to establish identity. As he points out, “Canadian writing is the writing down of a new place” (*No Name*, 41).

Writers, of course, produce “space” differently when mapping their literary terrains. Yet, when read as textualized topography, these works, which at first seem to be radically different because of their regional particularities, may be strikingly similar. For instance, at first glance, it appears that Robert Kroetsch’s *Seed Catalogue*, an autobiographical long poem about growing up in Heisler, Alberta, and Birk Sproxtton’s *Phantom Lake*, a narrative approach to growing up in Flin Flon, Manitoba, appear to have little in common. Kroetsch’s long poem investigates the boundaries which have been used to chart Canada’s southern mosaic, while Sproxtton’s argument concerning the northern landscape’s resistance to mapping, paradoxically dispels such boundaries. Sproxtton suggests that this difference may be due to the Canadian “preoccupation with northern openness [which] differs from concepts of the home place in the southern prairies where life is charted more precisely” (95). Despite this, both writers, concerned with the nature of place/space, function like cartographers. Throughout *Seed Catalogue*, one finds space constantly mapped and the Canadian Prairie reinvented in terms of European history and memories. Likewise, Sproxtton’s *Phantom Lake*, also made of segmented autobiographical and fictional stories, hearsay, memories, and traces, presents space metonymically while offering a multilayered and “deep” map of a mining town in Northern Manitoba’s Canadian Shield.

In *Seed Catalogue*, Robert Kroetsch puts forward the proposition that “First, / a man must build” (23). Homesteading, of course, is the building of the Prairie’s most fundamental human site. Fixed in place, homesteads on the Prairie necessarily create relations of proximity, which, in turn, produce zones, borders, centers, and margins that may be understood in the terms of series or grids. In *Seed Catalogue*, the father passes on to his son carpenter tools. Here, man the homo faber is man the builder...and the builder is also man the mapper. Kroetsch’s Uncle Freddie not only knew how design and build “barns / with the rounded roofs,” in doing so, he also “mapped / the parklands with perfect horse-barns” (23).

Throughout *Seed Catalogue*, mapping is a matter of naming. Here it should be noted that the deep mapping of Kroetsch’s childhood is presented as a bifurcated matter. As Kroetsch’s speaker notes, there are two home places co-existing in the same place at the same time on the Canadian Prairie; there is “the home place: 17-42-16-W4th Meridian” (5); and “the home place: 1 1/2 miles west of Heisler, Alberta / on the correction line road / and 3 miles south” (5). This doubling of the homestead results in “a terrible symmetry” (5): a “double hook” in which farms configured according to European models and the wilderness, the natural world of the prairie occupy the same place—Kroetsch’s “home place” not only embodies “[t]he stations of the way,” it also houses “the other garden” which “*Flourishes. Under absolute neglect*” (21). Farming,

arguably, is gardening on a grand scale, and the phylogenetic grid created by the activity of cultivation (on any scale), a very deep map indeed. But constructing according to archetype on the Canadian Prairie in *Seed Catalogue* does not produce the sacred centre that one would expect. As Kroetsch points out, the Canadian Prairie is no Eden. There “are no trees around the house”: “Only the wind. / Only the January snow. / Only the summer sun” (5). The home place described in *Seed Catalogue* is a series of treeless gardens nested within each other: moving from the dirt localized behind Kroetsch’s ears (at best, as Kroetsch’s mother points out, cabbage can be grown there) to the hotbed with which the poem begins, the flowerbed by the house, his mother’s vegetable garden, the potato patch, and the grain fields. As one reads *Seed Catalogue*, it becomes apparent that all these gardens are contained within a larger garden, the farm which itself is a gigantic cultivated plot housed within the even larger, treeless, natural garden of the Canadian prairie. “[P]uzzled / by any garden that was smaller than a / ¼-section of wheat and summerfallow” (5), Kroetsch’s father points out, gardening/farming is human geography—the activity of constructing sites that map the landscape: “We give form to this land,” he says, “[B]y running / a series of posts and three strands / of barbed wire around a ¼-section” (17).

