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**Bodies in the Library:  
The Murder of the 'Self' in  
Robert Kroetsch's Mystery Novels**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

University of Manitoba

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

by

Donna Hasinoff

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BODIES IN THE LIBRARY:  
THE MURDER OF THE 'SELF' IN  
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BY

DONNA HASINOFF

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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## ABSTRACT

"Bodies in the Library: The Murder of the 'Self' in Robert Kroetsch's Mystery Novels" considers how Kroetsch's allusions to the conventions of mystery / detective fiction allow him to humorously scrutinize the dogmas of contemporary critical theory.

Peter Thomas's 1980 biography saw evidence, in the "constant formal renewal" of Kroetsch's work, reflecting the author's notion that "the Death of the Novel might itself make a good story" (124). Alibi and The Puppeteer, which function as a dialogic pair of murder mysteries, reveal that the "Death of the Author" and the very idea of 'self' also makes a 'good story' -- a narrative 'whodunit.'

Alibi offers a humorous recapitulation of poststructuralism's 'Mystery of the Disappearing / presumed Dead Author-God,' and of the failed relationship between authors and readers who 'relate' as adversaries, vying for control of meaning. The Puppeteer counters Barthes's notion that "the birth of the reader must be requited by the death of the Author" with the creation of a new kind of author / reader relationship.

The failed relationship of Dorf and Karen in Alibi, contrasted with mutual and loving support between Deemer and Maggie in The Puppeteer, thus serves as the basis for rethinking the nature of the 'murdered' Author and the vanishing subject. Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic 'self' proves an invaluable model, not only for reforming the concept of 'self' in both novels, but for moving towards an erotics of reading.

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For Lauga Josephson,  
who taught me to read,  
and for Kristopher Jon Hasinoff,  
who taught me to love reading all over again.

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'An *obiter dictum*, in the language of the law,  
is a gratuitous opinion, an individual impertinence,  
which, whether it be wise or foolish, right or wrong,  
bindeth none -- not even the lips that utter it.'

Old Judge

'Telling a story is like sex...you read a story  
to get to the end, not the middle.'

Mickey Spillane

## Introduction

From the standpoint of much contemporary literary theory, it might seem a dubious undertaking to investigate the ontological status of narrators, much less to try to revive them (along with any other bodies that might occupy the library). When one of the 'bodies' in question is an author whose writing is closely associated with the ideologies of poststructuralism the task becomes still more intimidating. But in mystery stories there are numerous precedents, if not for resurrection, at least for the release of a live body that has been prematurely trapped in a coffin.

Robert Kroetsch's latest novel, The Puppeteer (1992), not only stages the return of the missing narrator of Alibi, but also offers a site for two more return performances. The bodies of Manny De Madeiros and Julie Magnuson, both presumed dead and certainly missing in Alibi, are freed from the coffin or lake bed where they are thought to rest. Kroetsch seems to allude to the very type of this convention in mystery fiction: Sherlock Holmes's return from apparent death in "The Empty House" (see Hariharan 128). Evocation of "the highly structured and symbolic detective novel" in both these novels allows Kroetsch to play with its conventions, and thus to produce the sometimes parodic transformations which help to demonstrate "postmodernism at work rather than as a catchy and elusive theoretical definition" (Tani xii-xiii).

Nowhere is this foregrounding of theory in Kroetsch's mystery novels more evident than with respect to questions of 'self' which pursue every one of his fictional characters and narrators. For there is a "paradox within narrative study that the one

dimension that attracts so many readers and listeners to novels and stories in the first place...is the single area apparently least amenable to systematic analysis" (Toolin 90). Just as detectives defer questions of who and why, concentrating on the more easily verifiable what, when, and where, structuralists often defer or even ignore questions of identity and intention associated with "the ontological status of character" (90). Michael Toolin responds to the structuralist concentration on surface by observing that "an iceberg principle is at work in the way most people read characters: we operate on the assumption that the evidence we are shown is a necessarily limited selection of material" (91). The idea that there is something beneath the surface fuels the reader's enquiry as well as the detective's. Toolin's notion that "character is an illusion in which the reader is a creative accomplice" offers to mitigate the structuralist position somewhat, suggesting that the reader's active participation may be a key to solving the narrative whodunit.

There are mysteries and there are Mysteries, as Robert Kroetsch might say. In Mystery and Its Fictions, David Grossvogel elaborates more formally the connection between what he calls Primal Mysteries -- those stories of ultimate beginnings and endings which are subject to speculation and interpretation, but never solution -- and the mysteries which are the stuff of popular fiction. He speculates that man, "Unable either to grasp or to abandon mystery...resorts to a familiar fraud: he attempts to absorb mystery in speculation; he invents incarnations with which he can cope" (4). Aside from the rather bizarre notion of an Agatha Christie novel as the incarnation of an 'ultimate' question, Grossvogel does focus on the very feature of the

traditional whodunit which most distinguishes it from mysteries of the 'primal' variety. The whodunit must have a solution. Grossvogel goes even farther, asserting that "the mode of the detective story is to create a mystery for the sole purpose of effecting its effortless dissipation" (15). Instead of endless speculation, the detective story promises to solve the mystery in the time that it takes to read a novel. This transitory quality "exaggerates to the point of parody" the life and death concerns which are often the subject of the detective's inquiry. Thus, as the detective plays the game of detection, "the metaphysical mode is replaced by the mode of play" (16). Even the inevitable corpse in a murder mystery is somehow "free of the odour of death that is usually associated with the beyond" (15).

In addition to this guarantee of a solution, readers of the genre soon learn to recognize other rules of the detection 'game.' The so-called contract between author and reader which usually exists as unarticulated and often vague expectations on the reader's part, once existed quite literally for readers of mystery / detective fiction. The codification of 'rules' for "the writing of detective stories (Ronald Knox in England, S.S. Van Dine in the United States) and the foundation of a 'Detection Club'" (Tani 20) to enforce them in 1928, did not ensure that the rules would never be broken. Such gestures do, however, testify to the highly structured and conventional nature of the form. Later, even with the development of American 'hard-boiled' variations, detectives could still be relied on to solve the mystery at hand, although the world at large remained an urban jungle, full of enigmas and injustice. In a sense then, a traditional mystery novel offers a comforting substitution

for the insoluble primal mystery; the detective's solution, in which 'all is revealed,' replaces the indeterminacy of questions which, though we never cease to ask them, remain Mysteries that are permanently beyond the capacity of the human intellect.

The mystery genre, however, has not remained static. Writers of the 'hard-boiled' school, for instance, have contributed to the internal evolution of the genre, while still operating largely within the 'rules' of a genre. However, the postmodern writer "who plays with the rules and the techniques of detective fiction from *without*" produces "something that is no longer a detective novel but rather a deliberate negation of the fundamental purposes of the genre" (Tani 24). Writers like Pynchon and Calvino, Robbe-Grillet and Nabokov "intermittently use detective conventions" to produce what Stephano Tani calls "the anti-detective novel" (34).

William V. Spanos coined the term "anti-detective novel" (Spanos *passim*) to describe writing which evokes "the impulse to 'detect' and / or to psychoanalyze in order to violently frustrate it by refusing to solve the crime (or find the cause of the neurosis)" (Tani 40). Tani recognizes that writers who thus "deconstruct the genre's precise architecture into a meaningless mechanism without purpose" effectively "parody positivistic detection" (34). But the anti-detective novel is by no means the only contemporary manifestation of the genre. In addition to those novelists who continue to evolve within the tradition, some 'serious' writers are able to use the resources of detective fiction "as a scrap-yard from which to dig out 'new' narrative techniques to be applied to the exhausted traditional novel" (34).

When Robert Kroetsch asks the question: "Where is the voice coming from?"

(Labyrinths 155), what kind of mystery might be implied by his inquiry about narrative origins? A poststructuralist like Roland Barthes in "The Death of the Author" would reduce the very question to irrelevance in his assertion that "writing is the destruction of every voice, every origin." For Barthes, writing is "that neuter, that composite, that obliquity into which our subject flees, the black-and-white where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes" (49). To the poststructuralist, "it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is to reach, through a preliminary impersonality -- which we can at no moment identify with the realistic novelist's castrating 'objectivity' -- that point where not 'I' but only language functions, 'performs'" (50).

Barthes's outright dismissal of voice as a legitimate if mysterious subject for inquiry in the study of narrative appears to be an *a priori* condition which brooks no argument, unless we redefine the term which he seems to reject, particularly the notion of a 'self' which is implied in such terms as 'voice,' 'subject,' or 'identity.' But the death of the Author, in Barthes's terms, is also required by "the birth of the reader" (55). It is in this "birth" that another self comes back into being: the self of the reading subject. In that case, the black-and-white of the page can not be the neuter or the neutral site that Barthes's essay would make it. Kroetsch's question about voice, then, as well as his play with the murder of the Author, may be considered, if not as a Primal Mystery, at least as a metaphysical mystery that warrants investigation. By a most 'singular' transformation of the dualities of the mystery / detective genre, Alibi and The Puppeteer suggest that not only characters, but readers and authors, may be

released from the traditional constructions of 'self,' but also from the equally limiting and even self-destructive alternatives of contemporary theory. At stake is an alternative definition of the human subject.

"Murder gets priority," according to a criminologist in P.D. James's Death of an Expert Witness, "to which someone replies with relief, 'Thank God something does'" (Miller 38). But "murder" is not even acknowledged in other versions of poststructuralist theory, most notably in Jacques Derrida's critique of "logocentrism which is also a phonocentrism: absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning" (11-12). For what Derrida resists in the ontology of Western metaphysics is that whole system "of hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak" in which "the strange privilege of sound in idealization, the production of the concept and the self-presence of the subject" (12) is "immediately related to the logos of a creator God where it began by being the spoken / thought sense" (15). To the post-Nietzschean philosopher for whom "God is dead," there never was any logos which authorized self-presence. So the death of God leads to the death of a centred subject; self-presence is itself swallowed up in the general metaphysical absence.

Murder none the less "gets priority" in this investigation of Robert Kroetsch's treatment of the death of the Author and the idea of self-presence, primarily for reasons of genre. The murder mystery provides both a grammar and a lexical framework, not only for reading Alibi and The Puppeteer, but for constructing an effective, perhaps even 'elementary' strategy for cross-examining critical theories

which marginalize or assault concepts of 'self' in fiction. Structuralism's conviction that a fictional character is "a mere function of narrative mechanisms" (Alter 52), along with its tendency to generate reductive typologies of character modelled on the sentence, often place severe constraints on discussion about notions of 'self.'

More significantly, under a variety of poststructuralist banners (Derridean, Freudian, Marxist etc.) the 'self' of a fictional character is not simply ignored or marginalized, but regarded as ominous: "a camouflage device or a mask... or worse, a pernicious illusion working to sustain an oppressive ideology" (52). Robert Alter speaks of poststructuralist "attempts to undercut the mimetic validity of character" (53), but it might be more accurate to recognize that the poststructuralist project threatens to do away with Character by the same means that the Author was dispatched by Roland Barthes and pronounced Dead. Seen in this light, deconstructing the 'self' is not mere abstract philosophizing or critical undercutting, but metaphorical murder...which an author as conscious as Kroetsch is of generic conventions, has made necessarily problematic.

Ultimately, this investigation is inspired not only by my puzzled scepticism about the poststructuralist project, but by a persistent impression (a detective's 'hunch'?) that Kroetsch's 'murder mysteries' do foreground similar reservations about contemporary conceptions and representations of 'self,' identity, and agency in fiction. Dorf, the narrator of Alibi, might even be read as a parodic critique of the Derridean assertion that "the signified 'self' is fragmented and dispersed...dissolved and infinitely deferred" (Porritt 326). If so, the companion novel, The Puppeteer, goes



beyond a mere critique of Derrida's model and posits a genuinely novel paradigm, a new way of reconstituting the 'self' of the speaking subject with respect to gender, number and relationship. For if the ontological unity and singularity of the narrator, William William Dorfendorf, is radically undermined in Alibi, the ontological plurality of the narrator(s) in The Puppeteer is radically asserted.

The poststructuralist view that the "self is not a unified, singular, and identifiable entity, but only a phenomenon created by language" (Porritt 324), is subjected to alternative re-visions in these novels. A new perspective on 'self' is developed through various forms of doubling, of which the sophisticated parody of generic conventions is only one. Indeed, since returning the body to the library ultimately depends on new ways of seeing the speaking subject, the doubled phoneme which makes up the lowly pun on the 'I / eye' signifier becomes a primary clue; the first person, 'I'-narrator of Alibi is finally replaced in The Puppeteer by a narrator whose failing eyesight may contribute to his need for a partner who helps him to see and write. Because these texts are 'conversant' with each other, with mystery / detective narratives, and especially with readers, they encourage a dialogic orientation and a re-articulation of the notion of 'self' as a product of dialogue.

## Chapter I

### Framing the Private "I":

#### Vanishing Subjects and the Body of Evidence

Alibi and The Puppeteer together dramatize the considerable difficulties of representing a 'self,' whether as narrator or as character, in what Robert Alter labels an 'ideological' age. Contemporary critics and novelists, steeped in dogmas which demand the elimination of the 'self,' undeniably face theoretical inconsistencies and lexical challenges in depicting the bodies of characters and narrators. As Alter notes, for example, "narratologists have scarcely any critical vocabulary for encompassing the mimetic dimension of character" (51), an absence which may explain why "character is the major aspect of the novel to which structuralism has paid least attention and has been least successful in treating" (Culler, Structuralist 230).

However, poststructuralists intent on obliterating the "pernicious illusion" of self can't simply ignore references to a self-presence which their philosophy so vehemently denies; they must employ more active, and even more violent means. In this ideological age, narrators who tell tales and writers who commit words to paper often seem to struggle to dispose of the evidence, the inevitable trace of a human 'presence' that clings to characters and narrators in works of fiction. In this respect, poststructural purists in particular may be in an analogous position to the perpetrators in murderer mysteries. For murderers also strive to destroy evidence of their 'authorship' of the crime, and to invent alibis that may absolve them of responsibility for the body, which tradition often places in the library, the site of reading.

In a summary of alternative critical perspectives on the nature and function of the narrator, Jeremy Hawthorn notes that "Gerald Prince describes the narrator as 'the one who narrates' (1988,65), and Katie Wales as 'a person who narrates' (1989, 316)." Mieke Bal sees the narrator as "the narrative agent, the linguistic subject, a function and not a person, which expresses itself in the language that constitutes the text (1985,119)" (116). Wales and Prince's descriptions clearly imply a human presence or a reasonable fictional facsimile, while Bal's terms suggest that a 'subject position' rather than a human presence is the preferable strategy for describing 'what', not 'who' is responsible for the narrative.

One critical strategy for dealing with 'bodies' in fiction (dubbed the 'purist' position by Rimmon-Kennan), attempts to eliminate any inconsistency between its theory and its language by refusing to refer to narrators or characters in human terms. Weinsheimer's analysis of Jane Austen's Emma Woodhouse, for example, includes the remarkable statement that Emma "is not a woman nor need be described as if it were" (cited in Rimmon-Kennan 33). Claiming that semiotics does not destroy or objectify, but merely dissolves or recontextualizes characters, Weinsheimer concedes that "under the aegis of semiotic criticism" characters certainly "lose their privilege, their central status, and their definition," but he maintains that "this does not mean that they are metamorphosed into inanimate things (à la Robbe-Grillet) or reduced to actants (à la Todorov) but that they are textualized" (32). Although he judiciously characterizes the semiotic approach to character in moderate and non-violent terms -- 'dissolution' connoting a less violent fate than 'destruction' -- ultimately Weinsheimer cannot avoid

de-humanizing terms. He concludes that "as segments of a closed text, characters at most are patterns of recurrence, motifs which are continually recontextualized in other motifs. In semiotic criticism, characters dissolve" (32).

For one who makes the very sensible observation that characters and narrators are made of language, and not flesh and blood, it is no doubt logically consistent to postulate a primarily functional, linguistic subject rather than a human presence. Apparently to avoid a suggestion of either body or consciousness as attributes of the subject which is *produced* by literature, Etienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey resort to an unwieldy description of "Readers," "Authors," and "Characters" of fiction, as forms of "quasi-real hallucinatory individuality" (cited in Hawthorn 180). Indeed, the absence of a logically consistent and functional terminology is one practical obstacle to a systematic structuralist analysis of characters or narrators. Jonathan Culler observes that structuralism's relative inattention to 'character' may not be a simple matter of semantic inadequacy. While acknowledging that in practice readers and critics frequently privilege 'character' as "the major totalizing force in fiction," Culler maintains that "a structuralist approach has tended to explain this as an ideological prejudice." Ultimately, the very notion of characters "as richly delineated autonomous wholes, clearly distinguished from others by physical and psychological characteristics ...structuralists would say, is a myth" (230).

