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Robert Kroetsch and Richard Ford:
Writing and Unrighting Games

by

Kevin Brooks

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
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Loisirs	0575
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Ophtalmologie	0381
Orthophonie	0460
Pathologie	0571
Pharmacie	0572
Pharmacologie	0419
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Soins infirmiers	0569
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Biochimie	487
Chimie agricole	0749
Chimie analytique	0486
Chimie minérale	0488
Chimie nucléaire	0738
Chimie organique	0490
Chimie pharmaceutique	0491
Physique	0494
Polymères	0495
Radiation	0754
Mathématiques	0405
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Généralités	0605
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Génie nucléaire	0552
Ingénierie des systèmes	0790
Mécanique navale	0547
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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommended to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Robert Kroetsch and Richard Ford: Writing and Unrighting Games" submitted by Kevin Brooks in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

All fiction can be considered from the perspective of game theory because fiction, by its very nature, neither corresponds to any reality, nor is it meant to be the verbal representation of actual events. A short survey of game and language theories, beginning with Ferdinand de Saussure and Ludwig Wittgenstein, suggests two distinct ways language and games can be understood. The incorporation of these theories into contemporary thought provides a philosophical context for understanding the differences between Robert Kroetsch's and Richard Ford's approach to language games, a context for understanding their fiction. Writing about games as models for writing, sites of self-definition or deconstruction, and places of tension between chaos and order, Kroetsch and Ford take different paths towards "unrighting" games, either carnivalizing them or unmasking their illusions. The writing and unrighting of games is both a recognition and questioning of the importance of the game-play metaphor in contemporary thought about language, self, and life.

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Dedication

For Laura

Table of Contents

Title page i

Approval page ii

Abstract iii

Acknowledgements iv

Dedication v

Table of Contents vi

Introduction: Marking the Field 1

Chapter One: Philosophies and Poetics of the Game 5

Chapter Two: Kroetsch -- The Subject of the Game 22

Chapter Three: Ford -- Life is not a Game
(but language is) 44

Conclusion: Expanding the Field 66

End Notes 70

Bibliography 75

Introduction: Marking the Field

Robert Kroetsch tells Russell Brown that he cannot choose between the picture theory and the game theory of language: "Game theory is the conception of language as a serious game, picture theory of language as identical with reality. . . . Typically I would suggest that the fascinating place is that place right in between the two" (16). Kroetsch, however, may not be in a position to choose. If words refer only to other words, signs to other signs, the picture theory of language may be only a mode of deception, a convenient "opposition" for the game theory. Kroetsch's desire to imagine a place between game and picture ignores "the game" of picture making in an attempt to create a "borderland" image between the two (Brown, 16).

If the picture theory of language still holds currency it is with the realist movement, or the new "minimalist tradition in contemporary American fiction" (Saltzman, 423). Richard Ford would seem to subscribe to the picture theory, and distinguishes himself from a gamester like John Barthelme on the basis of how they view language: "He [Barthelme] sees the world differently from how I see it and he thinks about language differently from how I think about it, but there's more that's alike between him and me than there is that's different" (Bonetti, 92). The unstated difference is the distinction between picture and game theory, and the undeveloped similarities are part of the common ground of "postmodernism".

Ford shares with most "postmodernists" a recognition of the tension between order and chaos, a sense of the construction of the subject, and an interest in games. But postmodernism is not a unified position. Cast in general terms, Linda Hutcheon regards the postmodern as "a problematizing force in our culture today: it raises questions about (or renders problematic) the common-sensical and the 'natural'" (*A Poetics of Postmodernism*, xi). Postmodernism cannot simply be equated with that other pervasive "post," poststructuralism -- antifoundational, decentering, "endless" critiques of signifying practices -- but must also acknowledge connections with "discourse analysis; feminist, black, ethnic, gay, post-colonial, and other ex-centric theories; psychoanalysis; historiographic theory; and even analytic philosophy" (A

Poetics, 227).

Hutcheon's list is not complete; to include Ford among the postmodernists it is necessary to see the pragmatic position within the generally problematizing character of postmodernism. Pragmatism presents an antifoundational, decentering perspective, but it also insists on being able to act on contingent beliefs. In many ways I think pragmatism and poststructuralism, Ford and Kroetsch, are mirror images -- the same, but opposite.

All fiction can be considered from the perspective of a game theory because fiction, by its very nature, neither corresponds to any reality nor is it meant to be the verbal representation of actual events. Fiction, like a game, is self-contained, and may be, Kroetsch says, profoundly mimetic (*Labyrinths of Voice*, 64). But one plays at constructing mimetic forms -- realism -- and one plays at making pictures. I see the picture theory of language as being subsumed or contained within the game theory of language, making it possible to analyze both Ford and Kroetsch from a game perspective.

A short survey of game and language theories in Chapter One, beginning with Ferdinand de Saussure and Ludwig Wittgenstein, suggests two distinct ways language and games can be understood. The incorporation of these theories into contemporary thought provides a philosophical context for understanding the differences between Kroetsch's and Ford's approach to language games, a context for understanding their poetics. Criticism focused on the game of/in literature has become increasingly detailed and sophisticated, but Kroetsch and Ford both present unique challenges to the game/text analogy. By simply writing, and writing about games, they have taken different paths towards "unrighting" games, to making them strange and unmasking their illusions.

My individual chapters on each author examine gaming scenes as metafictional representations, and particularly examine the fate of the subject in both games and language. The construction of the self is significantly affected by the uncontained presence or the close control of chaos, manifested in the game representations as the tension between play and rules. Kroetsch's fiction seems to suggest a pattern of an ever-expanding game in which characters, readers, and presumably the

author, are being increasingly subsumed by the game. Ford's fiction consistently questions the value and appropriateness of games, regarding them as illusions and the realm of children. Yet his work shows a continuing interest in games: his later fiction engages storytellers in games with language, and readers are increasingly challenged by the presence of lies and symbols in these apparently flat and sincere tellings. His use of first-person narrators significantly opens his texts to playful readings. This playfulness, however, is resisted by strongly realistic prose and the urgency of preserving a sense of self through what Ford calls a "rage to order" ("Introduction," xvii).

My focus on the actual games represented in the texts of Kroetsch and Ford serves not only my interest in game theory but also addresses generally-overlooked elements of each author's work. Kroetsch has always been known for his "trickery" but little attention has been paid to his actual representations of games. The schmier game in *What the Crow Said* is discussed by Neil Randall because it dominates much of the novel ("Carnival and Intertext," 94). The rodeo of *The Words of My Roaring* and the ice festival of *Gone Indian* are touched on occasionally (Ball 19-20; van Herk xxii, xxvi). But most often, Kroetsch's playfulness is examined in the context of the play of signifiers, the play of intertextuality, or the play of the Trickster (Edwards (1987a):105; Lecker, 83; McKay 147-48; Rudy Dorscht (1991):15-26; Wilson 122). Brian Edwards and Susan Rudy Dorscht write about the "game of reading" that confronts the reader in *What the Crow Said*, although again they do not make reference to the schmier game (Edwards (1987b):71; Rudy Dorscht (1991):74). I too, will be writing about the play of language and the reading game, but learning from the games within Kroetsch's fiction.