Ricou would no doubt recognize *Seed Catalogue* as a work which concerns itself with the intrusion of man on the Prairie and his geographical relationship with the natural world. In *Phantom Lake*, however, this relationship is largely geophysical. Located above the 54th parallel in the “rocks and lakes and bush” (92), the place itself, which resists being sited, remains largely unstructured. Embracing the “nomadic lifestyle of...hunters and fishers, trappers and prospectors...who cannot be found by seeking an intersection, a street address, or a topographical grid with numbers,” those who live there know “exactly” where they are “and it sure as hell is not south” (92). This “not south” is “true” north, a place that “has not yet ossified into a costume house” with roles waiting for you to try on (92): unlike the south where life “is charted more precisely” (95), in the north “[y]ou can move” Sproxton says, “you have some wiggle room” (96). There may well be “a dividing line between a chartered and domesticated southern life and an unfettered and nomadic northern life” (92), as Sproxton’s narrator insists, but topographical matters in *Phantom Lake* and *Seed Catalogue* are more complicated than they first appear to be. *Phantom Lake* names and maps its northern locations, mapping its landscapes like *Seed Catalogue*. Also, while it charts the effects of European cultures transforming place into space on the Canadian Prairie, Kroetsch’s long poem also resists the ossification of that which Sproxton speaks. In *Seed Catalogue* there is also a good deal of “wiggle room.” A collection of autobiographical segments—memories, doggerel, lyrics, tall tales, and advertisements—drawn from Robert Kroetsch’s life on the farm, *Seed Catalogue* operates on the principle of collage in much the same manner as Birk Sproxton’s *Phantom Lake*. A collection of segmented autobiographical and fictional stories, hearsay, memories, traces, interviews, and reportage, *Phantom Lake*’s topography provides its readers with a multilayered and “deep” map of a mining town in Northern Manitoba. Similarly, *Seed Catalogue* provides its readers with a multilayered and “deep” map of the terrain just west of Heisler, Alberta. The many juxtapositions and intersections contained in both texts—as Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks would say, the historical with the contemporary, the political with the poetic, the discursive with the sensual—demand to be uncovered, unfolded, and reinvented.

"Shield Notes," *Phantom Lake's* first section, warns that such uncoverings, unfoldings, and reinventions require active, not passive readers. This requirement of the reader is typical of Sproxtton and his work. As Christian Riegel notes in his preface to "An Interview with Birk Sproxtton," "[r]eaders are asked - required - to think and to participate in the meaning of his texts and are forever kept off-kilter in an elaborate aesthetic game that is a Sproxtton narrative." Reading *Phantom Lake* involves adapting to a spatial presentation of information that transmits the experience of place/space up north. In this text, language itself is rooted in matters of terrain. Sproxtton introduces the emphasis on the geophysical by asking: "How can we know what an age means? How do we find a proper language for an overflowing fullness? How [do we...] find a language for this tiny chunk of Canadian Shield?"(10). For Sproxtton, a miner's son, writing or measuring the world is not a matter of translation or interpretation. The way to tie together words and world, world and words, Sproxtton says, is scrabbling, reaching instinctively for the "geological word" (10).

