

Author finds women difficult



by Janet Russell

The trip from University campus to Cromdale Campus goes on and on past worlds many students seldom, if ever, visit; past Italian groceries, second-hand stores, residential areas and old hotels. I wondered if I had missed my stop; I seemed to be going so far. I hoped this author would be worth the trip. Finally, the bus got there.

The classroom was large and fluorescently bright. Robert Kroetsch walked in blinking. He talked casually with the janitor bringing in the water and the instructress, before he was introduced. He strode to the podium and began to talk and read in a relaxed and robust voice. To start, he chose sections from a new poem that is intended to counterbalance *The Ledger*. The poem revolves around ex-

cerpts from a seed catalogue. Those of us from farms have all read these in the barrenness of February and dreamed of the fruitfulness of summer. The poem is an intensely personal reminiscence of his family and the hired man and physical work and the garden and creating and falling off the horse.

"How the hell do you fall off a horse that's standing still, the hired man asks"

When an American looks around himself, he sees a picture of himself. Albertans and Canadians often do not get a chance to see themselves, only someone else. Kroetsch feels his books give us a view of our own culture and the possibilities open to us. A written literature is a first step towards convincing us of our culture's unique existence. It is a visible sign. In *Creation* (1970), there is a conversation

between Margaret Laurence and Kroetsch in which they both comment about the force with which they were first struck by, in the realization that writing could really be about a prairie background. Canadian writing is coming well, he feels, and does not require any particular concessions.

Rural mythologies clash with our urban lives

"Fiction is made out of gossip." He went on to talk about how important gossip is as a regulator in small towns and rural communities. Gossip is extremely important. As Albertans, there are few of us without some close ties to such communities and we can remember the power, potency and pleasures of gossip. Out of gossip merges the storyteller.

"You listen to people in bars and they are telling stories; sports stories and eventually bear stories." Kroetsch wants to know "What are they really saying?" He is fascinated by the mythologies of a culture. So far

he has been exploring the male story. Men here have a lot of fun together, he finds. At parties or gatherings, the men congregate in one room and the women congregate in another; remarkably like a Sunday country picnic. He feels that we have a demystified mythology of the strong, independent, macho man who indulges in heavy physical activity. Our rural mythologies clash with our urban lives.

The bear stories. He came back to them time and time again. Children and their teddy bears, the bears in *The Manticore* and his own new book *Badlands* were all discussed.

Another recurring myth regarding the return to the land of the dead was discussed at length. There is an Indian myth about the woman who returns to the land of the dead to retrieve her husband. The gods would allow her husband to return with her if they did not touch each other on the four day return trip to the land of the living. Forbidden fruits are sweetest and after three days they touched. The husband is whisked back to the land of the dead. This legend will sound somewhat familiar to classical scholars as it is very much like the Orpheus myth. Kroetsch uses the mythical format of returning to the land of the dead in *Badlands*. He had never heard of the Indian myth before writing the book, yet it is a part of Anna Yellowbird's traditional background. (The fascination with myths has led Kroetsch to read a log of Jungian psychology but the questions were there before he ever heard of that man's work.)

Creation, vitality all intertwined in images of sexuality

Creation is another prime concern. Planting a garden, a studhorse man, nature all predominate. He loves the images of sexuality. The man's vitality requires the release of creating.

Although he read several

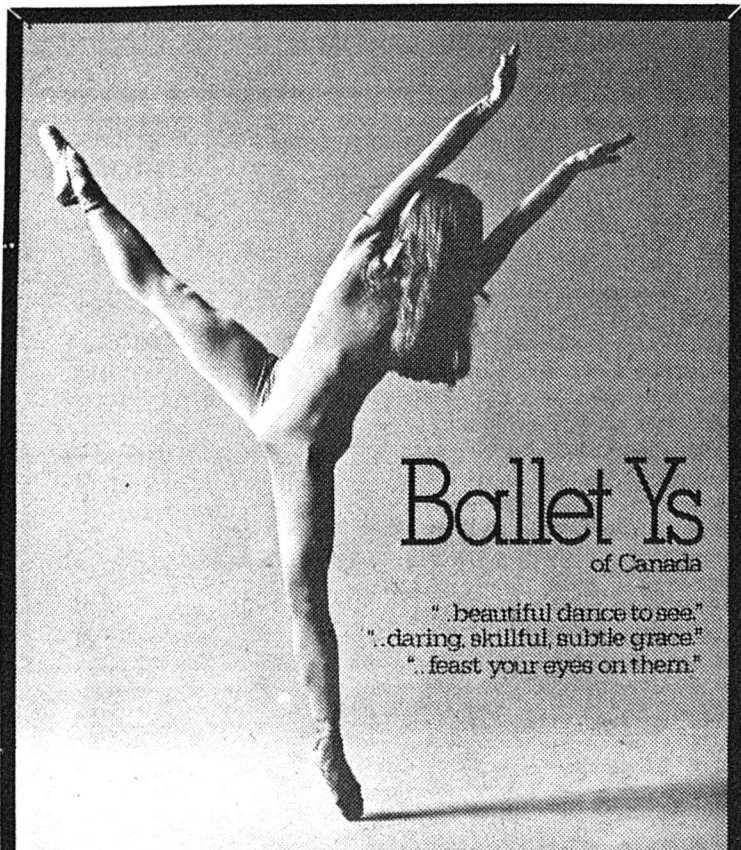
poems, Kroetsch insists that he is a story-teller, not a poet. "I am not a poet; I do not think in images, don't know how the hell they do that. I think in stories crossing the street I think, how how can I tell a story about this." His poems are not to be dismissed lightly though.