Richard Ford has received less academic attention than Kroetsch, probably because he is much less overtly theoretical and experimental than Kroetsch. Kay Bonetti and Bruce Weber have spent considerable time discussing with Ford the "seriousness" of his work, but make little or no mention of his use of games. Nick Horby has written the only complete and up-to-date survey of Ford's fiction, but it is merely that, a survey. Horby places Ford in the context of "contemporary American fiction" alongside Raymond Carver, Anne Tyler, Bobbie Ann Mason, and

others, emphasizing Ford's realism and the recurring themes of "displacement, love and sex, survival" (96). Edward Dupuy's article on *The Sportswriter* focuses on the importance of "telling," but he rejects any need to consider the "double reflex" in the novel, including the role of games (94 n.3). Christian Messenger and Robert Cochran both recognize *The Sportswriter* as a work within the genre of sports literature, something all others mentioned have ignored, and they therefore cannot help but discuss the "game" in Ford's fiction. Cochran reads *The Sportswriter* as having something to say about "the place of sport in American life and about the function of sport in personal relationships" (92), as well as commenting upon the interesting distinction between sportswriting and "real writing" (92) made in this novel. Messenger's reading is the most interesting, providing a deconstructive reading of the viewer/teller Frank Bascombe "dismantl[ing] gesture and the life of the body into discourse" (217). Ford's work is significant enough, I think, to generate further critical insight about the relationship between games and writing.

Kroetsch and Ford as mirror images loosely represent poststructuralism and pragmatism. The poststructuralist position supports the notion of language as a game, but emphasizes the "play of signifiers" rather than language as being a rule-bound system. A pragmatic view of language may recognize the play of signifiers as a feature of language, but language can be tied to or grounded in experience. Language, for pragmatists, can ultimately get something done, communicate something concrete, even if language begins as a game. The writing and unrighting of games is both a recognition and questioning of the importance of the game-play metaphor in contemporary thought about language, self, and life.

Chapter One: Philosophies and Poetics of the Game

Bernard Suits recommends that any study of the game of literature and games in literature begin with either a clear definition of a game or a clear statement about the game(s) the investigator is discussing (215). My study will discuss the formal and informal games represented in the fiction of Robert Kroetsch and Richard Ford, focusing particularly on how these games illuminate or thematize the two distinct ways these authors are engaged with language games. Of equal interest is how each writer plays games with language and consequently with readers, and how readers may play games with texts. A distinction needs to be made between authors engaged with language games and authors playing games with language, but the fundamental distinction to be made for studying the game of literature is the clarification of play and games.

"Play" is an encompassing term that for Johan Huizinga categorizes all activities different from "ordinary life" (28). James Hans breaks down Huizinga's play-work distinction by suggesting that "the essence of play is its capacity to saturate every aspect of our lives" (2). I agree with Hans that play is all-pervasive, but play in its most elemental form of random movement is easily and often contained within some rule-like system. According to Allen Guttmann, play is a fundamental human activity that is divided into spontaneous play and organized play (games, art, even "work"), and those organized games are divided into competitive and non-competitive, physical and intellectual games (2). Any element of "organization" -- one constitutive rule or convention -- transforms play from the purely spontaneous into some, if rather vague, form of game.

Play, as it is manifest in both spontaneous and game form, might also be usefully divided into different "play-spirits". Derrida concludes "Structure, Sign, and Play" with the distinction between "negative and nostalgic," "affirmative and joyous" play (93b), although his idea of "negative" play might more generally be characterized as idealistic and conservative, while his "affirmative" play is radical and disruptive. Kroetsch and Ford represent two distinct positions within the affirmative, radical play realm: Kroetsch's play-spirit spills over

the limitations of the game in an exuberant fashion; Ford affirms play's pervasiveness primarily through his anxiety to contain it. Although such containment may suggest a conservative spirit, I think Ford's vision is that play and the closely related notion of chaos -- unlimited, random movement -- are so overwhelming that they must be regulated in some fashion to make sense of the world. Ford is never wholly "affirmative and joyous" in his play-spirit, but his anxiety guarantees that he is never nostalgic, either.

While we can "loosely" refer to authors playing with language or with readers, writing always engages authors in game playing. A carefully plotted narrative twist or a series of related puns are not examples of "spontaneous" play. The only "pure" form of play that one will encounter in writing is the "play of signification," Derrida's characterization of the endless process of the signified in turn becoming signifier. The excess of "meaning" that spontaneously arises from the relation of words, images, and texts within or between texts may initially be a form of pure "play", but the reader's process of forging meaning contains that play within a game form.

Play in its purest form is random, unconstrained, movement, a form of play that is thematized in fiction but is inevitably organized by discourse about "play." The game, while distinct from pure or free play, is the most familiar manifestation of playing; "play" is subsumed into the concept of a game. To "organize" language in any motivated way is to not merely play but to play a game.

Language, for all users, is a self-contained system based on commonly accepted rules; the "game of literature" unavoidably begins with the author's engagement in language games. Playing the language game is a writer's co-operative struggle with the "system" to arrange language as he or she desires. It is often a pre-writing engagement or a game-in-process that can only be commented on via authorial statements about poetics or through inferences from the produced text. An author's game-play with language, in contrast, is the final product, the narrative twist or puns, that makes the text "playful." An author is always engaged in the game of language but, as we will see with Richard Ford, that game-playing does not always produce a play with language or a playful text.

The "game of literature," despite its singularity of grammar, is not a monolithic game. In choosing a "serious" writer like Ford as contrast to an obviously playful writer like Kroetsch, I am emphasizing distinctions within the game-model of writing, as well as the game-model's ability to account for varied writing and reading processes and products. Texts have been regarded as analogous to mirrors and lamps,¹ to maps,² and most recently to parties,³ but the text/game analogy provides an account that more fully balances the activities of both the reader and writer, as well as being able to give a sensible account of the text itself.

The process of breaking up the monolith of "game" was started by Michel Beaujour in the influential *Games, Play, Literature* (French Yale Studies 41 (1968)). Beaujour suggests that there are only three general "poetics" possible. The game-player poets may: 1) play according to, or play games with, accepted rules and conventions, as most poets do; 2) pretend to leave the game and simply make noise or write nothing, as the Dadaists have chosen to do; or 3) leave the game, saying something to the effect that I do not have to play in order to be a poet, as the Surrealists have chosen to do (59). Beaujour's first poetics, however, contains many styles and philosophies of game playing that need to be differentiated if one is to recognize a variety of game and language experiences. Kroetsch and Ford exemplify, as their play-spirits suggest, two related but distinct sub-poetics.