Like *Phantom Lake*, *Seed Catalogue* also requires its readers to be actively engaged with the text when scanning its pages. Its entries are also arranged spatially. Polyphonic stanzas scattered across the pages call attention to the physical nature of Kroetsch's poetry, as the poems many speakers occupy different parts of the pages. Reading the lines of verse in *Seed Catalogue* is often like following a game trail: there is no trace of the poet's "coming or going," "only a scarred / page, a spoor of wording / a reduction to mere black / and white/a pile of rabbit / turds tells us / all spring long / where the track was" (18). The verse itself, as this verse suggests, is not the final construct. The poetic act is a natural, if somewhat scatological, activity. Rather, the activity of reading which constructs the socio-spatial experience of the text, for each reader brings to that activity his or her experiences and/or desires. In *Seed Catalogue*, readers find themselves tracking the poet as he moves from entries advertising varieties of seed to lyrical verses to tall tales. Separated spatially by white space, these passages are not privileged over one another. As in *Phantom Lake*, the reader is encouraged to read in any order, vertically, horizontally, diagonally—to find the poet's trail. When readers return to the text, they find the trail has changed because they themselves have acquired new experiences and/or desires in the interval. The track, like a rabbit's "coming or going," is one which is fluid. Always in the process of being created, the map's construction is like creating a series of overlays: each reading adds new points to the track which in turn complicates the grid which is the long poem. As Aritha van Herk notes in "Robert Kroetsch: A Biocritical Essay," Kroetsch even goes so far as to say, in *Seed Catalogue*, "[r]eaders are invited to compose further sections," as though they too can participate in the process of charting a life.

Charted, that is read as a socio-spatial expression, the poet's "track" reconstructs what life at the home place during Kroetsch's childhood was like. Occupying two places at the same time, one finds a number of tantalizing binaries at play: one is extant, the other absent; one is the natural world; the other a human construct; one is the reality which one lives, the other a memory. With apologies to Plato, there is an Ideal and a Real. The European ideal exists in terms of its absence: in Heisler there are no "clay and wattles (whatever the hell they are)...Lord Nelson...kings and queens...Sartre and Heidegger...pyramids...lions...lutes, violas and xylophones...the Parthenon...the Cathédrale de Chartes...Heraclitus...ballet and opera...[and] Aeneas" (12-13). . Via its very absence, the European Ideal continually calls itself into being. "[T]he Seine, the

Rhine, the Danube, the Tiber, and the Thames” may be absent in the New World, but the *Strauss* boy “could piss right across” the Battle River when it ran dry one fall” (italics mine 12).

In *Seed Catalogue*, geographical names also convey scientific abstractions. Diametrically opposed to the abstraction of its European model, the Real is emphatically concrete and biologically secular. Kroetsch’s speakers not only use an earthy vernacular, they often descend into slang: “shit,” “piss,” “ass,” “prick,” “bullshitters,” and “piss-up” prepare the reader for the physicality of the collection’s infamous masturbation poem. On the other hand, the elevated diction of the seed catalogue’s promotional passages, for instance, those concerning Copenhagen Market Cabbage, Hubbard Squash, and Early Snowcap Cauliflower, transmit hierarchical and abstract notions of “pedigree” (3), “superlative” (8), and “inheritances” (15). Euphemisms, like “playing dirty” (9), convey socio-ideological relationships: those of the low to the high, of the child to the adult, of woman to man, of the colony to its Mother Country. As Kroetsch notes, both he and Germaine recognize that the priest, who enforces cultural norms and forms during their catechism lessons, constructs a human geography foreign to the place in which they live: they “knew—well— / he had named it he had named / our world out of existence” (9). Kroetsch’s co-mingling of low and high not only involves diction but also the poem’s syntax: towards the end of *Seed Catalogue*, a speaker presents the reader with the archaic and the modern versions of the same question, “*How do you a garden grow? / How do you grow a garden?*” (28). The poem’s form also varies according to the speaker. Like the settlement patterns around Heisler, Kroetsch’s offerings are heteroglot: lyrics, promotional passages, doggerel, narrative, tall tales, riddles, and advertisements.