At the opposite end of the analytical spectrum from Weinsheimer's notion of decentered, dissolving characters, and Culler's notion of characters as pure "myth" or mere "nodes in the verbal structure of the work, whose identity is relatively

precarious" (Structuralist 231), A. C. Bradley's very traditional studies of Shakespeare speculate freely about the 'lives' of characters outside the artistic frame of the plays in which they appear. In place of semiotic dissolution or deconstruction, Bradley advocates conjecture (from textual 'evidence') about the past 'life' of a character. His method encourages an imaginative 're-construction' of a character's 'self' as a means of solving such mysteries as Hamlet's relationship with his mother, or Lady Macbeth's apparently deficient maternal instincts. Bradley's approach to fictional identity, including techniques reminiscent of psychoanalysis, now seems extremely naive in its reluctance to differentiate between fictional characters and 'real' human individuals.

Faced with the inadequacies of traditional 'humanist' methods, contemporary critics who are committed to a theoretical position eschewing all notion of 'self' and 'character' nevertheless cannot seem to avoid the impulse to 'characterize,' to collect details of behaviour and appearance which identify the body and the voice of the narrator in human terms. This often occurs even in artistically self-conscious, postmodern texts, rife with conflicting or inconsistent clues. The impulse to 'humanize' narrators is still quite apparent in Alibi and The Puppeteer, whose narrators foil traditional humanist critical models of characterization, and who on occasion 'behave' suspiciously like Weinsheimer's "recurring motifs." Culler's statement of 1975, that "there has been a change in novels, with which both the theory and practice of reading must come to terms" (231), now seems like an immense understatement, especially with respect to the treatment of characters. The degree to which even the "faceless protagonists of modern fiction" (231) appear most human

(what Hawthorn terms "level of personification" [117]), stubbornly remains a factor.

Notwithstanding the unquestionable influence of semiotic criticism, 'he' and 'she' have not been utterly erased from the critical lexicon, and it is unlikely that many readers without specialized training conceive of Dorf, Deemer, or Maggie Wilder as motifs or patterns. However the ontological status of a writing or narrating 'self' may be theorized, a degree of 'characterization' in human terms rather than in purely linguistic ones seems inevitable, even in critical discourse which insists that the notion of 'self' is an illusion. The 'body' keeps popping up in the strangest places.

My principal strategy for investigating the voices and bodies of speaking subjects (and breaking their alibis) is to posit a relationship between Kroetsch's 'mysteries' and the **generic, formal** conventions of mystery / detective fiction, though it is possible to isolate specific antecedent sources for Alibi and The Puppeteer. For example, Thomas Bludgett, the insomniac lawyer who is "always reading" (Puppeteer 12), might recall Pinkerton, whose detective agency used the slogan "We Never Sleep" (Geherin ix), and Maggie's "just the facts, please" (106-7) echoes Joe Friday from television's Dragnet. As an example of stylistic parody, Dorf's self-constructions and macho fantasies in Alibi seem indebted to the hard-boiled American writer, Mickey Spillane, who identified himself with his fictional creation, Mike Hammer, to such a degree that "he actually played out his fantasy in celluloid" (Van Dover 149). Dorf's scrupulous self-editing habits are very different from Spillane's, who "apparently composed as rapidly as Hammer investigated...requiring between three days and two weeks to complete a novel" (99). While Alibi thus vividly demonstrates

Hutcheon's notion of parody as "repetition with difference" (Theory 32), primary evidence linking Kroetsch's novels to the mystery / detective genre rests not on specific allusions, apparent only to readers familiar with specific texts, but on allusions to formal conventions, to concealed identities and secret information, detectives and mysterious murder(s), the veritable clichés of the genre.

Robert Alter notes that literary allusion may be evoked "through a wide spectrum of formal means" but concurs with Ziva Ben-Porat that "the consequence...is 'the simultaneous activation of two texts' in patterns of interrelation that are usually quite unpredictable" (112). In choosing 'allusion' rather than 'intertextuality' I intentionally emulate Alter's distinction between the terms: "Whereas allusion implies a writer's active, purposeful use of antecedent texts, intertextuality is something that can be talked about when two or more texts are set side by side...without regard to authorial intention" (112). Beyond a reasonable doubt, there seems to be sufficient evidence in these murder mysteries to suggest the presence of the Author as an active participant. I submit that in Alibi and The Puppeteer, Robert Kroetsch, with forethought (though not with malice), intentionally alludes to mystery / detective novels, and that the evocation of these antecedent texts is an intrinsic and a central feature of these novels. The case against the Author may be circumstantial, but evidence suggests that rumours of his Death have been greatly exaggerated.

Missing, concealed, and presumably dead bodies in Alibi and The Puppeteer are primary examples of authorial allusion to the conventions of murder mysteries which allow Kroetsch to question, seriously if humorously, poststructural dogmas of

the 'self' with respect to Dorf, Deemer and Maggie. Even narrators and writers with apparently watertight alibis which locate them far from the scene of the crime (of writing) leave traces of their presence. There are certainly literary precedents for paying close attention to alibis, from Peter Wimsey's focus in Five Red Herrings to Poe's warning that "the more perfect and watertight the alibi...the more suspicious it is to a good detective." This view is reiterated in Dorothy Sayers's Have His Carcase, in which Sherlock Holmes is quoted as saying: "Only a man with a criminal enterprise desires to establish an alibi" (cited in Merry 18).

One obvious technique by which Kroetsch's allusion to the mystery / detective genre draws attention to the problems of representing bodies and 'selves' in Alibi and The Puppeteer is to inscribe a death as one distinct contextual limit of the human body. Kroetsch's larger strategy in evoking the generic context not only asserts the central importance of perspective in locating a body, but reminds us with admirable black humour that the physical evidence of a skeleton or a stinking corpse is required to confirm that a murder has taken place. "O death, where is thy stink," writes Dorf in the chapter to which Karen Strike has added the heading "THAT LITTLE PLOT / OF MEASURED EARTH / EMBRACES ALL AND NONE" (Alibi 69). But the "rather unpleasant odour" which "seeped out around the neck" of his jacket is "not entirely without its nuance of reassurance" (69). Dorf has no difficulty in recognizing the reassuring smell of his own live body.

In The Puppeteer, Jack Deemer is equally quick to note that when dead, "the human body, in extreme heat, does not long retain its freshness" (260). A corpse is



indeed a conventional requirement of a murder mystery, and according to this generic convention Josie and Ida of The Puppeteer argue that, since "no one has ever produced a body" (34), Papa B must be innocent of the spa doctor's murder. Ida is particularly adamant, finally silencing Josie's objections with her first-hand experience as a witness to death:

Ida was pressing her victory. "When my husband died right there on our Alberta homestead in the middle of the night in the middle of a blizzard at least I had a body as evidence. And if I killed him, at least he died the way he claimed he wanted to die."

"You're always exaggerating," Josie said. "You have no respect for the truth."

"Don't truth me," Ida said. "I was there in that shack with the body for two days and two nights..." (36)

Beyond the certainty that a murder mystery requires a corpse in order to create a murderer in the narrative, Kroetsch's evocation of the genre suggests that locating and identifying the bodies in his mystery novels is invariably complicated by the mediation, and therefore the perspective, of a narrator who relates the story of the crime. In Alibi, Dorf's perceptions of bodies, including his own, reveal a profound tension between a desire to conceal / deny the body and to reveal / acknowledge the body, a double-bind that preoccupies his narrative.

Acting as Deemer's agent, Dorf can submerge his own desires and motives, can even conceal his own identity, but as a narrative agent Dorf's body asserts itself.

Karen remembers him as "the man with the tall, sad face" (8), and he later reveals:

One of my secrets is just this, that I'm sort of funny looking. A face that is almost too long. A body that is too long also, without really being big. Almost big. Not genuinely unattractive; just funny looking. Just on the edge of it. And, as a result, beautiful women like me. (11)

There is a strange tension, if not outright contradiction, in Dorf's juxtaposition of offhand, equivocal, self-deprecation and a mysterious power over the opposite sex which he perceives as a direct consequence of his "sort of," "almost," "not genuinely unattractive," "funny looking," body. Later, talking to three old ladies in the spa, he claims to be aware that his aging face, which "I guess I'd have to call handsome...had only a few years of illusion left." Dorf admits to hoping that these 'older' ladies might still desire him, but an accumulation of details suggests that he is less than secure in exposing his body and his desires than his 'confessions' imply.

His needlessly explicit assertion that in inviting Karen for a drink he ignored "being fifteen years her senior" (8), may be evidence of Dorf's anxiety about his own aging body. His attraction to her is undercut by snide, even patronizing criticisms. He describes how Karen is a "*lunatic* on the subject of history...*affects* a kind of disbelief in the better things of this world...has something of a *nasty* tongue," and wears "*pretentious* hand-knitted mittens" (8-9). Dorf carefully points out that it is *Karen's* idea to travel to Banff, noting with the precision of a policeman giving evidence that during the car trip "her left hand once, briefly" touched his "right thigh" (8). Dorf claims that the surprise of receiving a gift, and not a sudden kiss on the

cheek, is what nearly causes him to drive off the road. He even offers the trivial fact that necessity, rather than desire, "not once, but twice *forced*" them "to hold hands" (9). Dorf writes himself an alibi, a version of events which minimizes his personal investment (emotional and physical), in initiating a relationship. His narrative strategy thus protects him from the embarrassing possibility of romantic failure.

As a narrative agent Dorf repeatedly resorts to techniques that mitigate the potentially dangerous consequences of love and desire which threaten his sense of 'self.' He admits, in the chapter headed "BLUE," that 'fictionalizing' is one effective strategy for shielding the 'self' from emotional pain, even from the pain of jealousy. When he begins a sexual relationship with Julie and Manny, Dorf not only increases his pleasure "By pretending just slightly that Manny was Karen," but insists more than once, "I truly felt no jealousy" (130). After the first encounter of this sexual trio, Manny asks Dorf to relate the events of "the previous afternoon," echoing the question of the fictional detective who asks: "where were you on the afternoon of the crime?" Dorf is able to dodge the question and overcome his initial reluctance to elaborate by describing the experience as though it had happened to someone else. In a somewhat schizophrenic split, "I" becomes "he." Dorf describes "a strange man who drives a blue Mercedes-Benz" with whom his "friends...sometimes make love together" (132). Using this technique, he says: "I began to sense I was finding a way out of the corner I was almost in." In this act of separating the telling "I" from the story he relates, Dorf finds that not only can he deny his part in the sexual triangle, he can even announce with a kind of moral superiority that "the very thought of it

offends me" (132). Dorf's fictionalized 'self,' the mysterious stranger who drives the blue Mercedes, is an identity which protects him, just as his role as Deemer's agent protects him from the responsibility for his own desires. He tells Manny: "I am only the collector's agent. I only act out the collector's desire. The desire is his" (133).

As early as Dorf's first immersion in the Banff spa, however, his desire to escape from the awkwardness of the body is exposed beneath the surface of the water. Submerged to his lower lip, Dorf finds himself in a space "full of floating heads" who "weren't the least bit troubled at not having bodies... Nobody seemed worried. Shit, I thought, this is okay" (10). He has found an alibi for his own denial of the body, claiming to have a life-altering experience in "looking at all those heads, floating there on the water." He compares this moment of self-realization to the intensity of discovering his capacity for murder when he "levelled a gun" at his "wife's frightened, absurd, scrawny lover" (10). But the notion of disconnected heads and hidden bodies which Dorf finds so comforting is merely an optical illusion which he is forced to acknowledge. When he encounters Julie in the spa he writes: "I could not see her body, except in so far as I could see into the water itself, with all the attendant distortions, as dictated by the laws of physics" (12). Later he even makes a weak attempt at using science to explain to Karen why his own submerged body and its desires display a disconcerting tendency to rise to the surface. "'Our bodies were weightless,' I said. As if that might be an adequate excuse, an alibi, a reason that would exempt me from any human rules of which Karen was the keeper" (24).

While Dorf keeps up a constant flow of words on the surface, under the water

Julie's unseen body is busy, "her hands," Dorf says "touching mine now, touching my chest, my abdomen, finding my own lost body" (13). But that "lost body" of the speaking subject is not simply lost or disappearing as a result of his constant travel at Deemer's behest. Dorf allows that "the whole thing with my wife, the divorce and all that, turned me off sex in a way." Explaining that he spent "a few years being a bachelor as if it was a new religion," he leaves the impression of a self-imposed chastity, but the image of Julie's hands touching Dorf's, "inviting *them* to respond even if *I* couldn't" (13), could be equally suggestive of anxiety about sexual failure.

Dorf's insecurity about his relationship with Karen Strike has been noted, though the root of that insecurity, as well as his attraction to her, may be suggested in his perception that she is "the most cruelly efficient woman" (12) he has ever known. In the spa with both Julie and Karen, with his locker key hanging from a "loop of string around" his "slightly aroused member," Dorf's assertion of his own 'efficiency' as a collector may be less of a non sequitur than it first appears. "Yes," Dorf writes with assurance, "I can say quite truthfully, I never fail when Jack Deemer sends me on a search" (12). What is apparent from the context in which Dorf's assertion of 'efficiency' appears is the careful avoidance of any possibility of sexual failure.

"But what a hot joining underneath the surface," the narrator writes. "She came before I did" (14). Since no one, not even the narrator, can "see down into the water" (14), we have only Dorf's assurance that "the soothing effects of the water," the proximity of other bathers, and the locker key, did not cool this joining. It is Julie's enigmatic death threat, according to Dorf, which "tipped" him "over the edge

into a slow, long, delicate flooding" (15), and left him "standing there, comic, ridiculous even." He admits to being 'ridiculous,' and to having no sense of how long his body has been poaching in the steaming waters, ignoring Karen's warning that "If you stay in too long you'll be wiped out" (12). But unlike the crowd of men "standing around naked and pink and steaming, their shrivelled pricks like so many mushrooms" in the locker room, Dorf maintains that he still wore the string of his "locker key around" his "*sturdy* member" (15). The chapter heading, "OR IN WHICH DORF CLAIMS TO HAVE GOT LAID," adds further evidence that some editorial doubt, at least, exists about Dorf's claims, his motives, and his narrative strategy of self-concealment. As editor of his manuscript, Karen is clearly not about to take Dorf's word as the deed.

In The Puppeteer the perspective and narrative strategy of the speaking subject is also an important factor in identifying bodies, and once again generic allusions frame the reader's perceptions. Kroetsch begins The Puppeteer with the cliché of the dark and rainy night, and the arrival of a mysterious, dark-robed stranger (albeit a stranger who delivers pizza). Maggie Wilder suspects that "she had seen the pizza man somewhere before" (5). Her sense that he is concealing both his body and his true identity, that he is an "imposter who went around dressed as a Greek monk" (7), leads to speculation that he is a fugitive, a criminal, perhaps a potential murderer. Maggie even imagines herself as a potential victim, noting the time and date of the first delivery from Midnight Pizza on a calendar in order to "help the police discover who murdered her" (6).

The narrator juxtaposes mysterious, dangerous features of the stranger from Midnight Pizza (the plots which Maggie imagines) with incongruous details of his physical presence ('ascetic' face, contemplative eyes) and his harmless conversation about local bakeries. "Murderers and fugitives weren't supposed to have favourite bakeries." Why, Maggie wonders, when Papa B returns for a second delivery, "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" (9-10). In Maggie's eyes, Papa B's appearance suggests that he may be a fugitive / murderer, but his failure to fulfil the deadly and / or romantic generic potential anticipated from tall, dark strangers on dark and stormy nights exemplifies the reversal of mystery / detective conventions, and of Kroetsch's persistent foregrounding of questions of concealed identity.

Maggie's first encounter(s) and initial conversation with the pizza man resemble an official investigation. Playing the role of detective, she interrogates the suspicious stranger, doubly identified as Papa B and Papa Vasilis, probing the "gap between her naming and the man himself" (10). She notes the exact times of the encounters ["1.22 in the morning, February 14th" (6), "2.18 in the morning" (8)], as would any good investigator seeking clarification or even noting inconsistencies in his story. But almost immediately the tables are turned. The narrator notes that Maggie imagines her suspect has taken over the role of questioner, prompting suspicions about who is the detective and who is the criminal?