The distinct play-spirits of Kroetsch and Ford are not merely individual differences, but representative of traditions within game-play theory and the philosophy of language. A writer of fiction may not need to make philosophical arguments about the function or use of language, but both Kroetsch and Ford represent "philosophies" of language that can be understood within the context of poststructuralist and pragmatic language games. Language and game-theory originally converged on the chessboard, Saussure and Wittgenstein being founding players. Both agreed that language is like a game, and chess is the exemplar, but both also saw distinct roles for the players. Saussure required that the player follow the rules closely, while Wittgenstein encouraged a wandering away from the confining system.

Saussure and Wittgenstein both use the chess analogy to establish

that a word's meaning is contextual. For Saussure, "The respective value of the pieces depends on their position on the chessboard just as each linguistic term derives its value from its opposition to all the other terms" (88). For Wittgenstein, "We may say: *nothing* has so far been done, when a thing has been named. It has not even got a name except in the language-game. This was what Frege meant too, when he said that a word had meaning only as part of a sentence" (24). As Wittgenstein says, nothing so far has begun; Saussure and Wittgenstein agree on how to "set up" the game, or how the game of language has been set up to "name," but they diverge as the play begins.

Henry Staten describes Wittgenstein's play as "syntactic," Saussure's play as "systematic:" "The 'overall role' of a word is thus not to be thought of as its place as defined within an abstract, synchronic system [Saussure] but as the qualitative or 'physiognomic' character of the sensuous-appearing word as it emerges from the panoply of its syntactic settings [Wittgenstein]" (80). Wittgenstein stresses that one must "look and see" how language is used, how it "emerges from its syntactic settings" because he imagines language games in which rules are made up or altered as play goes along (39). Saussure's belief in the systematic dynamics of language would not allow for such improvisation, for such "authorial" control: "values depend above all else on an unchangeable convention, the set of rules that exists before a game begins and persists after each move" (88).

A speaking or writing subject in the Saussurian conception of the field of language is determined by the system or code of language, the rules of the game that are "unchangeable." Language is an autonomous system -- Saussure even compares it to a machine -- that supersedes the subject, a view Allen Thiher sees repeated in later philosophers:

The primary orientation of Saussure's thought argues clearly against a view of language as a series of psychological determinations. As the mechanism metaphor implies, his views also give support to the idea, comparable to Heidegger's later thought, that the subject is spoken by language. Or, as Jacques Derrida later formulated it in a thought that joins together Saussure and Heidegger, the subject only exists thanks to language. (67)

The Saussurian-Heideggerian-Derridian "reification of language"⁴ and "decentering" of the subject⁵ is a language game distinct from subject-centred language games. Derrida's critiques of Saussure and Heidegger, however, promote a reification of play as well as language. While "system" and "rules" remain vital to Saussure, "difference and the play of meanings it generates will not really be accommodated by the notion of systems" (87), Thiher says. Derrida's conception of the language game adopts the Saussurian decentering of the subject but also the Wittgensteinian critique of systems and rules.

Derrida is most concerned with allowing the play of the trace, that which "has no meaning and is not" ("Différance," 133a), that which would exceed, be beyond or outside, Saussure's *centred* *langue*: "As rigorously as possible we must permit to appear/disappear the trace of what exceeds the truth of Being" (133b). Neither Saussure nor Wittgenstein concerns himself with anything beyond what Kaja Silverman calls "the domain of signification" (10). And while the subject in Saussure is consumed or subsumed by the rules -- made a pawn, even a king -- the subject for Derrida disappears: "There is no maintaining, and no depth to, this bottomless chessboard on which Being is put into play" (133a). The game, like the subject, is made up of contradictions and instability.

Derrida shares with Wittgenstein a rejection of controlling systems or rules, but Derrida's "play of signification" and "trace" beyond Being via the centreless, endless, supplement and the bottomless chessboard are replaced in Wittgenstein by a controlling subject who has "ordered" language.⁶ "Wittgenstein rejects the idea of a system of rules underlying the diversity of uses in favour of looking carefully at those uses to see how they are in fact ordered" (79-80), says Staten. Language, for Wittgenstein, is most interesting in how it is used, and not in how it works as a system independent of or controlling the subject.

If Derrida is aligned primarily with Saussure's language game and the absorption of the subject, Richard Rorty can be aligned with Wittgenstein and his view of the controlling subject. According to Rorty:

One can use language to criticize and enlarge itself, as one can exercise one's body to develop and strengthen and enlarge itself, but one cannot see language-as-a-whole in relation to something else to which it applies, or for which it is a means to an end. (*The Consequences of Pragmatism*, xix, my emphasis)

Rorty prefers a physical trope rather than the chess analogy because he wants to stay completely away from the necessity of rules. He wants a subject to be able to control his or her language and actions according to the circumstances of a situation, not according to absolute but arbitrary rules. Language is more often a tool than a game for Rorty, tool being a metaphor that Wittgenstein also uses. When language is a game, it is used as much as it is played.

Jules Law, surveying the "new" pragmatists' relation to Wittgenstein (Rorty, Stanley Fish, Walter Benn Michaels and Stephen Knapp), suggests how they proceed in their ungrounded, contingent activities: "The pragmatist tells us: assert whatever beliefs and preferences you have (you can do no less); and if challenged, offer whatever reasons you have (you can do no more)" (320). The pragmatist, rather than getting lost in the infinite play of signs, brings the game to a close at whatever point is most beneficial to him or her. Language is not "reified" or given precedence over the language user in the pragmatic conception of the language game.

The divergence in game and language theories, beginning with Saussure and Wittgenstein and further accentuated through Heidegger, Derrida, and Rorty, posits two views of the player: one player is open to language and is the site of language's speaking; the other player "exercises" his or her "resourcefulness and inventiveness" in playing the language game devised by men.⁷ Subjectivity is inextricably linked to both games and language as they are systems of or for the articulation of an "ego," a discontinuous but speaking subject.

These "players" and "subjects" of the language game are not just the writers or speakers, but also the readers and the posited "subject(s)" of fiction. Kaja Silverman extends Emile Benevise's terms the "speaking subject" and the "subject of speech" to include the "spoken subject" as possible positions within the language game:

The speaking subject of the cinematic text is that agency responsible for the text's enunciation. The subject of speech, on the other hand, can best be understood as that character or group of characters most central to the fiction -- that figure or cluster of figures who occupy a position within the narrative equivalent to that occupied by the first-person pronoun in a sentence. (47)

The "spoken subject" is the "subject produced through discourse" (47), and can be closely related to the speaking subject, or can be as different as the reader him- or herself. Awareness of the subject position is crucial for a study of the game of literature; players -- both writers and readers -- are continually absorbed and reconstituted by the game of language.