In *Phantom Lake*, Sproxton’s linguistic construction may also be termed hybrid, but not in Mikhail Bahktin’s sense of the term, for its heteroglot offerings do not operate as socio-ideological contradictions. Speaking in Flin Flon is not a matter of high and low dialects, the Old World vs the New, but the experience of “living in the fluid mingling of languages, the language of my prairie-born parents and the language of the industrial world on the Shield all around us, where we speak of smelter smoke, and slag pours, and headframes, and this lake (say Amisk) or that lake (say Apthapauskow), everyday things to us, places alive in our daily rounds, but exotic and alien to outsiders” (11). Like Kroetsch’s treatment of language, Sproxton’s *Phantom Lake* is also heteroglossic, distinct varieties of languages coexist in the same linguistic code. Sproxton’s northern code, unlike its southern counterpart, is not linguistically competitive. “The place names that shape us,” Sproxton says, “carry the Cree words into a lively hybrid. The name Flin Flon, a crazy invention in English vibrates between the Cree names, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Flin Flon sits on the border of fact and fiction; the name inhabits both the world of flesh and blood and the invented world. Cree, French, English each calls out to the others. English words each outnumber French and Cree words, but both persist to enrich and enliven and transform the others” (132).

In a novel, the hybrid utterance employs only a single speaker—the posited author, for example – whose story contains one or more kinds of speech (Bahktin 263). *Phantom Lake*’s multiplicity of voices and the wide variety of their links and interrelations, however, are not arranged into a polemic apology, for there is no controlling narrative voice that interrelates dialogically with the other voices inhabiting the text. Sproxton’s

own speech is part of a hybrid utterance, as he may be said to present himself as the text's posited author, but he is only one of several such speakers. Thus, if one must identify *the* posited author of *Phantom Lake*, it cannot be said to be Sproxton. Properly speaking, the text itself may be said to be the author of itself—speaking as the place and in doing so expressing the heteroglossia that is Flin Flon via its many and very different “languages.”

Kroetsch may also be identified as his text's posited speaker, but he too is only one of several voices in *Seed Catalogue*. Like Sproxton's, Kroetsch's use of collage creates a reading dynamic that allows his readers to experience what the Surrealists termed *drift*. Scattering his poem's segments on the pages of the text breaks up any narrative linearity of the verse and encourages readers to visit the stanzas as they please. One is not constrained to read from left to right in *Seed Catalogue*. Rather the reader is invited to read vertically, horizontally, from right to left, or diagonally as one pleases. One may, as it were, *drift*. As the French Situationists note, *drift* or *derive* elicits playful-constructive behavior on the part of the participant (Hilder). Rooted in the Marxist idea that material conditions can create consciousness and thereby dull human creativity, the theory of *derive* is, at its core, an urban critique which produced in those who practice it knowledge about how certain architectural phenomena promote or impede certain activities. *Drift* rests on the notion that human geography is designed to encourage specific movements, for instance, the journey from home to work or school and back again. The drifting participant's awareness of such psychogeographical effects upon him or her, however, frees that individual from his or her socially produced ennui. As Hilder notes, performing *derive* means to both submit to and contradict psychogeographical pressures by one's awareness of them. For those reading *North of 54*, deviation from the physical constraints generally placed on the reader by the narrator is a common (and desired) experience. Reading *Phantom Lake* involves recognizing the relationship between the inhabitant and his or her habitat, the reader and the text. One method that Sproxton uses to teach the reader how to examine his or her relationship with place is *bent humor*, that peculiar doubled-way of seeing that comes from living on boundaries. Flin Flon, for instance, is “a place where people walk on their own water” (36). What may be only a metaphor elsewhere is the literal truth in Flin Flon. The citizens of Flin Flon, it seems, are able to perform miracles, by using their sewers, which run above ground in wooden boxes, as sidewalks. In *Seed Catalogue*, Kroetsch's method of doubling the home place also encourages an awareness of the spatialized nature of the written word. “This is a prairie road. /” one of Kroetsch's quatrains informs the reader, “This road is the shortest distance / between nowhere and nowhere. / This road is a poem” (17).