It remains difficult to declare categorically who is in charge of the investigation because Maggie and Papa B do appear to effectively switch roles, or trade places.

Responding to Papa B's questions, Maggie "thought, he's testing me. He wants to know who else lives in the house" (13). And while her amateur 'detecting' does not solve the mystery of Papa B / Papa Vasilis's true name and identity, the pizza man quickly resolves the mystery of Maggie's own double naming. "So Bludgett was right about the moniker," Papa B remarks ('moniker' suggesting a criminal alias), and Maggie finds herself unable "to attempt an evasion" (13). Instead she 'confesses' to the counterfeit monk, "My husband's name is Ketch. Henry Ketch. I'm Maggie Wilder because I decided not to take his name. But sometimes I hide behind it" (13).

Even when she manages to draw the ersatz monk into explaining his peculiar costume, Maggie's conviction that her visitor is still hiding his true identity is further complicated by an impression that the outlandish cassock is a subtle manipulation of the truth, intended to throw the curious off the trail. She wonders: "is that part of your disguise, letting us think we see right through you?" (14), suggesting that the stranger achieves a kind of invisibility. Papa B's 'obvious' and attention-getting disguise might also be seen as a variation on the classic criminal ploy of 'hiding in plain sight' (as instanced by Poe's purloined letter), which helps to explain why Papa B's identity is so difficult to discover.

In addition, by second-guessing the surface explanations the stranger provides, Maggie effectively doubles the solutions to the mystery of Papa B's identity. Maggie finally concludes that "He was deaf, the man, to any kind of snooping. He was a walking, deliberate blank space" (14). To compound the irony and frustration of having revealed numerous personal details about herself while discovering nothing



concrete about the pizza man, Maggie Wilder is suddenly abandoned by the mysterious visitor, who promises to return on the following day "at midnight sharp" (16). As suddenly and mysteriously as he arrived 'one dark and rainy night,' the man from Midnight Pizza "was gone through the door...and Maggie was alone with the rattle of his boots on the steps of the porch, with the steady sound of the rain" (16).

"Papa B," of course, proves to be a fraudulent identity, one of the many assumed names of William William Dorfendorf, aka William W. Dorfen, William "Dorf" Dorfen, Billy B, and even Billiam Billiam Dorfer (sic), among others. He first appears as the narrator of Alibi, to which The Puppeteer is a sequel, under the alias "Dorf," a name which in reverse reads 'fraud' (Hariharan 150). Even the title of Alibi derives from the lexicon of mystery / detective fiction, and from the beginning its narrator conceals aspects of his life and his identity. Because his narrative focuses on his role as Deemer's agent, fragments of 'personal' information which the first-person narrator of Alibi seems to 'confess' openly in the first pages of the novel are hidden, or at least marginalized in relation to the central 'fact' of Deemer's presence and influence on William William Dorfendorf's life.

By submerging his own desires and personal details in the central story of the search for Deemer's spa, Dorf achieves a kind of invisibility in dissolution. By identifying himself as 'Deemer's man,' Dorf may even be setting up an alibi of diminished responsibility, a technique which the later 'untouched' journal entries on Manny's 'accident' recapitulate. The crucial importance of narrative perspective is announced as early as the end of chapter one when Dorf declares through the thick fog

of the spa: "I expected to see Karen" (9). The question of what can and cannot be seen emphatically underlines that it is the narrative agent William William Dorfendorf, perhaps the most outrageously 'doubled-agent' ever imagined, who records and distorts the body of evidence which constitutes Alibi.

In spite of his apparent attempts at self-concealment, Dorf's personal story, like his body, does not completely dissolve and disappear. It is merely distorted by the context in which it appears. Virtually the first lines of Alibi refer to a wife's marital infidelity, the failure of the marriage partnership, a failed attempt at a crime of passion, shots fired, a flight out of the country, a few years "under something of a cloud," and an abrupt return. This tantalizing and brief scenario may not be offered as a confession at all, but as evidence which the narrator offers in order to depict himself as distanced from emotional encumbrances of love and marriage, jealousy and anger in his somewhat shady past. Now, like "most men" who are "secretly pleased to learn their wives have taken lovers," the narrator bluntly insists that he is "a happy man" (1). Indeed, he directly attributes his luck at landing a job to his solitary and emotionally self-sufficient status. His boss, the millionaire Calgary oilman Jack Deemer, "needed an agent who was a completely free man" (1). Because he virtually defines himself as one of Deemer's "*minions*," Dorf's narrative self-construction makes his solitary status one of his most important assets.

Dorf's only contact with his eccentric employer is via written messages, "instructions for which there is no explanation; no place to seek clarification" (1). Thus the course of Dorf's life appears to be determined by a bizarre partnership with

an unseen writer who sends him around the world in search of collections. Such a self-construction might also imply that Dorf's freedom is already compromised by this relationship (his personal agency diminished by his status as Deemer's agent). It appears that when Jack Deemer pulls the strings, his agent / puppet responds. There may even be metafictional parallels between Dorf's role as the endlessly searching servant of an absent writer, and that of an agent / reader / detective in search of a solution / meaning to a narrative puzzle. The ominous and "unfortunate message" which finally precipitates Dorf's "calamity" is: "Find me a spa, Dorf. That was the message. Nothing more, nothing less. Out of nowhere. For no reason" (1).

Dorf describes the sender of this puzzling message as "unapproachable...a conundrum ...a mystery" (Alibi 94), vehemently insisting that "Deemer speaks to no one" (97). There is an almost religious fervour in Dorf's determination to preserve the mysterious aspect of Deemer's voice. He is so shocked by Karen's claim to have spoken to "Jack" on the telephone that he offers an absurd 'explanation' for her misapprehension: "An imposter...perhaps he employs a look-alike" (96). In The Puppeteer, Deemer's physical presence is as elusive as his voice, as Maggie Wilder discovers as she searches for him in Artemona: "She had never seen Jack Deemer, and yet she must describe him" (Puppeteer 227). Her Greek vocabulary is restricted to "*Canadezos...Geros*," but even if she could question the Greeks she encounters in a more reliable medium than mime, her ability to describe Deemer would still be limited to vague references to his age, and the photographic activities of his travelling companion.

Deemer's body also remains something of a mysterious cliché, "Senex something or other" (122), for quite some time. He does seem eager, however, to correct any false impression that he is "lame and blind and bald" (228), created by Maggie Wilder "in her ignorance" (230). Deemer may be over seventy but he is anxious to defend his appearance: "I should say that I do not walk lame; my stride is vigorous and enduring. And I might add that I am not bald; my hair, however grey, falls in long and graceful waves to my shoulders" (230).

However, it is Deemer's voice, and not his body, which attracts our initial and most sustained interest in this novel, starting in chapter three when he rather histrionically exposes himself (to readers) as the unidentified "I" who appeared in the previous chapter. "As you have no doubt guessed, I am Papa B's Jack Deemer" (30). Deemer's actual appearance on the 'stage' of the novel is no less dramatic. The speaking "I" finally makes his entrance in a climactic scene, dressed in a bridal gown. Here too, Deemer's physical presence is introduced with the same hesitation, the same suspenseful delay of his earlier self-nomination. At first even the immediate witnesses focus on the dress, rather than the person who wears it, noting only that "a bride came out through the chapel door" (250). With this entrance into the dramatic community of the novel, Deemer's fellow 'actors' are not alone in failing to recognize him immediately. Readers, too, are kept in the dark until the last possible moment. Thus, although he is now playing his part in the spectacle, as the speaking subject he is still able to "trap the unwary eye" (Alibi 231) of the reader and thus manipulate audience expectation and surprise when the spectacle is narrated.

And yet, the single crucial and defining detail of Deemer's physical presence to which he most often refers is a characteristic which might be expected to interfere most with a narrator's ability to read and record experiences. "I cannot see well at all" (251), he announces, suggesting, not for the first time, that the "I" who speaks with such apparent authority may be the least able candidate to make reliable observations, let alone to speak as an absolute Author. Even before he identifies himself by name, the anonymous narrator who declares his loving support for Maggie's "need to get the story of her wedding dress down on paper," admits being "much too old and gone in the eyes to do her sort of work" (17).

Identifying the body of the narrator in this novel is complicated, not merely by the homogeneous blending of Maggie and Deemer's voices, or even by the appearance of two separate perspectives and voices. Instead, the speaking subject appears to be a collaboration between separate but mutually supportive, mutually dependent partners who each contribute according to their strengths. Poor eyesight might hinder certain aspects of Deemer's narrative performance, but according to Karen Strike, even though "He sounded lonesome" (Alibi 96) on the telephone, "His voice is so old. But strong too" (97). Deemer may have a strong voice but he has weak eyes; Maggie, on the other hand, "does have careful eyes, eyes that miss nothing" (Puppeteer 18). What she lacks, however, at the beginning of the novel, is loving support, the affirmation of a partner who is genuinely interested in the story she wants to write. Deemer does not simply lend his voice, but his ear, to the enterprise of co-authorship with Maggie. What prevents this partnership from being seen as an appropriation or a kind of

ventriloquism, is that both of the partners maintain an individuated vitality. Neither Deemer nor Maggie can be called "dummy," as Karen repeatedly refers to Dorf (Alibi 23, 27, 59 etc.).

Suspicion about impersonation of voices -- not to mention impersonation in the form of disguise, since Deemer eventually elects to remain in the wedding dress -- contributes as well to this complicated narrative situation. Although it has often been a challenge to reconcile critical theory with critical practice in the discussion of narrators, the narrative marriage of voice and eye in this novel makes it 'doubly' difficult to describe the body of a speaking subject which resists classification by gender and number but nevertheless displays evidence of 'its' humanity.

Before the unique qualities of voice and body which constitute this speaking subject can fully declare themselves, readers of The Puppeteer encounter the more 'conventional' bodies of a mysterious stranger and of Maggie Wilder, who names him "the pizza man," and the anonymous (disembodied) voice of a third-person narrator. All of the allusions to concealed identities, role reversal, and speculations about murder in the opening chapter of The Puppeteer are, we suppose initially, filtered through Maggie's consciousness and Maggie's eyes by this unidentified, impersonal narrator. This situation is abruptly complicated by the announcement in chapter two that "Maggie Wilder is writing this" (17). The previously concealed narrator, now identified as "I", claims to be Maggie's "loving supporter," a collaborator engaged in "reading over her left shoulder" and joining "her train of thought" (17). But if Maggie Wilder is writing in collaboration with a distinct first-person narrator, how can we

separate and identify the narrator's voice, body, and perceptions from those of Maggie Wilder? It appears that the narrator's identity is disguised, or at the very least, severely complicated by this announcement.

There are, moreover, several clues which might provide circumstantial evidence to support, though not confirm, the early suspicion that there are indeed two voices which constitute a speaking subject in The Puppeteer. The narrator's claim that Maggie "Sometimes...scrambles a few of my words in amongst her own" (17) suggests a kind of narrative omelette, in which the separate ingredients are not easily identified. Yet such a statement seems designed to encourage readers to do just that, to search for incongruities and inconsistencies in style, tone, and logic. The additional information that it is Jack Deemer whose words are part of the mix gives readers / detectives another clue with which to re-read in search of his voice.

B. Hariharan cites a number of examples of Maggie's direct or reported speech in chapter one which could reflect Deemer's influence. He notes the "vindictive tone" of her thoughts towards Papa B in one passage in particular, and observes that "her commentary goes beyond anything she knows of the pizza man." Hariharan concludes from this evidence that "All the 'thoughts' ascribed to Maggie are more likely to be of Deemer's creation" (127). Yet it is also plausible that Maggie's thoughts about the pizza man are simply her own imaginative speculations, stimulated by his eccentric appearance and evasive answers, and by her sense of having seen him before, as well as by the circumstances of his appearance (a dark and rainy night), and the fact that Maggie Wilder is a writer.

Nevertheless, as Hariharan's observations suggest, Maggie has no reason to be spiteful towards the pizza man, and re-reading the questionable passages with an awareness of Deemer's presence makes a suggestion that he is 'responsible' for the vehement tone seem reasonable, if not irrefutable. Ultimately, no amount of rhetorical, stylistic, narratological or symbolic evidence can conclusively solve the mystery of the narrating 'self' if the very conception of self is being radically challenged and redefined in the relationship of Jack Deemer and Maggie Wilder.

In spite of Dorf's own adamant assertions of 'singularity' at the beginning and the end of Alibi, there existed a possibility of developing "a continuing, tentative relationship" (2) with Karen. The relationship is complicated when Karen's birthday present of a journal allows Dorf to play the role of narrative agent, in addition to his role as Deemer's agent, yet there is evidence that even in the role of journalist Dorf is not entirely 'free.' When Karen, "the film exposé" (62), accuses him of leaving his journal where she would be sure to read it (60), she suggests that his anticipation of a reader or readers may have influenced his narrative choices and style. Her accusation thus begins to undermine Dorf's alibi, to 'expose' his attempt at passing off self-inventions as a journalist's non-fictional 'truth.' But when she asks: "How do you know...that I didn't give you the journal intending to read it?" (62), she raises additional doubt about how free Dorf is to control his story. Dorf's singularity and freedom may be compromised from the moment he assumes the journalist role, which not only causes a further split in his identity but adds another dimension to the quandary over apparently irreconcilable desires. Nevertheless, for readers at least, the



narrator of Alibi remains a single subject, albeit one who may be split, fragmented, doubled and possibly even parodically 'deconstructed.'

In The Puppeteer, however, the narrative voice itself is doubled, not by fracturing or dissolving a single dubious authority but by joining together Deemer and Maggie in a dialogic partnership, a metaphorical marriage of minds under the sign of the wedding dress. Thus the speaking subject becomes plural, 'we' instead of 'I,' and the very conception of self is radically challenged and revised. Kroetsch thus addresses the 'problem' of representing a self without denying responsibility for his plots with any theoretical alibi. But in demonstrating the dubious consequences of following poststructuralist logic to its end, he accomplishes more than a transformation of the concept of self. The extensive evocation and parody of the conventions and clichés of mystery / detective fiction provide almost incontrovertible evidence of the Author's presence. It appears that Kroetsch has taken deliberate aim at the restrictions of contemporary theories, and that he always knew the pun was loaded.

The poststructuralist view that the "self is not a unified, singular, and identifiable entity, but only a phenomenon created by language" (Porritt 324) is thus subjected to alternative re-visions in both Alibi and The Puppeteer. A new perspective on self is developed through various forms of doubling, including the sophisticated parody of generic conventions of murder mysteries. Indeed, since any return of the body to the library ultimately depends on new ways of perceiving the speaking subject, the doubled phoneme which makes up the lowly pun on the 'I / eye' signifier becomes a primary clue; the first-person 'I'-narrator of Alibi is finally

replaced in The Puppeteer by a narrator whose failing eyesight contributes to his need for a partner who helps him to see and to write.

Because these texts are 'conversant' with each other, with mystery fiction, and especially with readers, they encourage a dialogic orientation and a re-articulation of the notion of self as a product of dialogue. Both pun (I / eye) and parody depend on a dialogic relationship between terms or texts, perhaps even a multi-voiced conversation between text(s) and reader, and can only be understood when readers 'see' or 'hear' texts / voices in relation to each other. Thus doubling, in a variety of forms, becomes an essential and central characteristic of a mystery / detective grammar, and a prime clue, not only for reading Alibi and The Puppeteer, but for radically reforming the concept of self-presence which Derrida and his followers so radically deny.

## Chapter Two

### Criminal Plots and Acts of Detection in Alibi

In the opening sequence of a popular television series, Diana Rigg introduces characters who are, in one sense, less *real* than she. Detectives like Poirot, Miss Marple and Inspector Morse are represented by *real* actors -- David Suchet, Joan Hickson and John Thaw -- who convincingly trade places with the characters that they play. This mingling of various levels of reality is accentuated because Rigg's 'real' body appears against a backdrop of 'slightly-less-real' photos of actors in character, framed by 'significantly-less-real' line-drawings, hanging on a decidedly 'unreal' wall. A final complexity is added by the medium. For however 'real' the images of Poirot, Miss Marple, Morse or Rigg appear, viewers participate in the dramatic illusion in spite of their awareness that the bodies on the screen are composed of insubstantial pulses of light, just as readers acknowledge that fictional characters are ultimately composed of black marks on a page. Mystery's playful juxtaposition of 'the real and the fake' in a dramatic context illustrates the kind of 'double vision' that is needed to accommodate a simultaneous perception of bodies which seem to 'exist' in different dimensions. By evoking mystery paradigms in Alibi and The Puppeteer, Kroetsch is free to make playful and dramatic use of various kinds of 'doubling' which typify the principal character(s) and the structure of the mystery / detective genre.