The presence of spoken and represented subjects signals the disappearance of a transcendently guaranteed "self." Signifying relations may be centred in the speaking subject, but the spoken or represented subject is constantly re-played in the game of language. The rejection of the guaranteed self also corresponds to a rejection of a transcendental signified, an absolute self-identity. Language is viewed as a game not simply because it is rule bound, but because it no longer has any certain correspondence to the world. The "self" becomes a player speaking or spoken in the game, rather than an autonomous self universal and timeless, outside the game. In the absence of transcendence the game or "image of play," as Allen Thiher suggests, "offers a nontranscendental ground for Being and logos" (62).

Offering such a "ground" presents the danger of games being appropriated for foundationalist purposes, but the ludic metaphor always works both ways. Game-play cannot, Thiher says, merely offer a "provisional order" (158), but must also be willing to recognize chaos "as a fundamental state" (158) and threat to that order. The abyss or chaos that is revealed by the absence of transcendence either can be structured by a rational game-model or further accentuated by the "unrighting" of a game. The tension that is present in a game-model is the same tension that exists in the Bakhtinian model of "carnival": the sanctioned release into chaotic revelry and self-transformation.

The construction of the subject is closely related to the order-

disorder dynamic within a game-play situation. The player "open to language" is vulnerable to, or exhilarates in, a fluid, shifting subjectivity -- epitomized, Kroetsch says, by that "central carnivalistic shift, into representing the opposite sex" ("Carnival and Violence," 101-02) -- while the player exercising his or her resourcefulness on language and chaos employs the language-game as a form of "provisional order". Other issues besides language, subjectivity, and the order-disorder dynamic are connected with the implications of a play-game metaphor, but these three are vividly evident in the writings of both Kroetsch and Ford.

The representation and outcome of a game in fiction, Robert Wilson suggests, provides an insight or metafictional reflection on the writing or reading experience. "Anything may become a theme," Wilson says,

but when play and game concepts are threaded into narrative discourse it seems to cut close to the heart of the literary experience. There is *something* in the game/text analogy that seems hard to deny even if it is also hard to get straight. When play and game concepts metamorphose into themes, or lend their shapes to plot moves and episodic patterns (as in the godgame) or serve to characterize narrative agents, or merely provide symbolic interludes, they generate a fundamental reflexivity. To write about games or about play is to write about writing. (242)

As mentioned in the Introduction, much critical interest has been directed at Kroetsch's playfulness, but there has been little focus on the actual games in his text. Commentary on Ford has focused on his seriousness, overlooking or explaining away the overt games of *The Sportswriter* in particular. To write about the game of literature, I believe, it is necessary to write about the games in literature.⁸

Kroetsch's fictions illustrate all of Wilson's points: he utilizes a 151-day-long schmier game to shape a substantial part of the plot in *What the Crow Said*; bull-riding, baseball, winter carnivals, hockey, rummy and other games comprise significant episodes and/or symbolic interludes in almost all of the novels; William William Dorfendorf and Jack Deemer, of all of Kroetsch's narrators, are themselves most involved in games. As well as Wilson's examples, Kroetsch makes use of

a "childhood baseball memory" and teases-out the erotics of play in different formulations of his poetics and aesthetics.

Play and game concepts in Ford's writing function primarily as symbolic interludes -- boxing matches in *The Ultimate Good Luck* -- as characterizations of agents -- all four novels have a "natural" athlete for whom the "game of life" turns sour -- and as part of the tension between "playing games" and "being serious" that is a theme throughout Ford's writing. He recognizes the reflexive nature of writing and games, although he seems uninterested in the double-play of each: "Odd, isn't it, how literature has that double reflex? I would have to be a fool not to be aware of it, but you start looking in those double reflecting mirrors and you can look forever" (Bonetti, 87). His resistance to metafictional readings of his work does not, however, prevent a playful reader from abandoning Ford's "intentions."

Because neither Kroetsch nor Ford has employed a "big game" narrative in the sports literature tradition of Bernard Malamud's *The Natural*, and because they do tend to limit their overt games to episodes, those scenes seem to be primarily metafictional keys to the writing and reading process. The writer and reader are constituted through their engagement with language, just as the player's subjectivity is defined through his or her position in a game. Games in literature are multi-faceted sites of subjectivity: speakers/writers playing and being played by language; subjects played and written about; and readers being spoken to and brought into the play.

The speaking subject's engagement with language is, as I suggested earlier, the most difficult game of literature to pin down because it is pre-textual or process-oriented. Kroetsch, much more so than Ford, has discussed his own and others' writing in interviews and essays, but the comments of each provide some idea of how each imagines his engagement with language. They are, I stress, both "imagining" that engagement, and they as "subjects" are re-produced in each speaking of themselves. The "poetics" they offer are not to be taken as conclusive statements about their writing, but as further statements constitutive of the speaking subject. Whereas the speaking subject is sometimes blurred or

"disappears" in the work of fiction, the speaking subject is at least made present, even if in disguise, in the "non-fiction" writing.

Kroetsch's poetics regards the "game of writing" as axiomatic, and therefore he seems to extend the possibilities and complexities of referring to writing as a game. He is interested in the physicality of the writing games, its emotions and erotics, as well as its dangers to "self" or subject. Writing is never a formal game for Kroetsch, but he is acutely aware of its conventions. "Conventions" according to Robert Wilson, are "loose rules, . . . less abstract, more resistant to formulation, and altogether more flexible than rules" (85). Playing within or around with conventions is, in the absence of spontaneity, a form of game-playing.

The formality of game rules is clearly an impediment to effective communication, and for Roy Harris, that means the chess model of language is not applicable. Harris does not find Wittgenstein's belief that we can "make up the rules as we go along" (*Philosophical Investigations*, 83) helpful: "The whole point of the chess analogy is that the rules do determine in advance all the possible moves, and that the grammar of the game is not decided by individual players as the spirit moves them" (91). And if alternative game models -- games that are "improvised free-for-alls" -- are substituted for chess, they would not provide "the right model for explicating the institutional character of language, its regularity and its autonomy" (91).

Kroetsch writes from neither a formal game model nor a pure "free-for-all" model, but realizes that chess or any other game must be "skittled," destabilized and reconfigured to effectively represent the writing game.⁹ Harris is correct in saying that the analogy of chess as a model for language is not operative "however hard we try to stretch the analogy" (119). But by stretching the concept of a game, the analogy may begin to provide greater insight.