For Sproxton, this doubling of language in *North of 54* raises a number of playful questions regarding the making of history with the social production of space—not the least of which involves the spatialization of the words themselves. In *Phantom Lake*, the physicality of language is highlighted. Even puns are made spatial—created by words that are embedded in other words. For example, Sproxton floating like a dead man in the lake finds “grave” in the word, “gravel” (100); he is “a person with rocks in his name” (98). Within the words that they create, the physical nature of the letters themselves become an important part of the reading experience. This text encourages readers to read with awareness, to find words inside words. Doing so, one becomes sensitive to space and what occupies it by reading metonymically, and is encouraged to recognize

Sproxton's technique of counterpointing in passages. Contrapuntal overlapping terms in passages which conclude a discussion in one section, for example, often appear to continue that subject in the next. Recognizing these overlaps in passages in *Phantom Lake* is very much like prospecting. The act of reading *Phantom Lake* is that of the early explorers in the area. When one reads *Phantom Lake*, one re-enacts the social production of space in that area's early history. Drifting from one passage to the next, one discovers outcroppings of tropes as one reads. Sometimes traces of these tropes are spread far apart, sometimes they are grouped closely together. On page 52, for example, Sproxton's discussion of the physicality of the term, "smelter smoke," which makes "you kiss your lips together as you say the phrase," becomes "the smelter smoke which plumes and drifts in the wind" which shrinks lungs into "dry shriveled lumps" or fills them with "ugly yellow pus" in the following section (53) before becoming the "warm trickle of smoke in [his] throat" on page 54.

The changing, sensual nature of smelter smoke is part of Sproxton's strategy of the "double take, a double hook" in *Phantom Lake* (54). Like Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* and Robert Kroetsch's *Seed Catalogue*, *Phantom Lake* also offers its readers concurrent realities. There is no authorized version of anything available in this text. Instead one finds repetition and refrain, reinforcement, intersection, and juxtaposition. The stories and excerpts repeating, forming, strengthening, and reforming Sproxton's lietmotifs create the narrative equivalent of musical chords and dischords. Because the presentation of these motifs is always in flux, the equivalent of a coherent melodic line conveying an over-riding meaning is never firmly established. Since meaning cannot be fixed, the reader, involved in the process of locating tropes, becomes involved in playfully constructive behavior. In short, while reading he or she creates not meaning but meanings. As a result, narrative coherence rests on the reader's own discoveries. A text which is constantly reinvents itself when read, *Phantom Lake* is aptly named—Denis points out, "you think you're going one place and you find you're going some place else" (12).

Thus, *Phantom Lake* becomes a different text for each reader...and a different text at each reading. *Seed Catalogue* functions in exactly the same way. One gardens when reading this text: repetition, reinforcement, intersection, and juxtaposition of the motifs of seeds, seeding, planting, and harvesting form, strengthen, inform, and re/form concepts of what a garden is. Arguably, in such a situation, the text mediates meaning for the reader in much the same manner that a landscape, like Kroetsch's Prairie or Sproxton's Canadian Shield, mediates meaning for its inhabitants. Attracted to various phrases and terms, the reader also experiences the growth via Kroetsch's use of extended metaphors. Thus in Section 9 of *Seed Catalogue*, "the bomb/exploding / in the black sky" (25) could be informed by Jim Bacque's conversation with a woman in "Terminal 2, Toronto" (22) or by "Germaine with her dress up and her bloomers down" (9) or by "the husband with his ass sticking out of the ground" (13): or by all three of these passages or by none of them at all. A reader may have stopped at these stations of the way or may not have—meaning in this text depends on which seeds have been developing, what ideas have been transplanted, whether those ideas have taken root or whether they have been weeded out. The act of reading *Seed Catalogue* is much like working the land. Making meanings, one is metaphorically ordering or forming impressions of the New World—by extending the metaphor, one is acting like a homesteader.

In *Seed Catalogue*, form and function are geographically determined. Likewise, when investigating the outcroppings of Sproxtion's subject—the language of the place itself—one prospects when perusing passages in *Phantom Lake*. Drifting like a prospector, the reader searches metonymically while exploring the textual landscape. Reading *Phantom Lake* involves a considerable amount of traversing white spaces, panning punctuation, sifting syntax, and investigating metaphorical outcroppings, while looking for tell-tale signs of mineralization and personification that could indicate veins of meaning. Moreover, as Sproxtion himself notes, his texts (like *Seed Catalogue*) are constructed so the reader can “dip and skip. You can dip in and read the text for a bit and go quickly to another place and start again so that while the sequence may be important I think it's more important to the reader to find his or her way through the network and create a path” (Riegel).