D. A. Miller has described the unfolding of a detective novel as "act one, the crime; act two the police." Indeed, detective fiction is generally characterized by an explicit structural duality, each of its two 'stories' (crime and detection or 'real' event

and narration) with its own 'author' (criminal and detective). In Reading for the Plot, Peter Brooks reiterates Todorov's identification of the "two orders of story, inquest and crime, as *sjuzet* and *fabula*." He suggests that Todorov thus makes the detective story "the narrative of narratives, its classical structure a laying-bare of the structure of all narrative in that it dramatizes the role of *sjuzet* and *fabula* and the nature of their relation" (25). The reference to dramatic performance is well chosen, for apart from an inherent structural 'doubleness' in detective fiction, there is another type of doubling in the roles enacted by the detective and the criminal. This dramatic aspect of doubling is particularly important for readers.

According to Stephano Tani, "duality is the basic principle of detection since the *sine qua non* requirements of the detective story are a detective and a criminal" (4). Even more important is Tani's sense of how the detective / reader is doubled in the act of reading and trying to solve (re-write) the text (the murder) which the criminal has plotted. Not only must the detective exhibit supreme rationality, he must also be able to duplicate the creative though often irrational genius of the criminal, in effect, to trade places with the murderer. Tani sees in Poe's Inspector Dupin, for example, the first "*intimatio* of the double current" of irrational and rational, noting that Poe himself speaks of his "fancy of a double Dupin" (cited in Tani 4).

Poe's fancy suggests that Dupin's ability to solve the crime results from the detective's ability to duplicate the consciousness of the criminal, a questionable psychological explanation which is nevertheless echoed by an explanation more in keeping with structuralist theory. Following in the footsteps of the criminal, the

detective and his story of detection must also duplicate (in narrative) the criminal and his crime, which is the 'original' plot. Literally, if not in a psychological or metaphysical sense, the detective must trade places with the criminal. The murder mystery is only complete when the two plotters occupy the same site in terms of narrative, that is, when their plots coincide.

Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Musgrave Ritual" is a vivid demonstration of how the "active repetition and reworking of story in and by discourse" (Brooks 25) occurs as a result of the detective's activity. In this tale, Sherlock Holmes literally goes over "the ground that has been covered by his predecessor, the criminal" (24). The master detective plots his course, duplicating the prior plotting of the criminal, and Holmes's "repetition results in both the detection and apprehension of the original plotmaker" -- Brunton (25). Holmes's famous method, while based to some extent on careful observation and logical 'reading' of surface details, also requires the ability to recognize the importance of apparently insignificant clues, the *obiter dicta* so often overlooked by the police. Holmsian analysis, in spite of its debt to what Barthes calls the "hermeneutic code" (S/Z 19) in its reconstruction of the criminal plot, also demonstrates a kind of deconstructive attention to margins and the gaps in the criminal 'text' in order to expose the duplicity of the murderer.

In an even broader sense the mystery paradigm helps Kroetsch to expose the distinctive forms of duplicity (the alibis and aliases) that narrative fiction engenders with respect to readers, speaking subjects and even authors. Criminal plot-makers and writers alike who represent the 'self' by describing "the various situational complexes

in which the self figures," create what Thomas Docherty calls the "aliases" and the "alibis" of the self (81). Moreover, readers also figure, implicitly or explicitly, in the situational complexes of a text. Just as detectives and murderers converge (in narrative terms at least) at the scene of the crime, plotting authors and detecting readers seem to meet, to occupy multiple situational complexes in a work of fiction. Kroetsch's mystery novels thus require not only a double perspective, but the dramatic and active participation of the reader. The artistic self-awareness which foregrounds the relationship between the real and the fake in Alibi and The Puppeteer, as well as the very different ways in which these novels figure the author / reader relationship, are critical to the dramatic "aesthetics of process" (Hutcheon, Theory 2) which, in tandem, these novels not only illustrate but enact.

Both Alibi and The Puppeteer seem preoccupied with the conditions of their own production, focusing on the writing activities of the speaking subject(s). This artistic self-awareness may explain why readers might be tempted to view these texts as virtual manifestos of poststructural theory, demonstrations of radical indeterminacy and of the impossibility of determining either authority or meaning. Such definitive conclusions fail to consider that these self-reflexive references appear in the context of Kroetsch's allusion to the mystery / detective genre, an oversight which seems to confirm Hutcheon's suspicion that readers and critics are often "more willing to accept the latest theory, hot off the press, than to trust to the art itself" (Theory 3).

Hutcheon sees parody as "one of the major forms of modern self-reflexivity" (2), and as one way in which the text may reveal "the methods of analysis needed for

its comprehension" (3). She also cites parody as "one of the techniques of self-referentiality by which art reveals its awareness of the context-dependent nature of meaning" (85). Doubtless a parody of the formal conventions of the hermeneutic tale mocks the 'all-knowing' detective / reader who attempts to decode the texts of a master criminal / author, but as *intentional* evocations of an antecedent genre, Kroetsch's mysteries also imply at least the existence of an *encoder* who is responsible for the parody which readers *decode*. "The pragmatic need for encoder and decoder to share codes" (116) suggests an interactive and mutually dependent relationship between authors and readers, rather than a static allocation of 'authority' to one of the partners. Together Kroetsch's 'mysteries' thus function as a "*locus* of subversion" (85), a site in which all certainties about authority and intention are subject to revision, and in which rigid theoretical positions of all kinds, not just those of the hermeneutic tale, may be disputed, cross-examined, and even mocked.

In describing acts of writing and re-writing or in offering opinions on the relationship between art and life, narrators seem to offer a form of reading instruction. But the curiously 'doubled' narrators of Kroetsch's mystery novels complicate the problem of identification by becoming, through very different acts of writing, **narrative** 'double agents.' The concealed identity of the enunciating agent becomes a mystery of authority. A whodunit which asks "who is responsible for this fiction?" appears as a minor mystery in comparison to the philosophical murder of the 'self' in theoretical discourse, but in accordance with the generic conventions, both elicit a passion for a solution.

Indeed, a narrative whodunit has implications beyond identifying the speaking subject in the text. Questions of identity, intention, and responsibility are also aspects of the larger narrative 'plot' which implicates authors and readers on all levels. As readers of John LeCarré will attest, it is not only the identity of the double agent, but the uncertainty about which spy-master ultimately controls the agent, that fuels the reader / detective's inquiry. Issues of free will and motivation may further complicate classic double-agent plots, leaving the question of final authority indeterminate. Yet, such philosophical speculation aside, examining the *modus operandi* of the (narrative / secret) agent may help the detective / reader. According to Peter Brooks, sociolinguists have stressed that even oral narratives frequently "appear to have a moment of 'evaluation'...when the narrator calls attention to the point of what he is telling, and...makes an appeal to significance he has wrested from experience through his narrative shaping of it" (cited in Brooks 34). In written narratives, Brooks notes that these evaluative moments are often associated with the efforts of an embedded fictive reader to decipher and interpret the story. Thus he concludes that especially in complex and highly plotted narratives it is not simply the plot but plotting, the evaluative moments when readers detect, or as Brooks puts it, "seize the active work of structuring revealed or dramatized in the text" (34-35), which is of greatest interest.

However, even when readers detect narrators in the act of plotting / writing, such evidence merely suggests a contextual horizon which helps to limit the range of possibility. For, like all textual evidence, narrators' descriptions of the act of writing may be accidentally and / or intentionally falsified. Just as it proves impossible to



determine the **absolute** or fixed limits of writers named Dorf, Deemer, Maggie or of any writing subject (since they change in time and in context), it proves equally impossible to locate the reader in a static position, in spite of the various reading 'instructions' which the text provides.

Even in the instances when readers seem to catch Dorf or Maggie Wilder in the act of committing words to paper, our certainty about narrative authority is undermined by factors other than the usual complications of identifying a particular point of view, ideology, or prejudice. In Alibi and The Puppeteer we face more than routine questions of 'where is the voice coming from' and the 'believability of that voice,' for these texts exhibit the artistic self-consciousness which characterizes much poststructuralist writing. Allusions to additional layers of note-taking, editing, transcribing, organizing and collaborating produces a stratified text which distances both writers and readers from the scene of the 'crime,' the first act of putting pen to paper or fingers to keyboard. Distortions to this theoretical 'original' text make it impossible for readers to absolutely prove the identity of the plotter from stylistic, narratological, or semiotic clues. Readers are virtually forced into a position of constant doubt and speculation by a lack of conclusive evidence. Each new clue, deletion, reiteration, or context requires re-evaluation of assumptions about the relationship of both the teller and the reader to the tale.

Hutcheon notes an analogous relationship between the detective and the textual interpreter, since both are engaged in activities which are "active, constructive, and indeed more creative than true to fact" (Theory 12). But unlike traditional mysteries,

where detectives in the text can be relied on to sort and evaluate the evidence and reveal the 'whole story,' Alibi and The Puppeteer offer no such assurances. Instead these novels encourage readers to abandon the passive, readerly stance, to literally 'play detective' by examining evidence of 'criminal authors' in the act of plotting.

Despite Dorf's denials, Karen's reading suggests that he is a narrator with a flair for embellishing, editing, and plotting, rather than a journalist, dutifully and truthfully recording or religiously confessing the events of his life. Yet despite her criticism of Dorf's journal, Karen is prepared to overlook an apparent contradiction when she asserts the essential 'truth' of Dorf's self-inventions (61). Dorf himself has already been reconciled to any such contradiction. "Fake the real" (Alibi 52), he tells Karen as she puzzles over the opening frames of her documentary. In offering his terse credo of art, the journalist suggests that the difference between real and fake may be virtually indistinguishable. As an alternative to outright fakery, however, Dorf suggests that Karen could incorporate 'authentic' archival photographs into her documentary. His notion of old photographs as reliable historical evidence indicates either indifference to or ignorance of the possibility that early photographers may also have been 'faking the real' when they 'documented' the spas. Like the introduction to television's Mystery, the ways in which Dorf and Karen 'fake the real' underscore the complex relationships of life and art, fact and fiction, past and present, and even life and death, that preoccupy Alibi.

Instructive differences between initial composition and editing with a plot in mind are revealed in the final ten pages of Alibi, which are presented as

"Dorfendorf's Journal" and organized by date rather than by chapter headings. The first journal entry situates the writer in the present, "looking back, now," able to "see all with a clarity that is as joy-giving as a bottle of good red wine held to the sunlight" (229). With the clear vision of hindsight, the journalist records that he is editing his handwritten journal into "a proper manuscript" (229), and recycling the original pages into kindling or toilet paper. But the journalist's activities are not simply acts of self-concealment, like those of criminals and secret agents who shred documents, erase finger prints or destroy material evidence of their presence at the scene of the crime. He also aspires to "a few heroic or profound last words" (70) which will not only assure him a kind of immortality in "the old alabaster" (68) of art, but will also, if he succeeds in controlling his text, exonerate him from any crimes or guilty secrets for which his mortal body may stand accused.

Endlessly writing and re-writing, Dorf is an author who is obsessed with the impossible task of resolving the contradictions of his (life) story within the framework of his dubious journal. The entry for August 8 includes:

Yes, today, even while I tear out sheets from the front of the journal, I write new notes on the sheets at the end. The journal itself was intended to cover a mere calendar year. Even with those first pages vanishing, a handful each day, I have too many blank sheets remaining...I begin to fear I shall be arrested here forever. (230)

As he writes and re-writes his journal / alibi, across the lake Karen Strike follows a similar artistic credo. Removed from the 'original' event, "Karen must fake the end of

her documentary" (231). Deemer, De Medeiros and Fish *perform* their entry into the healing waters of the cave over and over, *playing* themselves so that Karen can reproduce the appearance of reality and a satisfying ending to her documentary.

Just as there are risks in re-staging and reshooting, Dorf demonstrates that there are obstacles to remembering and rewriting, for even his 'original' journal, disappearing into the fire or the outhouse, offers an imperfect record of the events it purported to represent with accuracy and honesty. He writes, for example: "I am trying to make sense of my journal, since I was sometimes remiss, sometimes left little gaps here and there" (231). For who could have predicted what details would prove significant over time? Only in retrospect, in the act of re-reading, does the author's sense of the story allow him to properly plot his journal. Even so-called journalists seem to require or at least desire a plot.

Certainly Dorf's scrupulous transcription, "not dropping so much as a letter" (231), does not produce a manuscript which solves the mystery of Julie's death or of Dorf's involvement in her disappearance. The promise that nothing has been deleted, and that the pages are "each carefully numbered, each proofread for the merest error" (231), gives no assurance of confessional authenticity, since the journalist admits to having publication in mind. Dorf is canny enough to realize that selling the story will require shaping efforts: "Let Karen put in some headings, some chapter titles to trap the unwary eye and lure the customer; she with the gift for compromise" (231).

In his entry for August 9 he even acknowledges his own alterations, admitting to "now and then finding a place...where I must make an emendation" (232). He sees

the journal as no more than "the original notes...only the negatives which now I develop" (232). Given such evidence of Dorf's theory and methods, should readers take his photography metaphor as an instruction to reverse their previous understanding of foreground and background, or simply to be wary that Dorf's 'developing' reflects his very specific sense of plot?

How, for example, should we read the entry for August 12? Following the comparatively trivial note of Deemer's most recent assignment -- a request for his agent to track down a collection of antique lanterns -- Dorf's journal offers a disturbing and obscure report of an apparent rape:

I hesitate to write what I must write, but write it down, I must...I was, by any legal definition, that final night, there in Deadman Spring...I cannot write the word. Violated will have to do. By whom, I cannot guess. Violence is anonymous. We live dumbly. And dumb I remain. I practise only to forgive. (234)

Forgiveness it may be, but it is also an accusation which makes the journalist a victim of a violent act.

The same events are also described in the chapter titled "ECSTASY/ EXTASIE/ EKSTASIS." In his edited version Dorf first claims, "It was I alone who...tried to restore, assert order," when the spa is plunged into a darkness "so black that light might have ceased in the universe." In the ensuing chaos, the bathers' terror gradually gives way to "original delight" (225) as they search for each other in the darkness. Relying on touch and the sound of the human voice, aroused by the warmth

of the water, Dorf's desire for order is replaced by an erotic longing. "We named our strangeness away," he stated, and the initial "loving statement" of names punctuated by "the yessing word" gives way to still greater intimacy of bodies. The narrator recalls how "We traded limbs; we traded shoulders, and arms and mouths; we traded buttocks and thighs. The cave permitted us" (226-27).

The erotic possibilities of touching and naming are violently short-circuited, however, when Dorf reports: "I had been seized, caught from behind, surprised, ambushed, captured, taken" (227). Seized in the arms of a stranger, Dorf claims he did not resist because he "assumed it to be a gesture of love" (228). If readers see him as a victim of sexual violence, rather than a man who is crippled by a fear of human connection and relationship, Dorf's retreat to monk-like seclusion seems justified. In both edited and unedited accounts of what may or may not have been a rape, the rhetorical strategy encourages readers to sympathize with Dorf. Yet the avowal in the diary that he "cannot write **the word**" does not prevent Dorf from arranging sufficient words which invite readers to fill in the elided space with a story of violent rape.

A similar strategy is employed in the final chapter when an apparent confession that Dorf may have witnessed Julie's fatal "falling" is closely interwoven with the account of how he too is violently pushed. The context thus allows Dorf to suggest that the description of the Mercedes plunging over the cliff is merely a product of his own empathetic imagination. The image of "Julie, there on the cliff edge, held by her lover. Or held by love," is followed by Dorf's statement "I could not shout" (228), which seems to place him at the scene of the crime. Yet the context which the narrator

creates allows Dorf to escape the final judgement of readers.