Rules and conventions preserve the proper playing of games, as well as protecting and offering some form of justice, to a player who has been illegally prohibited from playing, or injured in play due to an infraction. But if literature relies strictly on convention, and not rules, the "players" -- authors, readers, and characters -- are at a greater risk than formal game players. Some writers put themselves at

greater risk than others. Umberto Eco and Bernard Suits use Ian Fleming's 007 novels and pulp detective stories to illustrate rigidly conventional literary games that are safe and predictable for both author and reader; Kroetsch, on the other hand, says that he "plays on the edge of convention" and that fiction does not acquire a game element until it "risk[s] losing" (*Labyrinths*, 50).

Kroetsch risks the "self" and the body: "I take the risk of falling right into language. . . . I think a kind of erasure of self goes on in fiction making" (*Labyrinths*, 50). He also risks contradiction, disorder, and madness:

It's interesting that we **play** the **game**, isn't it? There is a double thing that goes on even in the statement which is very fascinating to me. The two words contradict each other in a signifying way. Play resists the necessary rules of the game. (*Labyrinths*, 50)

The "signifying way" in which the words contradict each other signifies the "madness," the excess, of games and literature. The rules and conventions make the games recognizable and comprehensible, but the rules and conventions are always strained by the play, the excess, that is not easily contained by structures.

For Kroetsch, it is the physicality and ethos of games, the willingness to risk body, self, and madness that draws him to the game/text analogy: "the body writes the poem. You must stand close to the plate: even when the ball comes straight at your skull. You must be that innocent" ("Taking the Risk" 67). Language is not something Kroetsch tries to control: he is willing to be hit by the pitch, he is willing to lose more than the game. Writing is a matter of taking risks within the necessary game system, even challenging and threatening the structure of the game, flirting with chaos and madness until the game is re-structured or exceeded. Writing is also risking one's "self" in an attempt to be "innocent," to let language inflict its pain, its energy, its danger, upon the body, and to then let the body write the poem or story.

Kroetsch recollects the tension of play and game, the risk to body and self, as being a part of his experience of baseball. The ball diamond, and the larger context of "fair day" -- a prairie carnival --

becomes a scene of writing for Kroetsch, a place where he was first exposed to the danger of language:

Beginnings: a Cree from the Hobbema Reserve. A baseball pitcher. At sports day, when the team that was on a winning streak ran out of pitchers, it was legal to send a car driven wildly over the gravel roads, to the Hobbema Reserve. He was too old, Rattlesnake, too big to be graceful. Sometimes he was too drunk. But he pitched ball like a man possessed. I was a kid, maybe 15, playing first-base because I was tall and all the real players were off to war. Rattlesnake threw the first two pitches straight at my head: inside curves, coming high, breaking straight at my skull. After that I stood too far back from the plate. Only years later did I understand that I'd met The Trickster. ("Taking the Risk" 66)

Throwing at batters is permissible (by convention, rather than rule) only when the hitter is crowding the plate, has hit the pitcher hard before, or when the pitcher is retaliating because the other team has broken some other unwritten convention. This Trickster, Rattlesnake, has no apparent reason to throw at Kroetsch, but for the Trickster the game and the tension are not enough if the conventions are not pushed.

Kroetsch at fifteen was not a "real player," he did not know how to play against a breaker of conventions as the "real players" would have. A "real player," Kroetsch realizes later, would stand in against the pitch. The pitcher/Trickster is not "unbeatable," for in the endless game of literature the pitcher can be played with. In an article with Diane Bessai, Kroetsch says, "Like all tricksters, . . . he [Coyote, from *Double Hook*] runs the risk of himself being tricked" ("Death is a Happy Ending" 209). The trick is to give oneself up to the game and/or language, to be as innocent as the Trickster: "he pitched the ball [he wrote] like a man possessed." The beanball sends a message.

The Trickster is not only innocent and unself-conscious, but also a man of excess, a "madman" of sorts: too big and too old to be graceful. "Grace" suggests an ease and refinement of movement, a perfect balance between order and chaos. Kroetsch's writing employs the

tension of "rule" and "play," but he sanctions excess, as in a carnival, rather than striving for a balance: it is *legal* to drive *wildly*. The play threatens to, or does, exceed the rules, and that excess is madness. Madness, according to Shoshana Felman, is "beyond control, precisely since, eluding a thematic apprehension, it is *rhetorical*, that is, consisting in the very principle of *movement*, in an endless, metaphoric transformation" (54). While his characters try to embrace order or exclude madness, Kroetsch keeps madness moving, rhetorically, throughout his writing. Kroetsch warns that when the reader encounters the author as Coyote, as trickster, "He [the reader] has entered a world where possibilities not only co-exist but contradict. Where thesis inspires antithesis" ("Death" 210). Where reason inspires madness.

The physicality of language is figured in the beanball, and in its source, Rattlesnake, but it can be actualized only through writing, through the marks on the page and the "book as it is read: a living body" (Josipovici, 33). The "body" produced by writing is also the progeny of a writing body, the product of intercourse with language. Sexual metaphors and sexual "play" blend into the game aspects of Kroetsch's poetics. Fore-play is teasing, arousing, a preparation, from the male perspective, for entrance into other bodies, into story, into a game. "Dare to enter. Dare to be carried away, transported" ("For Play and Entrance," 132), Kroetsch says. Dare to be "en-tranced!" (132). The speaking subject enters and is "en-tranced" by the production of language games, while the spoken subject, especially the reader, is either witness to the erotic game-play of writing, or becomes similarly "en-tranced" and involved. Kroetsch encourages a "whole body" experience of writing and reading the language game.

While Kroetsch's physical, exuberant poetics extends the possibilities of talking about the game of writing beyond the play with rules and conventions, Ford's poetics of seriousness challenges the connotations of frivolity and purposelessness that surround the game/text analogy. Ford, in fact, would rather reject all analogies to his writing. He tells Kay Bonetti that he doesn't like the idea of being considered "workmanlike," the obvious epithet for Ford, "because it seems plodding and uninteresting. It, to me, is just a writer's life, and it doesn't have any actual parallels" (76). Comparisons to

other disciplines or practices are "somewhat trivializing of the thing that I do" (76), Ford continues. Ford can, nevertheless, be discussed within the context of a game model in a way that does justice to his seriousness and his writing.

For the games in fiction to be taken seriously, and for the game of fiction to likewise be accepted, the "deep play" Clifford Geertz recognizes in the Balinese Cockfighters has to be recognized as part of fictional play and the process of creation. Geertz appropriates "deep play" from Jeremy Bentham's *The Theory of Legislation* (1802): "By it he means play in which the stakes are so high that it is, from his utilitarian standpoint, irrational for men to engage in it at all" (666). For the Balinese, Geertz says, the utility of money is a feature of "shallow" games in which there is actually little money involved. But for "deep" play, in which large amounts of money are involved, the real stakes are "esteem, honour, dignity, respect, and status" (667).