Kroetsch relies on humour in his work. Some of his comic perspective comes from being away from his homeland for so long — an unintentional occurrence as there were no jobs home at the time. Some of the humour comes from the desire to spin a good story. There is always the danger that the irony will be missed but this possibility does not deter him.

One of the women in the audience suggested that Kroetsch did not know women well. He acknowledged his chauvinistic tendencies. A woman at Laval University has criticized him quite heavily recently for this reason and he was obviously upset by it. His upcoming novel will be dealing more with women. The female characters in *Badlands* were extremely difficult for him, but have provided a training ground for his next effort. The intended remedy is there.

More than any particular statement he makes, Kroetsch impresses by an aura of delight in life and living. He is infectious, left the reading with a renewed faith in Alberta culture and literature. I wished that I had been able to take several non-Albertan friends; I felt that they would have understood us better. I was inspired to look around this place and realize the excitement inherent in the rural-urban clash to which we are all subject. The bus trip was definitely worth it. The energy of the man radiated to all who came in contact with him. I left feeling warm and satisfied. I am looking forward to reading more of his work.

The world is good to Robert Kroetsch right now. He is writing in residence at the University of Manitoba. He has the time to write and talk and advise. He has time to create.



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Hurtig pushes ideal not profits

by Kevin Gillese

Stories From Pangnirtung (Hurtig Publishers, 1976). \$5.95, 100 pp.

Hurtig Publishers are all by themselves in the small Canadian publishing industry and books such as this one only reinforces their already-substantial reputation.

First off, Hurtig is one of the few publishers outside Toronto who has been able to make it in a very high-risk field.

Secondly, and by far more important, they are a publishing house with an ideal - to publish material which contributes to an understanding of Canada and Canadians - and they stick to that ideal even though it means they often forego the profits mass-circulation popular-appearance publications could bring them.

Stories From Pangnirtung is an experimental work, a piece of non-fiction which fits in with the Hurtig ideal and which will likely never become a best-seller or bring Hurtig a great deal of profit. Yet it is certainly a work that needed to be published and should be read by Canadians who wish to understand

something of the native Canadians of the north, the Inuit.

The work is a collection of stories tape-recorded from eleven Inuit elders of the Pangnirtung hamlet on Baffin Island. Working with funds from a Local Initiatives Grant, a group of Inuit recorded the interviews, translated them from the Inuktitut language into English and presented them to the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, Stuart M. Hodgson, in 1974.

The work is painfully simple in style - so unadorned that is very difficult for a person who reads the cultivated, urbane

works required at university. But it's also a tremendously unpretentious work, a collection of honest simple stories about the Inuit, the Inuit.

Stories From Pangnirtung is not a great work, neither does it pretend to be. It is, however, an important insight into the way and thoughts of the Inuit people and as such deserves a place with other anthropological and historical works on Canada in the Canadiana freak's bookshelf.

And Hurtig Publishers deserve congratulations on continuing their work to bring Canadians to a better understanding of themselves.

Walterdale new season

Walterdale Theatre is kicking off its new season with its production of Tom Stoppard's play *Enter a Free Man*.

From the pen of England's most comically theatrical playwright comes the story of man's struggle for identity. See

what happens in home and public when a free spirit, chained to the earth struggles to be free, and doing so discovers its own inadequacies.

The play, directed by Peter Wigmore, will start Oct. 13 and runs till Oct. 23. Tickets are available at the Bay Box Office.