Elsewhere the text invites similar 'filling in,' broad hints about the death of Jack Deemer's old partner, and about the death of Julie and the disappearance of her body. The journalist seems to realize the power of context or of a well-placed (intentionally plotted) gap in a story to stimulate the reader's speculation about what may or may not have occurred. Dorf is anything but 'dumb,' as he claims, since he has already declared his intention to publish his edited manuscript. His contention that he merely copied, "even as a monk of old must have copied, words from one book into another," rings utterly false. Dorf has a great personal stake in the events that he writes. He repeatedly refers to crumpling and dropping the sheets of the 'original' diary, which he scornfully refers to as "Karen's precious document," into the biffy. "Minding my own business" (234, 235, etc) is Dorf's claim, but this proves to be yet another evasive strategy. He is attempting to write a safe position / identity, an alibi, for himself: Dorf the victim, Dorf the agent, Dorf the passive transcriber of journals. The plotting activity of the journalist generates the complex and dynamic relationship between author and reader which is at the heart of this investigation.

The first reader of Dorf's journal expresses editorial distrust of the writing subject in a relatively early scene which is instructive for later readers. Karen recognizes the self-fascination in Dorf's writing when she tells him:

But you'd rather talk to yourself than to anyone else. You're fascinated. You invent yourself, each time you sit down to make an entry, and I feel envy. Watching you... You do those real 'takes' on this Dorf guy

that you're trying to put together. (61-2)

Karen's heading, "AN OPEN BOOK" (60), seems to reflect a belief that in doing "real 'takes' on this Dorf guy" (62), the journalist is revealing the 'fictional truth' about himself, making his life an 'open book.' Yet the remainder of the heading: "OR/ FOR OR AGAINST/ FOR AND AGAINST," raises doubt about Dorf's 'open book,' suggesting that Karen may already be dubious enough to mock Dorf's confessional pretension. Even if her heading simply implies reluctance to accept Dorf's journal at face value, a sense that it is a self-construction designed to take in unwary readers, Karen's reading creates a frame of doubt around Dorf's authority.

Karen's sceptical reading and her ironic headings are critically important in helping to expose a narrator who is mistakenly convinced that his agency and authority are sufficient to determine how his various "takes" on himself will be taken by readers. Following Karen's lead, readers are more likely to view Dorf as a narrative agent whose self-constructions are designed to protect him or acquit him of blame for any number of 'crimes.' His strenuous assertions that he is an 'innocent journalist' and not a plotting novelist are exposed as probable fictions by Karen's reading. In a similar way, claims that he is an innocent victim and all similar protests of innocence, laid out as alternative plots in his journal, are open to the same critical re-reading.

Although he confesses that he fired a gun in Manny's direction, Dorf claims that he was not trying to kill the dwarf, but merely warning him to clear off. Dorf even insists that it was not self-interest, but concern for his "baby ospreys" that inspired his actions. He admits, inadvertently perhaps, that in firing the shot and



announcing his boundaries he is acting against his "instinct to remain anonymous" (236), selflessly sacrificing his cherished anonymity for the sake of the birds.

His first defence, that the shot was nothing but a message to stay clear, is subsequently modified when he speculates that De Medeiros's own motives may have been sinister. In effect Dorf's journal provides alternative plots, one of which features the dwarf in the role of killer or blackmailer and Dorf as his intended victim. As the possibilities and motives multiply, it is not surprising that Dorf finds himself entangled in his own plot lines. For in suggesting blackmail as Manny's criminal motive, Dorf must admit or invent details about himself which would explain the crime. Readers can only speculate about what self-incriminating details Dorf may be withholding when he writes that he was "the only person on earth who might give evidence...in the matter of Julie Magnuson's death" (237), although the admission implicates him as at least an accessory after the fact. Furthermore, suggesting that he knows more than he is admitting about Julie's death in order to shield himself from guilt for shooting at Manny, would appear to be a dubious alibi at best. In excusing himself from one crime Dorf seems to rashly implicate himself in another, causing a rather bizarre reversal of the traditional '*qui s'accuse s'excuse*' pattern of confessions.

The journal continues to offer alternative 'plots' which would explain Manny's death without blaming Dorf. Dorf even implicates the victim, virtually blaming Manny for his own death with the trite observation that "It is suicide, as anyone knows, to stand up while hurtling straight ahead with an outboard motor in a canoe" (238). Dorf's final alibi -- his final rewriting of events into a self-exonerating plot --

asserts that the bullet he fired had nothing to do with Manny's fall from the canoe: "The good doctor lost his balance even before the sound of the shot could have reached him" (238). The event originally perceived as 'effect' -- Manny's disappearance and presumed drowning -- is thus disconnected from the event originally perceived as the 'cause'-- the shot which Dorf fires. Dorf's creative search for plausible alternative plots offers a 'solution' which appears to disrupt even the relationship between apparent cause and apparent effect.

The jumbled journal entries, full of non sequiturs and apparently unguarded personal asides and accidental revelations, are still only a subjective transcription of events, edited at the very moment of perception and at the moment of selection. Yet the sheer number of plots which Dorf's unedited Journal offers is reason enough to cause suspicion about the narrator's altered and transcribed edition of events. Furthermore, his penchant for increasingly complex and evasive narrative strategies gives a pattern for re-reading the edited versions of his 'life,' allowing readers to revise opinions with a greater awareness of the journalist's *modus operandi*, his plotting techniques, and perhaps even his motives. In effect, the journal itself provides another frame for reading (revising) the novel.

Yet the most important aspect of the Journal section may not be the impression of greater access to the 'unedited' presence of a speaking subject, nor even the opportunity to sceptically reconsider later 'editions,' but the gap that is created by the absence of the internal reader, Karen Strike. Because Karen has not read and framed the final journal entries, readers of Kroetsch's Alibi cannot depend on her detective

skills to help in exposing Dorf's plot. In effect, the reader must take on Karen's detective role. Her very absence foregrounds how crucial her role as reader has been in the creation of the preceding text. Just as the detective and the criminal are joined at the point where the body of the victim is located, the author and the reader are hereby joined at the site of reading.

Evidence for proposing an analogous relationship between the criminal / detective pair and the author / reader pair has already been offered in the introduction. However, the notion that "detective fiction...thematizes narrativity itself as a problem, a procedure and an achievement" (Huhn 451), merits reiteration. Exploring how narrativity is variously inscribed in detective fiction, Peter Huhn notes that "the stories that are narrated in detective novels can profitably be described as stories of writing and reading insofar as they are concerned with authoring and deciphering 'plots'" (451). The role of the criminal and the detective are thus conceived as entirely separate, the former assigned the function of writing the 'original' plot or enacting the murder, and the latter assigned the role of reading the (largely absent) criminal story and identifying the (largely absent) character who perpetrated / wrote the crime.

In Alibi, Dorf fancies himself in the role of secret agent, searching for the perfect spa, as well as the private eye trying to solve "the mystery of Julie" (Alibi 231). And yet, according to Huhn's enunciation of the genre, Dorf's writing and his self-effacing strategies suggest that he functions primarily as a (criminal) plotter. Following Huhn's model, Karen plays the essentially adversarial role of detective, thus providing a sceptical and dynamic model for readers outside the text. However,

this somewhat reductive formulation based on the traditional murder mystery is complicated by certain elements in *Alibi*, including the re-writing and self-editing activities of the narrator. For even if we ultimately read the edited journal as the failed alibi of a criminal plotter, and the narrator's dubious self-constructions as attempts to remove the 'real' Dorf from the scene of the crime, we cannot forget that the allegedly criminal plotting / writing springs from the narrator's own retrospective 'reading' of events. Thus, from a very early stage in the novel, Kroetsch's narrating subject performs two roles, a functional doubling which apparently splits Dorf into writer / criminal and reader / detective -- 'in search of himself.'

Readers become aware of this functional split in Dorf (which seems to make him a Bakhtinian 'dialogic author') whenever he records the temporal and spatial gap between an event and the writing of that event. Hints of a temporal distance and a dialogic, split subject are apparent when Dorf writes phrases such as "I am certain now, looking back" (50). However, an even more explicit historical separation of 'the Dorf who experiences' from 'the Dorf who writes' is clearly evident when he records:

Birthday today. Meaning, five days ago. I cross out *I am* and write in *He is*...He...I...what does it matter? I am, he is at last, this morning, trying to catch up. Birthday today; that was last Wednesday. Monday today. (51)

Looking back or 're-reading' from a new perspective alters the journalist's sense not only of the relative importance of events in the past, but also of his sense of the pastness of the past, his lack of connection with any of his past selves which are reduced to third persons, "he" not "I". Thus we are aware that Dorf's journal is not a

a transcription but a transformation, the writing "I" forever shedding the chrysalis of that "he" which is written about, as well as censoring and polishing with an eye to how "his" story will be read.

Telling Karen about his first encounter with Julie, Dorf omits certain vital (if a death threat may be called 'vital') information. His less than candid account -- an excuse / alibi for his lie of omission -- depicts his evasion of the 'whole truth' as if it were a selfless, even a heroic gesture: "Because I didn't want to spoil Karen's response. Her pleasure...I realized I would have to tell a lie. I would have to make up part of the story" (24-25). His original resolve to tell "the whole truth and nothing but" (25) is abandoned, he claims, for the sake of Karen's response. Although Dorf is clearly pleased that his story 'satisfies' Karen, it is not clear whether he is more proud of the sexual or the textual power that his success implies, or indeed, if he intentionally blurs the distinction. It may even be that Dorf prefers to perform as a story-teller relating a masturbatory fantasy rather than to risk a performance as a sexual partner in a relationship with Karen. In his apparent eagerness to substitute the textual for the sexual, Dorf may imitate a stylistic quality which James Naremore detects in the writing of Dasheill Hammett: "The pen may not always be a substitute penis, but with Hammett it often seems to be" (52).

More significant than his reflections on Karen's response is the narrator's sense of how important the act of remembering and relating (which requires listening to / reading oneself) is in providing personal satisfaction. Exhibiting an almost narcissistic fascination with the sound of his own words, Dorf seems as proud of his narrative

performance as he does of his performance with Julie: "'A bath of desire,' I said. I liked that, had used it twice before Karen protested" (25). However, far more is at stake than an author's pride in a well-turned phrase, or even an author's concern for audience satisfaction, when Dorf tells himself his own story: "I had to hear it before I could understand, and I had to understand before I could proceed" (25-26). Whether Dorf is ultimately capable of moving from static self-fascination to ex-static / ecstatic freedom remains to be seen, but he claims that telling his story to Karen and to himself leads to an understanding of how they were "bound together" (26).

This understanding or retrospective reading of events is based on perceptions far removed from both the original hot coupling with Julie, and from the act of telling the story to Karen. For Dorf writes, "Looking at my journal *now*, looking at what I wrote *then*, trying to make sense of it, I realize we were sealed at that moment into a bargain. We are all lonely." Recalling Karen's sexual response to his story, the "wet motion of her hand, the softly slapping motion of her hand" (26), Dorf figures himself not simply as teller, but as reader / interpreter of his own enigmatic text. It was, he declares, "an intimacy beyond touch" (26). Ironically it is this fragile intimacy of telling and of listening which Dorf risks losing by refusing to share in the experience of relating a story, although he laments:

"People never tell," I said. "That's the way it is. They can't."

"They should," Karen said.

"They should, they should," I answered.

"Then say something," Karen said.

"I want to be loved," I said.

Sexually and textually, as a lover and a story-teller, Dorf may feel a need for Karen, yet despite his simple assertion that he wants to be loved, he seems determined to avoid even her most aggressive attempts to establish a connection. The conflict between Dorf's desire for love and his fear of losing control shows signs of possible resolution when he and Karen finally make love in the Oak Room. Dorf is briefly released from his "claustrophobia" and experiences the "freedom that is animal freedom, a freedom from the illusion of time" (48), by surrendering to his passion. "The animal smell of Karen's body" and the acute sensual awareness of the moment offers the promise of release from the "contrivances of disguise and design" (49), but it is a promise that Dorf thwarts, despite Karen's continued efforts.

The tension of conflicting desires -- desire for love and fear that Karen may expose his alibi, uncover his narrative 'self'-- continues to trouble Dorf. Just off the plane in England, he admits: "my hankering for Karen got the better of me. Mere lust, I realize now," he adds, avoiding even a hint that his need is more than a bodily urge. He consistently sends contradictory signals about his feelings. "I tried to explain to Sylvia my need for Karen. 'In that case, Sylvia said, 'why did you up and abandon her without so much as leaving a note?'" (80). When he does summon Karen to Bath via telegram -- "I'M HERE WAITING. HELP" (83) -- he again leaves before she arrives. Karen not only flies to Bath, but tracks Dorf to Llandrindod Wells, an act which amounts to following him to the ends of the earth...since this old spa is virtually at "the top of the world" according to his own description of the route (95).

Instead of responding to Karen's extraordinary efforts, Dorf is drawn to Julie, a woman who he imagines "would slit your throat just for the pleasure of watching the blood coagulate" (82). Rather than pursuing an erotic connection and the possibility of love, Dorf pursues a woman who threatens to kill him. It is thus hardly surprising that the relationship between Dorf and Karen deteriorates into suspicion and opposition, as they struggle, like author and reader, criminal and detective, to control the story.

Dorf's rhetoric often implies honest confession, as when he claims that telling "the secret" of his encounter with Julie is "still another version of desire and guilt and the old hunger to connect" (23). But the sympathetic response he claims to have elicited from Karen, as well as his apparent assumption of narrative authority, are undermined by the ironic chapter heading, "BURNING, BURNING" (22). Karen not only challenges Dorf's authority, but re-frames his story and thus helps to establish yet another perspective for readers who recall Augustine's Confessions, or T.S. Eliot's adaptation of Augustine in The Waste Land: "To Carthage then I came/ Burning burning burning burning" (ll 307-08). For Karen takes the later perspective of the "reformed" sinner to evoke an image of the confessor who has not forsaken his lust.

Dorf and Karen thus demonstrate that the relationship between a criminal and a detective can be a kind of "contest between an author and a reader about the possession of meaning" (Huhn 456). Karen's sceptical response to Dorf's plots and confessions exemplifies one relationship between detective-readers and criminal-plotters. Their relationship also offers a model for the interactive role that external readers might play in such a text. Alibi bears witness to the dispersal of the assumed



authority of a fictional author who writes his journal, transcribes and destroys the original, and leaves his carefully plotted text to be polished by an editor who shares his penchant for 'faking the real.' Such a strategy does not shift the entire responsibility for the final text on to Karen. For Dorf is not an unsophisticated, "humble farmer...finding the strength of water" (231) like the spa-discovering Vincent Priessnitz, and Karen is unlikely to be an accomplice to that, or to any of Dorf's fantasies. Her ironic headings re-frame and thereby influence how his text is finally received by later readers.

Karen Strike's chapter headings do help to transform Dorf's birthday 'journal' into a form more closely resembling a novel, and more likely to "trap the unwary eye and lure the customer" (231), according to Dorf, but probably not in the way that he anticipated. For ironically Karen's headings provide the very means by which readers may avoid being seduced or trapped by Dorf's narrative. In addition to providing an ironic and humorous interpretation for many of Dorf's most 'serious confessions,' Karen's cross-examination of the gaps and inconsistencies in Dorf's journal helps readers to recognize the plotting and duplicity of the writer. More important still is the example which her sceptical reading strategy provides for readers of Alibi.

Karen virtually explodes Dorf's 'journalist' alibi and accuses him of perpetrating a fiction. In the chapter the editor has headed, "IN WHICH DORF IMAGINES/ THAT HE SHOULD HAVE WRITTEN A NOVEL/ INSTEAD" (16), Dorf himself acknowledges that novelists shape and order events for dramatic effect, but flatly denies that he is engaged in such manipulations in his own writing. "If I

were a writer of fiction..." (16), Dorf insists he would have written a different story, one which dramatized certain features and concealed others. He writes, for example: "I'd have concealed the fact that in three years I hadn't made love to anything -- man, dog, beast, or woman -- not to anything but my right fist, and that, infrequently" (16). But the explicit assertion that he is not a novelist and his 'confession' of sexual abstinence are cast in doubt by Karen's ironic chapter headings.