The commitment Ford has given writing sounds very much like deep play. Bruce Weber recounts Ford's first words to an undergraduate class: "I have just finished a novel, 674 pages in manuscript, that took me six years to write. I expect the same kind of dedication from you" (50). Ford is being both serious and making light of his seriousness, I suspect, because he recognizes the game that writing is, yet he values it immensely. His fiction suggests a denial of the importance of games, yet in focusing upon them so frequently he invests them with importance.

While Kroetsch talks openly of self-erasure in fiction, Ford speaks of both a self-sacrifice to and a self-championing of writing. Whether Ford recognizes or admits that his writing is a form of deep play, he clearly has engaged it at that level. Fiction writing, he tells Weber,

"is as potentially as useful a thing for a culture as there is. Not that I've been so useful, but it is as high a calling as you can have." And serious devotion to it, he says, purchases some rights: the right to presume, to make things up, to create. (64)

The self-sacrifice of Ford's writing takes the form of his commitment to the task, as well as sacrifice to language: "A sentence in my notebook will come at a place where I never imagined it. And that's really what

writing is for me, taking the raw stuff and recasting it into a logic that is its own" (Weber, 64). In this way, Ford is not completely removed from the poststructuralist position; he does accord language considerable power or what he elsewhere calls the "efficacy of language" ("The Three Kings," 581).. This self-championing, although still humble, takes the form of his demand for serious responses: "For better or for worse, literature is an important issue to me. That's what I've dedicated my life to, and I want to accord other people's work the same amount of seriousness as I do my own" (Bonetti, 89).

The seriousness extends beyond the writing process to the textual product. Again he undercuts his own seriousness, if only because it is such an extreme sense of "purpose:"

I like best of all stories whose necessity is in the implied recognition that someplace out there there exists an urgency -- a chaos, an insanity, a misrule of some dire sort which can end life as we know it but for the fact that this very story is written, this order found, this style determined, the worst averted, and we are beneficiaries of that order by being readers. ("Introduction," xxi)

Writing is not a day at the fair or carnival for Ford, although he obviously recognizes the presence of chaos that Kroetsch embraces. What seems most striking about the comparison of Ford and Kroetsch is that they apparently see the same fundamental state of chaos in the world -- as much as an "objective" world can be inferred from subjective accounts -- yet their writing shapes that world in very different ways. While Kroetsch's poetics tests the limits of the game, attempt to play the game of literature in increasingly involved ways, Ford's desire for order cannot be trusted to the mere game. A personal order must be asserted to ensure the efficacy of telling.

This serious pursuit of a purposeless activity, the playing of games, in both Ford and Kroetsch, is a value-laden term: games and play are, despite all claims of seriousness, or possibly because of claims to seriousness, purposeless and frivolous. Although Huizinga, Hans, and others argue that play is fundamental to human culture, play and games also connote privileges of class, gender, and race. Games, more so than play, suggest the institutionalized, organized systems of sport and

leisure that are most constantly before the public eye in the form of professional sports, Olympic competition, or organized leisure activities like golf, sailing, and general fitness. These events and activities are expensive to attend or participate in, and as models for young people they are dominated by male athletes. And while sports are racially balanced in many respects, racism still seems to dictate administrative and even playing positions. African-Americans are not only conspicuously absent from front-office positions, but also under-represented as coaches, quarterbacks, and pitchers -- the "brains" of a team. To suggest that a text is a game may evoke these connotations of class, gender and race domination -- and not wrongly, considering the similar patriarchal dominance of both games and literature.

But the game/text analogy does not have to re-inscribe these values. Kroetsch's most recent fiction engages issues of material control of discourse that his early fictions overlooked. As he expands the boundaries of the game, he becomes more interested in who is controlling it. Ford has consistently acknowledged the prevalence of sports in American culture, making it a part of his characters' lives. But he also turns away from sports and games to express his serious vision. He may recognize "deep play" in gaming activities, but he directs that commitment and involvement elsewhere.

The secondary literature on the games of/in literature has also turned its attention to concerns of constructions of the subject and control of the game. Robert Detweiler's survey of "literary games" in contemporary American fiction (1965-76) was ground-breaking in seeing the ludic relations between fictions of "exuberance and exaggeration," sports literature which placed particular games and players in central roles, and fiction which overtly played games and puzzles with the reader (48-49). But his categories identify only the product, and not the problems of production. Peter Hutchinson focuses exclusively on the "games authors play" with language and with readers. He sees authors engaging readers in a mutual play by: 1) posing enigmas which conceal or suppress information; 2) employing conventional games as "parallels" which "function as an interior duplication of narrative"; or 3) choosing narrators who are unreliable (23). Hutchinson makes the focus of the game of literature an interactive focus, although he pursues only the

author's attempts to engage the reader's imagination, not how the author engages the reader ideologically.

Christian Messenger acknowledges Detweiler's article as "the best attempt to classify the various games of recent fiction" (421), but Messenger significantly builds upon that work. He expands Detweiler's second category, sports fiction, into three more categories: the individual sports hero, the collective sports hero, and the anti-hero. He employs a Gremaisian "semiotic square" in which the play of the sports hero mediates his or her position as: 1) individual hero; 2) part of the collective; or 3) anti-hero. The grid is designed to "map out the field of sports fiction and give us conceptual points among which individual authors must range" (15). Messenger recognizes that he is not addressing the poetics of playing the game (442, n.3), but his emphasis on the play-spirit does recognize the construction of the subject in and through games and language. He also recognizes and discusses in some detail the distinct sporting experiences, and consequently distinct sporting novels, of women and black Americans.

Feminist and African-American treatments of the gaming experiences are two examples of further differentiation of the game/text analogy besides the poststructuralist and pragmatic formulations. The limits of this project prevent me from discussing other conceptions of the game/text analogy in detail, and my familiarity with Ford and Kroetsch determines my focus. The revisioning of games, sports, and texts by Nicole Brossard and Jenifer Levin, by Ralph Ellison and Barry Beckham, have influenced my readings of Kroetsch and Ford, but I only speculate, in the end, on where further study of the game/text analogy might lead.

Chapter Two: Kroetsch -- The Subject of the Game

A collector or archaeologist of gaming scenes in fiction will find in the fields of Robert Kroetsch impressive but eccentric ludic samples. The early specimens are often short and self-contained, but the more recent specimens sprawl and engross; the game is no longer easily distinguished from the "work." The older specimens parallel the game of writing allegorically and by association; the recent specimens become the game in form, effect, and experience. Kroetsch's fictions play out the philosophical concept of "language game" in creative, physical, and emotional incarnations.