Like William Carlos Williams' *Paterson*, that long poem in which the city of Paterson, New Jersey, dreams its inhabitants into existence, Birk Sproxtion's *Phantom Lake* and Robert Kroetsch's *Seed Catalogue* are psycho-geophysical and geographical gestalts in which a small part of the Canadian Prairie and a tiny chunk of the Canadian Shield forms, directs, and, if you will pardon another pun, concretizes its citizens' lives. Indeed, in *Phantom Lake*, Robert Kroetsch himself appears and offers his often quoted observation about Canadian literature and culture: “The fiction makes us real ... [i]n a sense we don't exist until someone tells our story” (132). It is not surprising that Kroetsch and Sproxtion are themselves self-actualizing items in their collages. They too are part of the terrain which they deep map. In *Seed Catalogue*, Kroetsch insists that it is “essential” to understand one's story. It is “essential” that we understand why Kenneth MacDonald died releasing a cargo of bombs over Cologne. What were the connections: what created the “terrible symmetry” produced by MacDonald's absence (26)? Was the death of Kroetsch's cousin “an intrusion on a design that was not his” or “an occurrence which he had in fact, unintentionally, himself designed” (25, 26). History, with its organizing logic of cause and effect, however, offers Kroetsch's readers no answers. However, when spatially determined, the relations of the elements in the grid in which the navigator found himself reveal a terrible symmetry to be found in the relations of the Old Country with the New. During his return to “the city that was his maternal great-grandmother's / birthplace” is completed, children are fed to “ancestral guns” (25, 26). Navigating himself to his own destruction, MacDonald's last moments reveal the similarities of birth and death, alpha and omega, which we tend to forget—like the propinquities of seeding and harvest, his death is “a strange / planting”: “Anna Weller: Geboren Cologne, 1849. / Kenneth MacDonald: Died Cologne, 1943” (25, 26).

Another instructive deep map that addresses questions of Canadian identity and culture, in particular, our identity as *situated* human beings, lies in *Phantom Lake*. Sitting in a Winnipeg classroom as a young man, Sproxtion has an epiphany in which he realizes that identity is not only a question of where we are but more importantly a matter of origins: where we have been situated in relationship to the land itself. In the north, the question of origins or where we are from is both a geophysical *and* a geographical matter. Here it is important to remember that our geophysical and geographical histories are not only organized in terms of chronology and cause and effect, but are also comprised of important spatial dimensions which cannot be overlooked. As Foucault points out, spaces themselves have histories and that “it is not possible to disregard the fatal intersection of time with space” (22). Thus only by investigating both time and

space can we fully articulate what it means to be *situated* human beings. Sproxton is able to fully articulate his situation when he recognizes how throughout his life time and space have been interrelated. He “had lived virtually all his life in the watershed of the Saskatchewan—Flin Flon, Regina, Red Deer” (195). “[W]hen I lived in Winnipeg and Gimli,” Sproxton says, “I was attached to the vast watery highway lurching to the bay via the Nelson and the Hayes Rivers. I could not escape the basin of the bay. I was an interior man attached to the bay” (198-99). If identity is the product and function of our environment, Sproxton posits, then northerness is not only a state of mind but also the deepest strata underpinning a northerner’s personality. When Sproxton examines the deep map of his own personal past, he discovers that “the impossibly long geographical past underlies the long historical past, [and] the historical past underlies my family past” (195). “There is something primal about the Shield,” Sproxton says, “The connections may lie underground, but the challenge to know our stories always remains” (196). Sproxton’s personal history is always presented as a matter of place. It “is shot through and through with strands of the North” (195). At the end of *Phantom Lake*, Sproxton reveals that he has also worked as a prospector. “As a youth, I moved north from Flin Flon toward the bay to find a gold mine for Hudson Bay Exploration and Development,” he says, “[A] company at one time headed by Tom Creighton” (195). His brothers’ and sisters’ personal histories are also geographically determined. Sproxton says, “the whole damned crew thinks north, even when we do not live there ... My youngest sister, Cheryl, lives in the heat of the Manitoba corn belt in Morden, and each summer she seeks out a lake, somewhere, but always north” (196).

