

The background of the entire image is a complex, dense line drawing in black ink on a light grey background. It depicts a lush forest scene filled with various types of birds, including what appear to be owls, hawks, and smaller songbirds, perched on branches and in flight. The foliage is rendered with intricate, overlapping lines, creating a sense of depth and texture. In the lower right corner, a tall, dark grandfather clock stands prominently. The clock face is visible, showing numbers 12, 3, 6, and 9, and the hands indicate a time around 10:10. The clock has a classic design with two pendulums and a decorative top.

All the Dead Husbands  
Robert Kroetsch

I've already seen what I've never seen.

--Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*

## 1 Vision

Even with binoculars,  
you can't see paradise from here.  
The lady in the house opposite gets in the way.  
She forgets to put on her pyjamas.

## 2 Second Thoughts

I persist in believing that watching paint dry  
is not such an idle activity.  
Belief is an invitation to doubt.

The sun on the hoarfrost, for a moment,  
looks everlasting.  
That's why we hide gold in vaults.

Every so often an apple falls  
on someone's head.  
We've been waiting now for centuries.

So old, so soon, and still  
wet behind the ears.  
We were expecting cannibals.

### 3 The Prairie Widow's Lament

I hear a coyote  
but can't see one.  
I see a herd of antelope  
but don't hear a sound.

### 4 The Prairie Widower's Lament

I am left with all the carrots to pull.  
The beets to top. The peas to shell.  
I am left with heaps of cabbage and kale.  
Now which of us has gone to hell?

## 5 Railway Track by Highway 13

A hawk on a sun-baked snow fence  
by the train track, watching the grass:  
waiting for a gopher to make the first move.

A prairie train track, polished bright,  
reaching straight at the horizon:  
grabbing eternity by the short hairs.

## 6 Voyage

Seaward.  
Sea/word.  
c-word.  
c-ward.

## 7 Early Draft of a Wet Dream

You're alone. I'm alone.

An orange moon, a thinning cloud.

An old red raven, flying all that way.

Imagine me, kissing your left nipple.

## 8 Pulp Fiction

The world is a gun, a copycat killer,

a holy terror, a two-bit thriller.

Or maybe we're just a genetic error.

## 9 Quest

Perhaps what we're looking for  
is what we're looking for.

Some of us find it.  
All of us fail.

## 10 Why I Cry at Weddings

We imitate the birds and the bees,  
the rash pirouettes, the ferocious buzz.

To fuck is to be impaled on the sky.  
Birds and bees and us, learning to die.

## 11 Nightfall

You were wearing nothing  
but black toenail polish.  
Night came early.

## 12 Rhyme

though  
through

plough  
trough

enough  
already

## 13 Seniors' Residence

All the dead husbands partake  
of the ache they once were.  
Their widows make love to them daily,  
just after three, over coffee and cake.



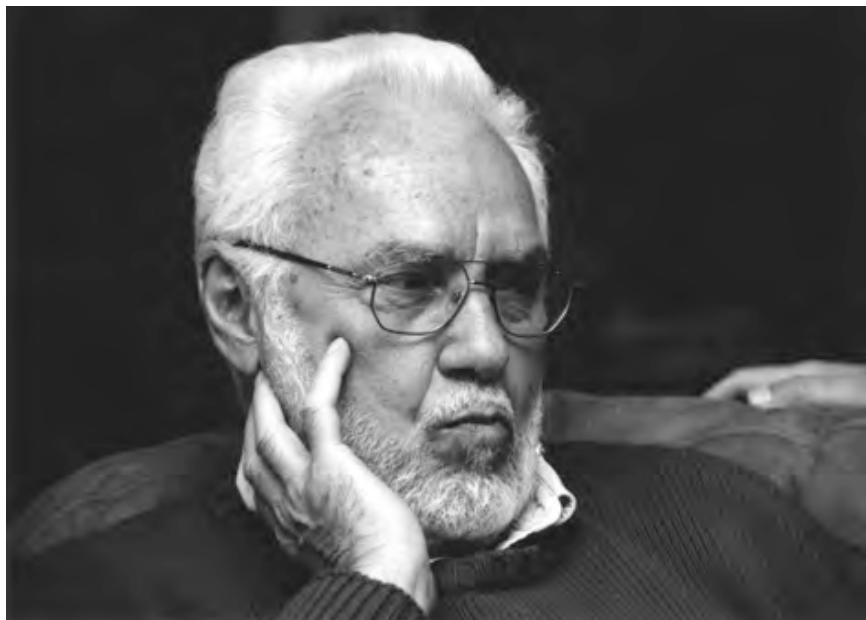


Photo: Danielle Schaub

Renowned poet, novelist, essayist, and teacher, Robert Kroetsch is one of Canada's most accomplished authors. With a career spanning well over 40 years, Kroetsch has received numerous honours, including the prestigious Governor General's Literary Award for his book *The Studhorse Man*. He has penned 9 internationally acclaimed novels, 14 books of poetry, and 5 books of non-fiction, essays, and exploration.

Celebrated as a leading creator of contemporary Canadian literature, his writing, teaching, and critical vision have helped shape Canadian literature and culture. His works have been translated, published, and studied extensively worldwide, and he has given readings in countries as various as China, Japan, Finland, Italy, and Australia. Kroetsch has taught and mentored countless writers throughout the world. A Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, he was short-listed for the Governor General's Literary Award in 2000 for *The Hornbooks of Rita K*.

A Distinguished Alumnus of the University of Alberta, his most recent award is the Manitoba Arts Council Arts Award of Distinction. Robert Kroetsch lives in Leduc, Alberta.

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