Kroetsch, within a philosophical context, represents the view that language is autonomous from the subject, that language itself may structure human experience, rather than the subject structuring language. But what is this "language" that exists separate from and prior to the speaking subject? According to Allen Thiher's reading of Saussure, language is "a virtual code or system, that transcends any individual use of the system, and yet can be said to exist only as the totality of the individual language users' possession of the code" (69). Similarly seen through a metaphor crucial to Kroetsch's most recent fiction, language is the totality of a collection, but the viewing or expression of that collection is always limited by the speaking agent's use of language. The limitation, paradoxically, is also a fulfilment, for the collection contains nothing without a speaking agent. Kroetsch writes of the end of the universal "self," but not the end of the speaking subject or storyteller.

Stanley Fogel regards this give and take as a rejection of a "logos-theory of language" (82), but also an admission of a yearning for a centre, for an originary word and order:

[Kroetsch's] engagement with postmodernism, specifically the writings of Derrida, has in all likelihood germinated the scepticism he feels vis-à-vis language as a transparent medium and the self as autonomous. . . . Nonetheless his fiction shows a sympathy for those who strain to inhabit such a universe. (82)

Kroetsch seems more amusingly interested in, rather than sympathetic, to

compulsive, possibly insane, characters like Demeter Proudfoot, Professor Mark Madham, William Dawe, Gus Liebhaber, or Jack Deemer. Kroetsch recognizes and is interested in this impulse to assert one's "self" as autonomous, and accept language as transparent. But these storytellers, editors, and orderers are not free from or beyond the game of language. Nor is Kroetsch himself.

If autonomy is granted to language, and the subject exists only through language, the speaker, despite resistance, is ultimately played by the game. Kroetsch's tale-tellers are often chaotic characters "falling into language" or rational characters failing in their attempts to order language, while Kroetsch the author in his adopted innocence "stands in against the pitch." A reading of the author's game with language -- now the author who "writes," not the author who talks about writing -- begins with a focus on the fictive narrator, the subject of speech. Although by no means "Kroetsch himself," these narrators are attempting the language game in ways that make one focus on the writing or speaking subject.

The decentering of the subject through loss of autonomy is revolutionary, a recognition that no control of language is permanent, due either to the endless play of signification or the carnivalization of discourse. While "carnivalization" is sometimes considered a "willed," subjectively determined process, "Once one has defined carnival as transgression," Robert Wilson suggests, "it is logical to assimilate the concept to any extreme version of ludism, including deconstruction" (41). The carnival, often represented as a game in Kroetsch's poststructurally influenced writing, both transgresses rules and plays its players (and spectators) into new and fluid roles. This same subject spoken by or through language, while part of the revolution, now has no control over the changes. He or she is denied agency and absolved of responsibility, a "talking head" without a political will. Such is the fate of the poststructuralist subject.

In the chaotic political campaign of *The Words of My Roaring*, Johnnie Backstrom is a talking head without political direction or will. At his first political rally, hosted by his rival Doc Murdoch, Johnnie falls from silence in the face of taunting into language and the words he finally produces: "Mister, how would you like some rain?" (8). The

heckler, a supporter of Murdoch, follows with "Right after the election . . . if we vote for Johnnie Backstrom" (8). Johnnie tries to defend himself -- "That's not what I said" (8) -- but confusion and inaccurate "interpretations" arise. Such is the fate of falling into language as speaker or writer. Johnnie is, at least, "back in the game" (10), the game of politics and language.

Johnnie returns to the Coulee Hill beer parlour after his "promise," but is confronted with another mis-quotation: "You say you're going to make it rain, Backstrom" (13). Johnnie's words are no longer a question, but a statement. He begins to understand what it means to fall into language:

I was joking when I said that, about the rain. I had to give old Murdoch a smart answer. Why in hell couldn't people forget something? "You can't spend rain," I said.

Another smart answer that fizzled out. (13)

Johnnie has no political platform or direction; he represents only difference and change from old Doc Murdoch. As a point of political satire, Johnnie is interested in being MLA for the sake of "indemnity" (7), but the absence of any other political direction parallels his thoughtless, endless, linguistic play.

After his "smart answer that fizzled," he was off and riding the bull of language. Potent and horny, "it was more dangerous" to ride a young bull than a castrated steer (104-105). Johnnie witnesses a boy of about sixteen riding in the rodeo, but what he sees is his own ride of language:

That boy was a great crowd-pleaser. You could actually see the blood he drew.

And then the cowbell rang and the crowd started really cheering. The time was up. The rider had stuck it out, making points all the way for style. The judges up in the judge's booth were all writing notes. (105)

Johnnie's "hind-tit speech" to follow, like the bull-ride, is a great crowd pleaser, playing on westerners' animosity towards the corporate east, offering biblical and anti-corporate rhetoric with little substance (108). Then he draws blood, telling the crowd that the Doc, "he comes from the east himself" (111). The swing in popularity to

Johnnie can be seen as "making points all the way for style" because Johnnie has no political substance. The metafictional nature of the bull-ride and Johnnie's speech is confirmed by my act of writing notes here in the judge's booth, the ivory tower. The bull-ride proves to be what Hutchinson calls an "interior duplication of the narrative".

The game of language, once begun, is not easily brought to an end, just as the bull ride for the young cowboy is not over at the bell:

the bull wasn't finished. He kept bucking and turning. And the boy who had been riding so grandly suddenly looked scared. His hat was too new, that was a bad sign. He had got onto something and he didn't know how to get off. He'd planned on being bucked off, I suppose, and here he was riding the worst animal of the lot, and he wasn't losing. That was his trouble. (105)

Johnnie, prominently sporting a bowler and a new political hat, finds himself in a situation similar to the rider's, unable to lose because the voters have hung their hopes not on the substance of his words but on the "promise" he has evoked. He cannot lose the bullshit he has started to spread; the language keeps turning and bucking.

Johnnie could have been "bucked-off" politics and language by his hasty "promise" of rain, his dangerous drunk driving, his passionate attraction to Helen Murdoch, "which . . . was, politically speaking, about as reckless a thing as I could do" (55), or his idiotic purchase of a Model-A at an auction sale. But subjectivity as a site of language makes it possible to lose language only by losing one's "self" completely: death. Despite his recklessness, he can only keep playing, moving as a game-piece between hope, booze, Helen, the car, and whatever is to come for him.

Having seen the bull ride and the need to lose, Johnnie seems caught between playing to win and playing to lose. Identifying Doc as an easterner, Johnnie asks his audience: "Please get out and cast your votes -- for the doctor from Ontario, Murdoch, M.D." (111). But self-deprecation is a strong position for Johnnie because he has no claim to legitimacy, he has no platform or record of success to run on. He appears humble, he appears to be one of the people, and he is willing to

accept the loss, just as his people always accept losing out to easterners.