As Warley et al. point out, if literature is an arena in which cultural identity is constructed, then Canadian literature has been an integral part of a network of discourses that have produced identities informed by images associated with the land. In 1972, Margaret Atwood pointed out in *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* that there are two ancestral totems in Canadian texts: the recurring motifs of the settlers that come with their European artifacts, the Garden being one (121), and the explorers who mapped and named places (114-15). The Explorers “fail or die,” Atwood says, the Settlers’ suffering and effort is “futile” (125). The geographical issues raised by Robert Kroetsch’s and Birk Sproxton’s deep mapping in *Seed Catalogue* and *Phantom Lake*, however, suggest that the time has come to add an important component to Atwood’s conclusions about storytelling in Canada. As Michel Foucault suggests, the twentieth century will be known as “above all the epoch of space”—that understanding of the world as a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein: in which the human living site is a space defined by relations of proximity between points or elements and formally described as series, trees or grids which in turn express relations of propinquity, what type of storage, circulation, marking, and classification of human elements should be adopted in a given situation in order to achieve a given end (22-23). Geographically speaking, texts like those discussed in this paper offer Canadians another, important and related, understanding of their ancestral totems via our imagined landscapes of the self in their networks of constructed space which situate individual identity by connecting human sites with one another.

Read as textualized geography, *Seed Catalogue* challenges the settler’s compulsion to order the land by pointing out that there isn’t really the need for gardeners and their European artifacts in Canada. After all, Brome grass, the only native plant listed, “Flourishes under absolute neglect” (20). A balanced and flexible critique of Canadian

and European norms and forms, Kroetsch's botany lesson ends in an open-ended fashion. Its final section gives the reader three options when considering "How / do you grow a garden?" (27). The third and final option returns to physical reality of the home place in Heisler. Canada is not Europe. There are "No trees / around the house, / only the wind. / Only the January snow. / Only the summer sun" (28). Moreover, Canada is no Eden: "Adam and Eve got drowned?" (28). Kroetsch leaves his reader with the question, "Who was left?" (28). Arguably, Kroetsch's humorous answer, Pinch-Me, is a wake-up call: it is time for Canadians to look around and realize where they are living. "Always north" (196), *Phantom Lake* is also an open-ended polyphonic hybrid—multi-layered, many-faceted and *geo-ameri-centric*, it too encourages its reader to dip and skip, to chart a path while drifting through its entries. In final analysis, the open terrain that *Phantom Lake* offers gives readers the opportunity to escape what Glen Gould has identified as "depressingly urban oriented and spiritually limited" ideas and values. Read as a geological text that invites readers, interested in mineral love, to explore the Canadian Shield, *Phantom Lake* promises that the transformation such an adventure will involve will be an awakening that is one of rediscover. Situated, Sproxtion's readers find themselves in a textualized landscape, created by an intricate series of socio-spatialized discourse, which they recognize from childhood: "the lakes go on,:" Sproxtion says, "The lakes dally with rocks and the rocks cradle lakes. The lakes snap and shimmer in the winter cold; they roll and glimmer in the sun and moon. They laugh and slap their shores and tempt your dreams. Some hide themselves underground, waiting. They challenge you to count them, like sheep. They challenge you to count them out...Payuk and Neso, Amisk or Beaver, Snow and Weskusko, Big Island, Athapap, Hapnot and Phantom—they lie like sleeping beauties waiting for your kiss" (200).

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