Karen's skilful reading / detection, together with certain precedents from the mystery genre, itself suggest that Dorf's offhand and limited confession might be tantamount to an attempt to conceal. For like Poe's purloined letter, this seemingly frank but somewhat brief 'admission' literally 'hides in plain sight,' and is only made visible / readable by virtue of the context in which it appears. Following Karen's example and that of the generic paradigm, readers will note that Dorf's confession of an austere sex life which he could and "would have concealed," is suspicious on at least two counts. The first suspicion arises from a chapter heading which questions the journalist's explicit denial of 'fictionalizing' intentions. Additional scepticism about how 'frank' Dorf intends to be about his sexuality is suggested in the previous chapter, "(OR, IN WHICH DORF CLAIMS/ TO HAVE GOT LAID)," a dubious account of sexual adventure which he admits left him weak-kneed and "crying a little" (15). The record of his aquatic sexual encounter reveals as much about Dorf's writing strategy as it does about his sexual performance. He claims to be disoriented among the other bathers, "strapping big women...bulky men, awkwardly trying to recover a sense of clothing, lifting cigarettes in their water-wrinkled fingers" (17). Readers may

see further potential for a double reading of the bulky bathers with their post-spa / post-coital cigarettes; while many spa customers apparently have found satisfaction in the water, Dorf has to admit: "I was, I can only confess, totally exhausted" (17).

Even if Dorf's claims of confession and of sexual adventure are cast in doubt by Karen's perspective, readers might still be inclined to take his journal at face value if he did not offer additional evidence for suspecting him of plotting a fiction. For if his body is exhausted, his bodily desires sated, Dorf's imagination and his desire to translate his experience into an exciting story are not. Looking into the pool, he may have a potential reader in mind when he imagines that it might have been possible for Karen or some "onlooker to see Julie and me in the intimacies of our passion" (17). In a thinly veiled juxtaposition of sexual imagery and narrative desire, Dorf admits to feeling an impulse to relate the story, "feeling recklessly on the edge of telling" Karen "what I suspected she had seen" (17-18). But there is no "long, delicate flooding" of words, no proof in Karen's editorial asides, that Dorf's "claims" to have gotten "laid" have any justification. Karen thus creates suspicion of physical impotence to match the narrative impotence which Dorf admits:

I wanted to point at the blank water and describe a man and a woman, their mutual fingers intertwined, gently tugging aside the crotch of the woman's green bathing suit, the thick, dark hairs like seaweed; perfect, ingenious tentacles, imprisoning the man's desire -- (18)

Dorf is unable to relate a single detail of his conquest, only to imagine himself relating an adventure which seems like his sole invention.

The journalist's initial reticence might be caused by a suspicion that Karen, that "two a.m. terror of the soul" (17), will not respond appropriately to his story. Even more threatening to Dorf's sense of authority is the possibility that his first audience / reader will contradict his version of events, as she later does on reading his journal account of their own miscarried sexual encounter. Karen challenges Dorf's omission of certain details which she considers more relevant than the assertion that he "didn't want to spoil Karen's response. Her pleasure" (61).

Dorf dutifully records Karen's editorial objections, including an unflattering description of the accident which frustrated their own love-making: "But you don't explain to either of us how a grown man happened to scald his prick, like a chicken about to be plucked, just at the moment when he might have done a little pleasuring" (61). However, his inclusion of Karen's potentially damaging disclosures becomes yet another opportunity for the narrator to repeat his own prior alibi for non-performance ("The goddamned taps were misnamed"). It also occasions an impassioned denial of Karen's suggestion that he was feeling guilty about his encounter with Julie, and a climactic flourish of macho bravura worthy of Mike Hammer: "Meanwhile, back at the hotel, I was getting ready to screw you blind" (61).

Dorf's anticipation of a sceptical reader, and his subsequent and pre-emptive narrative attempts to mitigate any damage that Karen's testimony may do to his alibi, only helps to show how much of a gap exists between the event (sexual or criminal) and his narration of it. The 'crime' of writing is in fact the duplicity of a narrator who duplicates and edits events until he thinks that he has escaped detection. But Karen's

work in reading / detecting cannot entirely unmask the pretender in the 'novel,' since she is denied access to the journal entries which are given at the end. Finally, there is no internal detective, no Miss Marple, no author-god who will reveal all to the reader. Alibi thus works to subvert the conventions of the hermeneutic form of the classic detective story, in which the detective's narration of the 'original' crime (sometimes accompanied by a re-enactment) works to expose the plot and identify the author of the crime. Evidently, the mystery / detective genre produces what Roland Barthes would call a "readerly" text, in which the reader's position is passive, static, comfortable ( *passim*). Kroetsch's murder mystery is clearly a more "writerly" text in that it poses questions about the limits of narrative authority and substitutes an aesthetics of process wherein readers must literally 'play' detective to expose the criminal plotting and the detective reading.

Peter Huhn agrees that "contextualizing detective fiction in terms of narrative and reading concepts necessarily carries implications about the possible models of interaction between the actual reader and the text" (464). The classical formula virtually guarantees that the detective will prove more successful at reading plots and breaking alibis than the criminal proves at writing plots and constructing alibis. But the already "entangled writing and reading contests" (Huhn 459) of the generic murder mystery are doubly complicated in a text like Alibi, where the reader is given no assurance of the ultimate triumph of one version of events. Here readers are forced to 'take sides' in the narrative contest, to assume a self-conscious and active role in weighing the evidence.

When Barthes declares: "On the stage of the text, no footlights," he effectively collapses the dramatic metaphor, leaving the audience to their own devices and desires, leaving them in the dark. Furthermore, his assertion that "there is not, behind the text, someone active (the writer) and out front someone passive (the reader)" ( 16), and indeed his entire argument ignores the possibility that is suggested by Kroetsch's mysteries, that a vital author and a vital reader need be neither adversarial nor mutually exclusive.

Although Alibi begins with a possibility for partnership and an erotic connection between Dorf and Karen, as author and reader these potential partners are unwilling or unable to 'relate' without claiming final authority. Thus, the potential for an erotic relationship deteriorates into solitary self-containment and narcissism. Entrenched in their roles of criminal plotter and detective / reader, Dorf and Karen neither interact nor 'relate' as equals, but play out their parts as adversaries, vying for control of the story. Ultimately the disappearance of both the accusatory reader and the narcissistic author seem an inevitable consequence of their mutual distrust and failure to trade places, and of their jealous refusal to share in the telling.

Based on the evidence of Alibi , the desire to make and maintain a passionate, human connection is incompatible with the desire to maintain absolute control in any act of 'relating.' However, the connection between reader and author, detective and criminal plotter which is played out to its inevitable and futile anti-climax in Alibi is neither the final solution to the mystery, nor the only possible relationship, nor even the end of the story.

## Chapter Three

### Breaking the Frame:

#### The Self as 'Other' in The Puppeteer

Structuralist readings of the formal duality in detective fiction maintain that its explicit separation of crime and detection dramatizes the separation of *fabula* and *sjuzet* (event and narration) in all narrative. Moreover, the two 'stories' (criminal plot and detection) and the two principals (criminal / author and detective / reader) are seen as not merely separate, but adversarial. The triumph of one invariably leads to the defeat of the other, and, according to the rules of the game, it is invariably the detective / reader who succeeds in reading, and therefore, in defeating the criminal's intentionally mysterious plot.

However, a structuralist such as Todorov cannot overlook a puzzling complication in this otherwise neat demarcation of boundaries for criminal and detective identities, a paradox which seems to contradict the manifestly separate and adversarial roles posited by his typology. For Todorov concedes that to the external reader, the detective story exhibits an extraordinary quality of simultaneity, presenting the 'real' crime (of the criminal / author) and the narration of the crime (by the detective / reader) as "two aspects of one and the same work...two points of view about the same thing" (45-46). He also notes that the criminal's plot is "absent but real" while the detective's story is "present but insignificant...a story which has no importance in itself," and which "serves only as a mediator between the reader and the story of the crime" (46).

There have been narrative experiments which attempted to eliminate the 'insignificant' mediation of the fictional detective / reader by assembling dossiers of "authentic documents," such as "police reports, interrogations, photographs, fingerprints, even locks of hair," which readers must use "to discover the criminal" (46). In these idiosyncratic cases 'real' readers utterly replace fictional detectives. Whatever difficulties this unusual strategy raises in practice, in theory at least it does seem to suppress Todorov's paradox of two simultaneously present but distinct plots by making the external reader responsible for solving the mystery.

Yet, readers of the vast majority of more traditional whodunits discover that the internal reader / detective and his narration of the crime not only interact, but virtually co-exist with the criminal and his original plot. For external readers, the separate 'stories' and the singular story-tellers collapse together in such a way that Todorov is prompted to ask: "how does it happen then, that detective fiction manages to make both of them present, to put them side by side?" (46). Although he realizes that a dramatic relationship between criminals and detectives is at the heart of the paradox, and hints again at a performance metaphor by suggesting a dialogic relationship between sub-genres in his typology, Todorov does not exploit the full potential of the performance clue. Nor does he attempt to resolve the mystery of simultaneously absent and present stories and tellers by considering that a dialogic model might be adapted and re-deployed to explain what seems to be a mutually dependent relationship between authors and readers, and between criminals and detectives in fiction. Detective / criminal or author / reader pairs might even be read



as conjoined and mutual rather than as separate and oppositional, if the relationships are viewed as dramatic enactments of Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the 'dialogic.'

Bakhtin's concepts of language and of self, which Michael Holquist outlines under the heading of 'dialogism,' offer insights into the paradox of the simultaneously present duality which Todorov postulates as an essential feature of detective fiction. In dialogism, the consciousness which I have been calling *self*, and which Holquist calls "the site of knowledge," is never unitary. Rather, "the very capacity to have consciousness is based on otherness." Furthermore, otherness in Bakhtin's sense is more than a "dialectical alienation on its way to a sublation that will endow it with a unifying identity in higher consciousness. On the contrary: in dialogism consciousness is otherness" (18). Thus the old paradigm of a binary opposition between self and other becomes obsolete because there is no real opposition but an ontological interdependence between self and other in Bakhtin's model. The dialogic self is a relationship of simultaneity similar to the relationship between the simultaneously absent and present aspects of detective fiction noted by Todorov. Bakhtin's notion of consciousness implies that self and other together enact a drama, or participate in a dialogue, of identity.

Similarly, the mystery / detective paradigm seems to imply a dramatic dialogue between all its principals. Instead of figuring the detective and criminal, or reader and author, as separate and adversarial, as self and other, the model could rather demonstrate that the reader's mission, like the "detective's mission, is to become the other" (Eisinger 505). Clearly, a Bakhtinian model offers more than an end to hostile

relations between detective and criminal, reader and author, or self and other, since it denies all claims of self-sufficiency from the 'individual' partners in these binary relationships.

The pure puzzle quality of the traditional murder mystery might explain why "a corpse to which is attached no actual sense of death" (Grossvogel 2) is at the centre of the relationship between a fictional murderer and his detective 'other.' The lifeless body at the scene of the crime provides not only the dramatic *locus*, but the *raison d'être* which 'animates' the bodies of both criminal and detective and initiates the dramatic dialogue of their relationship. In a similar way, a book's material presence might be regarded as an equally indispensable though inanimate textual body which locates authors and readers, or creates a *locus* in which a variety of relationships might occur.

Kroetsch's companion novels trace two very different directions in which speaking subjects who are engaged in relating and relationships pursue their desires, narrative or otherwise. The directions of the narrators are plainly differentiated by comparing the relationships they pursue, both sexually and textually, with the relationships which they abandon or reject. The artful self-impersonations of Alibi's first-person narrator, discussed in chapter two, are futile attempts to realize an impossible task, that of claiming total authorial control while still denying all responsibility for every act committed (on paper or elsewhere). Working alone, the curiously doubled and duplicitous Dorf, who trusts only his own readings, ends as he began, in isolation. Like Narcissus by his pool, Dorf's obsession with his own

written reflection, his fascination with the sound of his own voice, cuts him off from a potential relationship with his textual Echo, Karen Strike. Dorf's implied portrait of himself as an artist seems only to encode a poetics of divorce.

On the contrary, the two voices which merge in the dialogic speaking subject of The Puppeteer follow an entirely different course. Their struggle with the "strategies of avoidance and attraction" in relationships (Puppeteer 120) leads them from a self-imposed isolation to a mutuality based on loving support. Both Deemer and Maggie discover at least the possibility of personal transformation in and through their relationship as author and reader.

From the beginning, Maggie Wilder and Jack Deemer demonstrate a very different kind of impersonation than Dorf attempted in Alibi. For the most part, The Puppeteer is narrated in the third person, by a narrator with intimate knowledge of the details of several lives, including Maggie Wilder's, through whose eyes the narrative is most often focalized. Almost immediately, however, the usual gap between the character through whose eyes we see and an invisible third-person narrator, the private "I" who appears to be responsible for the text, breaks down in this novel. The announcement that "Maggie Wilder is writing this" (17), and the seemingly incongruous appearance of a first-person narrator who declares himself to be Jack Deemer (39), are certainly factors which contribute to our lingering uncertainty about the 'real' identity of the narrator of this novel. In spite of the female perspective, readers cannot even be certain in the beginning about the gender of the voice which speaks alongside, or for, or even inside Maggie Wilder. Even the confession of a male

voice speaking is ultimately subject to critical speculation about gender reversal. For Deemer's decision to remain attired in Maggie's wedding gown, having adopted "the same attitude towards the wedding dress as Maggie," may be sufficient reason to suspect that he "forgets the essential fact that he is male" (Hariharan 198). It may also be sufficient reason for readers to ask themselves about what "essential facts" constitute either side of the gender binary.

Even before the gender issue arises, the relationship between an apparently omniscient, third-person narrator and a female character through whom the narrative is focalized raises questions of appropriation. Such a narrative relationship might be considered a necessary appropriation for stylistic reasons, simply a question of convention and variety without significant ideological implications. However, the proprietary quality of the narrative relationship is sharpened when the speaking subject goes beyond reporting direct speech / *oratio recta* -- "'Come in out of the rain,' she said" (Puppeteer 8), -- or indirect speech / *oratio obliqua* -- "She was saying something about coffee" (9). An even greater threat of appropriation is inherent in a frequently hybrid syntax: "Murderers and fugitives weren't supposed to have favourite bakeries. 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" (9-10).

In this last example, without obviously surrendering authority or resorting to dramatic dialogue, the (current) speaking subject in The Puppeteer apparently "places himself...directly into the experiential field of the character" (Pascal 8). Thus the speaker, later self-identified as the male voice of Jack Deemer, not only impersonates

Maggie's voice and adopts Maggie's perspective, but literally seems to occupy the space which Maggie occupies. Whether this narrative space is shared by mutual consent and to mutual satisfaction, or whether it is a colonized territory where Maggie Wilder's consciousness is co-opted and occupied to serve the needs of a more powerful force, is not easily answered. Perhaps less troubling, but certainly just as awkward for a critical discussion, is the problem of choosing an appropriate form of address for this double narrator, since 'its' ambiguous gender and even its ambiguous number seem to resist both proper names and pronouns.

Such a union of direct and indirect forms, identified as '*le style indirect libre*' by Charles Bally in 1912, is not simply a distinctive deployment of grammar and syntax (cited in Pascal 8). Roy Pascal questions the affective weight of this form, which he calls "free indirect speech" or FIS (8), and speculates on how readers "apprehend the double presence of character and narrator?" (21). His observations are relevant to The Puppeteer, not simply because FIS appears so frequently in this novel, but because a particular kind of "double presence" implied by FIS enables an erotics of reading which reconfigures the speaking subject in this novel.

The "seductive opportunity" which FIS offers for a "narratorial distortion that insinuates a loaded comment, of irony perhaps, into what is ostensibly a faithful reproduction" means that in some texts (Pascal cites histories and biographies) FIS might be regarded as a "dangerous form even if it rests on actual authentic documents" (136). The 'danger' which Pascal notes seems inherent in a form which makes attribution virtually impossible. Setting aside the question of whether history

and biography constitute 'special cases,' Pascal correctly points out that double-voicing is especially prone to irony which is qualitatively different than that which arises in an interaction of two distinct voices.

However subtle the irony of Karen Strike's chapter headings, readers of Alibi can be reasonably certain that the irony is hers, and that it is directed towards Dorf's text. In The Puppeteer, where FIS and other factors often make it virtually impossible to detect the origin of a particular statement or point of view, it is similarly impossible to attribute ironic intentions. Furthermore, the question of whether the doubled voice in The Puppeteer should be regarded as a sign of mutuality or appropriation can never be settled by objective measurements alone, certainly not by a quantitative analysis of which partner plays the larger 'part' in terms of line attribution.

In chapter four, for example, the sentence "Maggie puts on the wedding dress" is followed by a description of the attic where she worked. A passing reference to a "red brick chimney" is quickly corrected, since it "wasn't red, really, it only appeared red in the bad light" (37). The first impression, that the narrator is editing, is checked by an admission that it is Maggie who "leaned forward and checked what she'd typed" (37). By the time we read that it is Maggie Wilder who "typed X's across the word" *foreboding*, or "Stop inventing, she typed" (38), we are prepared to entertain the illusion that we are reading a manuscript in the process of its production. Our first perspective must then be revised each time the third-person voice turns out to be a citation of the typing subject. The one voice proves always to be an echo of the other. But which is which? Even when the narrative pronouns clearly mark a third-person

speaking, the accumulation of Maggie's typed statements add to the confusion of voices. The direct speech of "I hate her, she typed" allows the "I" to speak for herself in type; but the third-person who says "she" speaks for her in print. If we take this instance of a third-person to be a transcription of Maggie's own words, we still have no absolute authority for the phrase: "Let it all hang out" (38). Whose direct speech is recorded in this imperative? Is Maggie urging her writing 'self' to continue, or is this the voice of her narrator, a supportive reader encouraging her to continue?

Even more significant than the ambiguity which we are forced to concede as a consistent characteristic of The Puppeteer's double-voiced narrator, is Pascal's assertion that "free indirect speech postulates a relationship between narrator and character, a knowledge of the inner processes of another person, that can never exist in real life, and that inevitably introduces a fictional element" (136), even to histories and biographies. In other words, FIS implies an unreal state, an ontological impossibility, so a reader's acceptance of this form is tantamount to the viewer's suspension of disbelief in a dramatic performance. In a number of ways this performance metaphor (a dynamic instance of 'faking the real') is central to the workings of an erotics of reading, inside and outside the text.

The dual perspective of theatrical audiences has been noted, but a similar need for duality exists for actors as well. Performers engaged in 'faking the real' are capable to varying degrees and with varying success, of simultaneous existence in two kinds of 'reality.' Although an actor may convincingly trade places with the character she plays by combining technical skills and various tricks of the trade, some dramatic

transformations may not be entirely due to expertise. Techniques, even the empathetic techniques of Stanislavsky's 'method,' may be learned, but some actors seem to possess a quality of vulnerability, a willingness to risk losing themselves temporarily, which translates into a luminous believability on the stage. So while an actor undeniably practices strategies of self-concealment, it is also possible that by assuming the costume and the persona of another, an actor may reveal self truths that even she did not previously recognize, adding an autobiographical element to the performance. Oscar Wilde observed that "Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask and he will tell you the truth" (Wilde 191). The 'truth' of Wilde's statement was directed not only to theatrical performances, but to narrative ones.

In The Puppeteer, the narrator's account of an actual dramatic performance offers an instructive model for the kind of reading practice which this novel anticipates, if not demands. For Maggie Wilder's response to Dorf's puppet show, and Jack Deemer's response to her *account* of those puzzling events, suggests a particularly complex relationship between the real and the fake, between performers and audience, and between narrators and readers. It is not simply a complex, but a dynamic aesthetic, for the performance model offered by The Puppeteer dramatically situates (casts) the reader in the text, just as Dorf's puppet show invites both Maggie and Deemer to participate in the performance by breaking the artistic frame.

According to the narrator, Maggie's first view of Papa B's puppet-show / text is simply of a "blank space, an empty window. A frame without a picture" (115). Papa B manipulates and speaks for his shadow puppets, including the trickster figure



of Karaghiosi, and Maggie Wilder is the audience of one on the opposite side of the framed screen. But when she hears Papa B's imitation of her voice, Maggie is "uncertain of how to respond" (116). Unable to resist responding to a plot in which she is implicated, Maggie violates the artistic frame to address the puppet:

"Karaghiosi, you are always pretending to be someone you aren't. I know that much about you. You're pretending to be Papa B" (116-17). Suddenly she encounters the ontological instability of a man pretending to be a puppet pretending to be the man. Since the existence of the middle term proves that this is more than a case of a man pretending to be himself, Maggie can now engage a fully dramatic model of the way each self exists by becoming its other.

Maggie appears to become her own other the moment she enters the performance to address the 'Maggie' character, a move which brings hoots of laughter from Karaghiosi, and an invitation from the 'fake' Maggie for the 'real' Maggie to join the play in the role of Inez. Here, the narrator's care in specifying which 'Maggie' is speaking leads to a breakdown in the conventions which normally govern audience / reader relationship to a text.

Only when Maggie Wilder's body makes physical contact with the Karaghiosi puppet is the already compromised separation of art and life, the real and the fake, fatally endangered. The moment that Maggie touches the screen and senses that "a hand touched hers in response," she is unable to play her assigned role by imitating Inez's voice. But her inability to speak for another character does not end her desire to participate in the drama: "She went on pressing her hand against the hand that

responded and she knew she had entered into the house on the screen, she was inside somewhere on the first floor, then on the second, finding the flight of purple stairs that would take her to the attic" (118). Maggie's transformation -- from passive, solitary viewer, to actor speaking the part of another, to active participant in her own right -- is later recapitulated in the narrator's experience, when Maggie relates "the story of her love affair with puppets"(119) to Jack Deemer.

Deemer admits that he too was once little more than a passive viewer / voyeur. When Dorf and Manny "confessed their abandon" with Julie, describing how "the three of them...in Portugal...got into one sweet bed together," Deemer was "at once audience and priest" (119). His claim that he received this story with equanimity, pleased rather than jealous to hear of his wife's "too brief happiness" with her "two lovers" (119-20), is followed by a declaration of how empty and unhappy his own life as a collector really is. "Perhaps to collect is to have all and nothing. It is to heap ashes on one's own head. It is to desire all and to embrace the emptiness" (120).

The splendid isolation of the collector is well documented in Alibi, in which Dorf describes his wealthy boss as the virtual god of his warehouse universe, presiding over the "collection of collections that he bothers to show to no one" (Alibi 108). But in The Puppeteer, Deemer reveals that his isolation is painful, and the vicarious pleasure of amassing collections is essentially empty. Employing agents like Dorf and Karen to bring him photographs and artifacts of the world, Deemer sees everything and everyone as a potential 'collectible,' as objects for his use and enjoyment. It seems reasonable to suggest that Julie and Manny might have faked their

own deaths at least in part to escape from his collection.

Deemer himself seems to be trapped, denied the possibility of love, by his inability to 'play' any role except that of a millionaire collector. "How free did any of us used to be?" he muses. "I, for instance, slaved and sweated to acquire a fortune beyond my own mathematic, and in the process fastened my failing gaze on love. I refuse to live only to die. Some nights I rehearse immortality by examining my collection of cartridges" (189-90). In spite of his wealth and his power to amass innumerable objects, Deemer can not acquire love through an agent, even though he briefly wonders if it's possible to love a photograph (82). Ultimately, Deemer does discover that his desire for love leaves him no alternative but to 'play' the game himself. His stubborn reluctance to do so may spring from the bitter memory of his first marriage partner, Julie.

Deemer's confession that "I was only my blunt and honest self" suggests how much his inability to satisfy Julie Magnuson's need for pretence has originated in his refusal to play a part in any fantasy which might compromise the integrity of his "honest self." Whether at this point he is confessing his failure with Julie or expressing a kind of moral superiority to such fantasies of love, the collector either would not or could not surrender himself to any performance until "Maggie Wilder, in her teasing way, came to my rescue" (120).

Finally Deemer is able to surmise that Maggie relates "the story of her love affair with puppets" (119) not out of her own selfish desires or her desire to manipulate, but because she believes that she was "telling" him back into his own

"desire" (118). Her words function as "a prod to desire," a revitalizing force, primarily because Deemer perceives and accepts her story as a kind of gift, with no strings attached. It is emphatically because *Maggie Wilder is telling this*, just as she is earlier declared to be "writing this," that a passive collector, an audience member who was once virtually a voyeur, is transformed into a vital collaborator.

The dynamics of telling and listening, production and reception, are crucially important to a relationship of mutuality. Deemer relates how "Maggie, telling the story to the page as I watched, reported that on that fifth night in the attic, she, at least, or she and Karaghiosi both, began to sense the presence of a stranger" (122-23). He earlier admits that Maggie controls her narrative and her audience, confessing that when she "hesitated, waiting for my response; I begged her to continue" (119). However, it is equally clear that the audience / reader is also capable of influencing a performance, as Deemer's unseen presence certainly influences Maggie's performance in the puppet show. Deemer's observation that "she did her doings for my eyes" (123), and not for Papa B's, suggests the dynamic role of the reader / watcher in creating the performance.

Even more suggestive of the complexity of this 'dialogics' is the third-person report of how Maggie's self-perception is affected by the presence of an invisible audience: "Maggie listened and waited...Watching, she knew that she watched herself being watched" (124). Here, the narrator appears to share his role as watcher, as well as surrendering himself to Maggie's gaze. In this apparently mutual regard, the teller can contain his / her own audience. Maggie and Deemer, self and other, are thus not

only inseparable but virtually indispensable to one another.

Deemer, who claims to be "much too old and gone in the eyes to do her sort of work" (17) as a writer, and Maggie, driven by "her need to get the story of her wedding dress down on paper," now become partners in writing, if not in crime. Instead of figuring as the old male who is "the butt of the joke in many a performance. Senex something or other" (122), the seventy-year-old Deemer sees his role as essential to the performance. In the puppet show he doesn't simply perform as a "loving supporter" (17) of Maggie's desire to write; he plays an equally important role in fulfilling her erotic desires. For Maggie is able to conquer her inhibitions about 'playing herself' in Papa B's puppet show, able to surrender to her passion, only when she becomes aware of "the presence of a stranger" (123) for whom she enacts her drama of identity, entering into a dialogue of self and other which ends in the necessity of "Finding other names" (127).

Whether Papa B intended it or not, the references to cameras in his puppet show remind Maggie that Karen Strike "took the pictures not for herself, but for me," Deemer insists. Thus, he suggests that not only the puppet-master behind the scenes, but the imagined audience in front, are crucial to the performance for Maggie, even if Papa B "could not...see past his own puppets to the audience beyond the screen." Deemer's critical question about the location of authority: "Who was the puppet, who the puppeteer" (123): is only partially answered when he describes himself, and not Papa B, as the puppet-master whose presence seduces Maggie. "She must undress to undress," he says of her double action of undressing in fact and in her telling, and "if,

to accomplish that, she must imagine a presence of a stranger, so be it." For his presence seduces Maggie not by pulling strings to control her, but by surrendering to her imagination. "I was," Deemer continues, "content to be the supreme puppet of her imagination, let Papa B connive as he might." Maggie and Deemer trade roles in this relationship -- each playing puppet and puppet-master -- and Deemer attributes their "shared pleasure, hers and mine," to their performance in this sort of play. Not only pleasure, but a kind of ecstatic freedom through performance is suggested when Deemer declares that "she was released and so was I, by our Karaghiosi" (124).

A flat white sheet presided over by the cardboard figure of Karaghiosi and the white page on which Maggie types become sites of congress and of transformation for both Maggie and Deemer. For as Maggie breaks the frame and changes from passive watcher to participant, and then later from dramatic performer to narrative performer, she is conscious of herself from Deemer's perspective as well: "she knew that she watched herself being watched." Self-awareness and awareness of the other are linked in this configuration. The realization of self in and through another involves a voluntary surrender to the other which engenders mutual dependence and responsibility, but this collaboration also offers an end to isolation, and a kind of ecstatic / ecstatic freedom. As a model for authors and readers, the relationship of Maggie and Deemer is a consummation devoutly to be wished.

At the beginning of The Puppeteer, however, Maggie is alone, as isolated in her borrowed Vancouver house as Deemer was in his warehouse full of collections. With her grown sons away at university, recently separated from her husband, she is a

free agent for the first time in years. Maggie believes that a wedding dress which "made her agree to marry" Henry twenty-three years earlier, will now help her to write "the life she would have lived" (4) if she hadn't married him. Over Henry's logical objections she insists, with a combination of stubbornness and whimsy, on referring to this writing project as "the autobiography of a wedding dress" (15, my emphasis).

Instead of finding herself in her writing, however, when she first picks up a pen she seems paralyzed by memories of how her husband dismissed and constantly corrected her past efforts. Though Maggie thinks she is "free of him" (3), Henry still functions as an imagined reader, looking in judgement over her shoulder. "He always knew better, no matter what she said about people. He'd glance quickly through one of the few short stories she ever managed to complete, and then he'd say, well, yes, I suppose some people might get carried away like that, they might behave that recklessly" (5). Just as dismissive is Henry's certainty that Maggie will join him in Greece if he gives her 'a room of her own' in which to "sit and pretend to write the autobiography of a dress" (23).

Unable to shake off self-doubt, Maggie is a writer who sits alone in an attic and cannot even make useful shopping lists. Her communication consists of talking to herself and ordering pizza. It is when the pizza man identifies her as a writer that "she felt the rise and swoop of her heart. 'I've only written one book in my whole life. One small book'" (11). Even when he explains that a friend recognized her name, Maggie, eager to hear more, "gave him a chance to go on...wanted him to explain, to

add with a pleased smile, he likes your stories, he thinks you hit it right on the head, the stupid things people do that change their whole lives --" (12).

The importance of Maggie's identity as a writer, and the significant role that readers play in her self-concept, become even clearer when she meets Thomas Bludgett. She discovers that Papa B's friend understands her stories no better than Henry. Responding to his comment on Trading Places, that she seems to "know Greece inside out" (26), Maggie insists: "I didn't know anything about Greece. That was the point" (26). Bludgett not only misreads Maggie the writer, he misreads Maggie the reader, when he assumes that warning her to stop inquiring about the first bride who 'occupied' her wedding dress will make her "go back to writing what you call fiction. You were safer doing that." In fact, Bludgett's "evasive and cautionary remarks" (31) about the mysterious history of her dress have the opposite effect. As the narrator points out, "He had given her the warning but not the story" (31), and the story is what she wanted and needed most. Maggie's passion to write and her passion to uncover / read the story of the wedding dress are inseparable. Like a detective's desire to uncover the plot, Maggie is eager to fill in the gaps in Bludgett's mysterious and 'writerly' text, his enigmatic plot.

Bludgett continues to be a patronizing mis-reader, occasionally delivering his judgments in Latin. "*Obiter. Obiter dicta*, Maggie Wilder" (38); she recalls more than once this "phrase that Bludgett likes to throw at her...*Obiter dicta*" (107). Ironically it is Bludgett's announcement that Jack Deemer "wants the dress" (28) which seems to jolt Maggie, after two days of "deep silence" (31), into writing at last. More



important in curing Maggie's paralysis, however, is the fact that Bludgett and Henry are not her only readers. The narrator who announced that "Maggie Wilder is writing this" also declares: "Reading over her left shoulder, I become a loving supporter, the champion of her need to get the story of her wedding dress down on paper" (17).

Since the words and the thoughts of Maggie and the narrator are so joined and scrambled, it may even be her "loving supporter" and not Maggie who retaliates with irony against Bludgett, calling him "the dreamless man" (39) and rebuking his attempts at "closing off her alternatives, shutting her down" (41). It is impossible to know finally if it is Maggie or her champion who imagines "Bludgett, on the porch, dumb and waiting," or who castigates him as "the insomniac avoider of the world he claimed so loftily to understand," a man who "didn't dare sleep, for fear of losing the control he liked to believe was his" (39).

Whenever Maggie's writing begins to stray from "just the facts" (106), Bludgett's *'obiter dicta'* reproaches her speculation and fantasizing. Bludgett's phrase, like her husband's opinion of her stories, sets limits which remind her to stick to the facts, "live within boundaries" (108), and by all means to avoid the dark corners of the attic. Henry refused to search for icons in the USSR or Turkey or Yugoslavia; for him they were "part of the attic that remained unexplored" (108). Maggie, "grudgingly, admired that about Henry, even if she couldn't understand" (108), for she is pulled by a desire to explore the dark corners, to risk crossing boundaries.

One recalls that Dorf's conflicting desires, both sexual and textual, were not successfully resolved in Alibi because of the choices he makes. Maggie, however,

chooses a path which allows her to realize her desires by entering into a new kind of partnership of mutuality with Jack Deemer. The path she eventually chooses is not simply to "spend her days and nights writing the perfect account of the life she neglected to live" because of her marriage to Henry. She literally makes a new life for herself in the "paradise" (262) of Siphnos, co-authoring a hagiography with Deemer.

Nevertheless, the change in direction has not been a simple matter, for like Dorf, Maggie must resolve her conflicting desires. Even before she goes to the aid of her hapless husband, she is aware of a need to free herself from the former claims of that deadening relationship. When she informs Papa B by telephone from Rome of the reappearance of Julie and Manny, Maggie makes a significant gesture which signals her resolve to change her life, by "removing the wedding band from the ring finger on the hand that held the phone. Delicately, without glancing down, she dropped the ring into the mess of cigarette butts and discarded tickets at her feet" (192).

But habits of a lifetime are not easily broken, "even habit can be a habit" (192), and Maggie's transformation from a patiently waiting woman whose own needs are constantly subsumed in or by the needs of others, is neither a simple nor an instantaneous metamorphosis. Although she realizes that her twenty-three-year marriage has had near fatal consequences to her sense of identity and self-worth, her trip to Siphnos might be seen as one final attempt to "recover something," even though it means "risking small insinuations, almost reaching out" (9) to her estranged husband. But the possibility of a reconciliation proves to be "one of her fantasies" (9) that does not materialize. Almost from the moment of her arrival the old pattern of

their relationship is resumed, in which Maggie's reaching out is met with the same self-centred disregard, arrogant presumption and petty correction that drove her away in the first place. Yet even when Henry "was talking aloud but speaking to himself" (221), out of concern for his folly "Maggie wanted blindly to reach across the table and reassure him. She was for a moment tempted to join him in his one and only crime, then tell him how to do it right" (222).

The split becomes irreconcilable with Henry's hostile response to Maggie's statement: "I brought my wedding dress with me." He misreads her generous intention, which was to "tell him, things work out, don't panic. So it takes time" (223). Instead of joining Henry, Maggie finds herself searching the dark streets of Artemona for the former owner of the dress. Whatever her motives in returning the dress to Deemer, when Maggie Wilder hangs the wedding dress on the clothesline of his villa she is able to finally see it, and perhaps her own life, from a new perspective: "Dress in a landscape, she thought. Good title. Must write that down" (230). Maggie is no longer concealing her identity in the dress, or in a role as Mrs Henry Ketch, but is taking control of the process of naming, and of her own story.

It is important to note that Maggie is not embittered by this symbolic act of separation, nor distraught at giving up the dress which she once assumed was the source of her agency. On the contrary, having surrendered the dress she really does seem to be "enjoying herself" (230), rather than agonizing over Henry's ineptitude as she did when her own identity was defined almost entirely by his need for her. She is even free to exercise her ironic and sometimes black sense of humour, rather than

simply submit to Henry's sarcasm. Of course Henry misses her ironic intention, assuming that she is flattering him and "getting into the spirit of things" when she answers his offer to "share the booty" with him: "The booty. The loot. Another Crusader has arrived to save the island and is about to depart" (232). Although she is able to laugh at Henry's ineptitude, Maggie does not altogether abandon him; she is prepared to support him at least long enough to pack his clothes and to listen to him count his ill-gotten loot while he complains about the high cost of get-away helicopters. When he is finally apprehended for stealing icons, she is even willing to defend him to the police with the unflattering assertion that "Henry Ketch was, at best, a nincompoop, at worst, a dupe of his own desires" (262).

Although giving up the wedding dress, like dropping her diamond ring, appears to be an important symbolic gesture in Maggie's self-transformation, in the beginning she is convinced that the dress will help her in a very different way. She steadfastly insists that she is planning to write the autobiography of the wedding dress, although she eventually concedes: "Perhaps every autobiography is a decoy. Even that of a wedding dress" (149). The form of autobiography, like the dress, like an assumed name, offers the teller or the wearer the temporary security of a mask. Because wearing the dress allows her to "hear the story she intended to tell" (2), Maggie assumes that its primary function is to help her write a new life for herself. But her numerous "failed attempts at telling herself her mislaid story" testifies to the true function of this remarkable garment. The wearer is not empowered as an author, as Maggie imagines, but as a reader. The story that Maggie finally hears / reads is that

her marriage to Henry Ketch is over, but each bride who wears the dress may read a different story.

"The rituals of love are many and various, and that of the wedding dress is stranger than most," the narrator assures us at the end of the story. When a solitary bride emerges from the chapel on Siphnos, the narrator notes that her gown appeared white from a distance, but "close up, it was a veritable mirage of colours and forms, a story of desire, of betrayal, of ragged lust, of barbarous fulfilment" (251). Less shocking than the possibility of this dress being the very one that Maggie surrendered to Deemer, less shocking even than the bride's identity, is the sudden shift in perspective which readers must accommodate. A third-person speaker who describes how "a bride came out through the chapel door" suddenly announces: "I had first of all put on the dress simply as a disguise...And then something precious happened" (250-51). The switch from third-person to first-person not only confirms that it is Jack Deemer who reads desire, betrayal and lust in the dress, it also presents a speaking subject who is both "I" and "she", the bride and the one who sees the bride from a distance. In a seemingly effortless switch in perspective, Deemer, like Maggie, is able to assume the role of both watcher and watched.

Deemer's experience in wearing the dress, like Maggie's, is one of self-discovery through reading / listening from a new perspective. Pacing and waiting in the dark chapel he claims that he "came to understand how Julie Magnuson must have felt on the morning of her delayed wedding" (252). Perhaps like Maggie's experience, this metamorphosis of Deemer can best be seen as a change in direction

rather than an epiphany. "Wearing the dress, I was no longer simply myself" (251), Deemer declares. Although it seems fairly certain from the narratological evidence that Deemer, like Maggie, has begun to re-vise himself through the mediation of the dress, the 'old' Deemer is not easily nor instantly dispatched. Habits of self die hard, apparently, and some time must pass before the collector is ready to play the role of other / author, surrendering his former self-control along with his solitude.

Nevertheless, readers should be aware that there has been a gradual but increasing shift in narrative perspective in The Puppeteer, from third-person to first-person, and that Deemer, once a virtual recluse, conceals himself less and less. The growing collaboration of Deemer and Maggie, indicated by the dual voice of the narrative, is not a static relationship. If the wedding dress is responsible for initiating changes, that is because it sets in motion a process whereby a 'self' and an 'other' come to occupy the same 'dialogic' zone. For it is the apparent feminization of Jack Deemer which presents the most blatant evidence that a radical change has occurred. Not only does he continue to wear the wedding dress, but he declares: "My dugs fill it out more than adequately, especially at those recurring times when I have a tendency to retain water" (265).

But is the feminization of Jack Deemer, and his new partnership of mutuality with Maggie Wilder, sufficient evidence on which to acquit the former collector of responsibility for the death of Papa B, aka Dorf? Papa B's headlong plunge over the cliff, "causing some of the bones in his neck to force his tongue out of his mouth" (257), leaves no doubt in this instance of the presence of an actual corpse. If Dorf

returns from the dead like Sherlock Holmes, his "second appearance" only occurs when the sling which was used to haul the body up the cliff "either slipped or broke and poor Dorf was in for a second crash" (260). Here, our verdict of 'murder' or 'misadventure' has to depend on eyewitness accounts, and according to Deemer only Henry Ketch "claimed he saw me give a push to William Dorfen, there at the cliff's edge" (256). Since Henry's testimony is uncorroborated, and his reliability as a witness diminished by his own conviction for theft, readers are left to consider the narrator's explanation.

In his summation of the case, Deemer plays the detective's role in laying out the relevant clues and the sequence of events, but he repeatedly returns to questions of motive and intention, even though he claims to recognize the purely speculative nature of such evidence. "The idea of motive is difficult, one might even say impossible, yet so much of our so-called law hinges on just that impossibility. Who would presume to describe another's motive? Do we pretend to understand our own motives?" (254). Yet Deemer does presume, systematically presenting the motives and intentions which he attributes to every suspect present at the scene of the crime, including himself. Even though he has frequently expressed a desire to kill his former agent and "old adversary" (251), more than once imagining the actual means by which it might be accomplished, Deemer continues to insist: "In my own stubborn way, I loved the man" (257). Readers are left with no certain way either to resolve Deemer's conflicting statements or to decide whose motive for murder was the strongest. In any case, wishing someone dead, like lusting in one's heart, may be a moral 'crime' but it

is not a legal one. Whether readers conclude that Dorf's death was accidental or intentional, the fact of his corpse is beyond dispute. His body and his bones remain the subject of speculation (by the Greek authorities and by readers), veneration (by the monks and priests of Mount Athos), and narrative, for Maggie and Deemer are immortalising Papa B by writing "a saint's life" (264).

Although it is not a crime on the scale of murder, or even an accident on the scale of a fatal fall, there is another 'error' in this novel which draws attention to the question of whodunit on a narrative level. Deemer's description of how his nameless ex-partner was injured by a falling beam, his body devoured and his bones licked clean by a family of lynxes (Puppeteer 205), is a different version of the story than Dorf hears from Fish in Alibi. The version which Alibi offers (substituting food poisoning for falling beam, and cougars for lynxes) is easily accommodated within the expanded narrative frame, since stories are often embellished and distorted in the act of re-telling. But this explainable 'error' is followed by another which is not quite so easily set aside. Explaining how the accident occurred while his partner was building a sauna in the bush Deemer says: "He claimed he built it so *Maggie* could take a decent bath" (206). Whose error is this? Does Deemer's typist make the error by accident, or is it Maggie's intentional or subconscious desire to write herself into the story? Does the impossibility of Deemer's partner building a sauna for Maggie indicate a slip of the narrator's tongue, of Kroetsch's, of Kroetsch's editor?...and if so many slips are possible, how on earth can a reader attribute the error...or any other statement in the text?



The proximity of these two narrative 'errors' does not offer a solution to the question of whodunit, but the pattern seems to suggest that Kroetsch is playing with the idea of intention in a manner which is only apparent if readers consider his two novels in tandem. Deemer is not above suspicion in the end; even though he occupies the climactic role of the detective, his summation of motives is no purer than Dorf's 'alibi.' So his responsibility in the matter of Dorf's death is finally undecidable; the *raison d'être* of the genre, a solution to the mystery, is only a matter for parody.

Still, this question of motive which looms so large, especially in the final pages of The Puppeteer, draws our attention to the related question of intentions in all acts of detection or reading. Deemer's recognition of the "impossibility" of motive does not deter him from pursuing that line of inquiry. Readers who are equally cognizant of the impossibility of determining narrative intentions, and just as aware that many authors, to paraphrase Deemer, 'do not pretend to understand their own intentions,' still find the notion of intention a temptation. Both of Robert Kroetsch's mystery novels exploit this seductive power of intention and motive in narrative. Readers may be tempted, not, as Jonathan Culler fears, to fall into the temptation of interpretation (Pursuit 3-17 *passim*), but to participate by 'playing' the role of detective, unravelling and reconstructing plots and assembling circumstantial and solid evidence. This is the true 'pleasure of the text,' the only solution to the mystery, that the reader can find herself "Trading Places" with the author.

## Conclusion

In Alibi, Karen Strike's reading / detection is critical in exposing Dorf's fraudulent and miscarried attempts to 'tell all' in his manuscript, but even his unedited journal entries virtually admit the impossibility of the task. At the same time, the final journal entries encourage readers to repeat the same sceptical re-vision that Karen demonstrated. Although he never seems to lose faith in his power to control the reception of his story, the only form of closure that the fraudulent journalist can manage is to stop writing and flee from the scene of the crime(s), leaving a rock to 'stabilize' the pages of his text (Puppeteer 70). Dorf's disappearance leaves many questions unanswered. While Karen's headings and comments might have continued to shed light on the final direction of Dorf's plot, it should have been apparent from the beginning that she is no Sherlock Holmes. However invaluable her reading has been in exposing Dorf, readers should not have expected a final word from Karen which would make sense of Alibi. Her absence at the end of the novel leaves readers to rely on their own resources, and to face the possibility that it was never Kroetsch's intention to deliver a tidy solution to the many mysteries in his novel. The notion that Alibi is merely a "spy-story" which fails to "live up to reader's expectations," because "in the end the story makes no sense" (Manguel 22), reflects a longing for a more 'readerly' text, but more significantly it utterly fails to recognize the parodic dimensions of the novel.

The anticipated closure of the traditional detective novel is not the only parody which is offered. Dorf's sudden departure might also be read as a parodic replay of

the poststructuralist plot which describes the disappearance of the absolute Author-God, with the added twist (which may or not make the joke cut both ways) that Dorf, this particular author, was never more than a tin idol from the beginning.

Kroetsch's humour looks double-edged in another respect. For the process of removing the Author from his lofty position requires the reader's active involvement in an essentially hermeneutic pursuit, leading to at least a conditional apprehension of the speaking subject as an authentically 'human' if not an absolutely 'authentic' and honest voice. The reader's growing perception of Dorf's all too 'human' failures and self-aggrandizing fictions serves as a counter-balance, a genuinely stabilizing force which prevents the body of the subject from disappearing altogether. Perhaps the Author God is simply shown to have feet of clay, in which case neither traditional humanist nor poststructuralist positions are spared Kroetsch's humorous scrutiny.

And if there are doubts about which side of the theoretical fence the author of Alibi is really on -- dogmatic positivism or dogmatic scepticism about ideas of the self and author -- The Puppeteer reframes and replays the mystery by suggesting that there is a middle ground between the two fences which purists in both camps overlook. The alternative that The Puppeteer offers is the positive potential of subjective 'doubleness' as opposed to its negative, self-destructive, duplicitous aspects. This novel explores the middle ground of mutuality and dialogue in a doubling of subjectivities, forming a new relationship between the principal performers -- author and reader.

Although Alibi and The Puppeteer enact distinctive and differing versions of a relationship between author and reader, both novels offer the possibility for an

external reader to share in the dramatic production of meaning...to move towards an erotics of reading. A description of reading as 'erotic,' indeed any proposal which juxtaposes the textual and the sexual, risks dismissal as outrageous, scandalous or frivolous, particularly when the rhetorical and lexical paradigms used in the argument are somewhat playful.

Nevertheless, attempting to revive a notion of human presence in critical discourse is a serious endeavour. Furthermore, Robert Kroetsch's murder mysteries are also seriously, if playfully, engaged with the issues of relating and relationship, the sexual and the textual aspects of the human condition. Kroetsch's mysteries counterbalance the inflexible theoretical positions which privilege texts as "scenes of reading rather than scenes of writing" (McGann 4). What Jerome McGann asserts in The Textual Condition, and what Kroetsch's novels demonstrate is that readers and writers can be joint participants in "the textual condition -- that scene of complex dialogue and interchange, of testing and texting" (5).

With Alibi and The Puppeteer, Robert Kroetsch situates himself with McGann and other pragmatists who recognize that "because human beings are not angels," and because authors are not gods, the "network of symbolic exchanges" which constitute human culture "as it is materially executed: as spoken texts or scripted forms" (3), is bounded by material and human conditions. It is possible to acknowledge the limits of language without denying the potential or the desire to communicate, as do so many "textual idealists" who are caught in a "version of an impossible dialectic, an 'unequal contest' between transphenomenal desires and factive, material conditions" (7).

Ultimately, to speak of an erotics of reading is to evoke an image which combines "the sexual event" and the "textual condition." Describing the most profound instances of those symbolic exchanges which occur in reading as "the intercourse that is being human" helps to suggest some essential aspects of an erotics of reading. For beyond physical satisfaction or pleasure or reproductive potential, it is in "the climactic marriage of our persons" that "we realize (in both senses of the word) that to be human is to be involved with another, and ultimately with many others" (3).

A less sexually loaded version of reading as an intimate involvement with other(s) appears in "Shadowlands." In this film, C. S. Lewis, played by Anthony Hopkins, learns to appreciate a new credo from a student whose passionate reading habits challenge the smug certainties and dogmatic Christian 'interpretations' which the Oxford don habitually delivers. Accepting the student's idea that "We read to know that we are not alone" effectively demolishes the notion of a self-sufficient reader. Furthermore, it is unnecessary to postulate the presence of a transcendent and all-powerful God or even the presence of his textual counterpart, the absolute Author-God, in order to treat reading as a meaningful human activity.

What is required is simply a recognition of a human presence, an acknowledgement that "texts represent -- are in themselves -- certain kinds of human acts" (McGann 4). Even the discovery of a seductive presence in reading does not depend solely on the author's contribution of a suitable setting, or on the lovely seduction of words; an erotics of reading depends equally on the reader's willingness

to contribute what E. H. Gombrich has called "the beholder's share" (179-287 *passim*). When McGann asserts that "love and text are two of our most fundamental social acts, we make love and we make texts..." (3), he reiterates my guiding premise, that it is bodies, the bodies of human authors and readers, that make love and make meaning in texts.

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