By risking the loss, by inviting the people to vote for Doc and securing his position in the game, Johnnie can then take a chance at winning. He maintains the position of self-deprecation, but identifies that as the position most voters are in: "If you agree that we must have back our self-respect, our sense of decency, our hope, our pride -- maybe then you should vote for the clown" (112). He, of course, is a clown, but he is also identifying himself with the clown who saved the young bull rider at the cost of his own life, the "clown who had stood up to a wild bull" (108). Johnnie is both the rider and the clown, but as Leon Surette suggests, Johnnie mistakenly thinks of himself as the clown only (18).

In his "heroic" state of mind, Johnnie delivers his "first major speech" (108). Now he thinks he controls language, outlining both his own and the Doctor's political "position." But his conclusion suggests how little his status has changed. He tells the crowd:

"You'd be bigger clowns yourself for voting for me--unless it rains by election day."

I choked up my throat. I've never been quite sure I intended to say that. I got carried away. Everybody kind of choked up. I guess they'd heard about me, word gets around. (113)

Johnnie can ride the bucking motion, but it is clear that he is never in control of the language -- "word gets around". Even at the end of the novel, with the rain pouring down, his prophecy somehow fulfilled, he now needs to explain that he had nothing to do with this miracle. He rides to town with an hour to prepare a speech: "Over and over I tried different approaches" (210); "somehow I would have to begin, . . . " (211).

Johnnie as "subject" is subject to the forces of language speaking through him. His public "self" is quite literally determined by the promise he did not make -- "Mister, how would you like some rain" -- and by the rain he did not create. The self is a construct, a collection, and not an essence. Johnnie believes he has to "make amends" for the "self" that has been constructed, for being the prophet and saviour he

imagines he will be received as. Suicide, the end of "self," is one possible amend. Telling, or "untelling" his "self" is the amend he decides to make, but as suggested above, he does not know where to begin. As he drives to the town meeting, his images of heroism and martyrdom suggest that he is again being seduced by language and his own telling of "self." One learns from references to Johnnie Backstrom, MLA, in *The Studhorse Man* and *Gone Indian*, that he could not lose.

Kroetsch's fall into language is not as innocent as Johnnie's fall -- Kroetsch is playing with, among other things, historical figures of Alberta politics and Edenic and Apocalyptic imagery -- but falling into language for the author, for the speaking subject, means acknowledging that one does not have a privileged relationship to the significance of one's own words. "Language, as signifier," Kroetsch says, "frees me into a new relationship with the signified" (*Labyrinths*, 209). Kroetsch's writing, like Johnnie's blurted speeches, can be interpreted in ways he cannot control. The "signifiers" become detached from any clear sense of "I," and he too is free to see in the language "signifieds" he did not recognize or "consciously" intend. Falling into language for the speaking subject, Kroetsch, is not nearly the dramatic "fall" Johnnie Backstrom experiences.

Kroetsch as "creator" seems to be controlling language, controlling his characters, and making a "name" for himself as a writer. Do we have any evidence to suggest his own "subjection" to language other than the examples of his "authorial" doubles like Johnnie Backstrom or his attempts to unmake himself in interviews? Do we believe "him" when he says that a self-erasure occurs in fiction or that he is "lucky" if language, "the great-given sounds, not over, but in [his] unique speaking" ("Voice/in prose," 35)? While not providing "proof" of language's dominance over its users, language's structure as a game, according to Spencer Wertz, would ensure that Kroetsch necessarily "erases" himself in writing: "The self is appropriated by the game (or by nature via a game). Playing a game is essentially a self-deconstructive activity. Phenomenologically, 'The player experiences the game as a reality that surpasses him,' Gadamer says (p.98)" (216). Kroetsch is describing language, the great-given, as surpassing himself.

The game, whether language or otherwise, would seem to appropriate the self by demanding compliance to rules and conventions. Kroetsch "gives in" to the use of conventions -- the oedipal struggle between Doc Murdoch and Backstrom; the binaries of chaos and order, movement and stasis, figured in Johnnie and Jonah Bledd; the apocalyptic imagery of the parched prairie, contrasted with Doc's lush garden -- but the "giving in" allows him the freedom to participate in the game. Conventions, as Wilson suggests, are open to permutations more so than are rules, making a "play" with conventions not an assertion of unique selfhood, but a manifestation of the game's potential play. Kroetsch can, and does, exhibit considerable control in his structuring, imagery, and use of intertextuality, but the significance of the game continues to exceed his intentions and control.

Kroetsch's fiction makes further characterizations of "authors" in competition with language, but these authors are trying to assert a self into, or in spite of, the game. Demeter Proudfoot, official biographer of Hazard Lepage and fictional narrator of *The Studhorse Man*, and Gus Liebhaber, editor and printer of the weekly "Big Indian Signal" in *What the Crow Said*, are trying to impose an order on language, on the whole world, that language will not easily submit to. The tension between order and chaos, reason and madness, like the tension between game and play, becomes a central theme in these two novels. However, rather than the games of these two novels being "internal duplications of the narrative" as the bull-ride of *Words* is, Proudfoot and Liebhaber engage in games and writing for a sense of order, control, and removal from the world. The ultimate failure of control, however, suggests that the subject is appropriated by the play of world and the play of language games.

The metaphor of game, according to Kroetsch's poetics, suggests a tension between play and rules, but Proudfoot and Liebhaber attempt to fulfil their desire for order by privileging the rules and conventions of hockey over the play of the game. Demeter "prefer[s] an ordered world" (61) to the disorder and uncertainty that Hazard ("chance") Lepage represents, and wants to morally and physically separate himself from "scurrilous, barbarous, stinking man" (174). He is, by choice, doubly isolated or "contained," living in a mental institution and

spending most of his time in a tub, possibly his "ship of fools".¹⁰

The ritual of listening to Hockey Night in Canada each Saturday further contains him, "the radio turned low, square and protective on the windowsill, glossy against the dark night beyond" (122). The radio and the ritual are further assurances against the uncertainty and disorder, the threat to "self," that seemingly lurks in the "dark night beyond." Demeter is aware of the "suppressed yet impending violence" in hockey, but for him, even that violence is neatly worked out by the game's code of conduct: "Uniforms identify the enemy, the friend. Each man guards his place. When you are struck, you strike back. Bobby Orr steps into Keon" (122). The play of the game is highly structured and contained by Demeter's simple axioms. He also lists his "name hoard" of "forever youthful names:" "Terry Sawchuk and Glenn Hall. Gordie Howe. Pierre Pilote. Stenkowski and Horton of the Leafs. My Rousseau plays right wing. Here is Ullman for Detroit . . ." (122). The "game" has become or has been transformed by Proudfoot into such a stable entity that he can attach eternal "selfhood" to the names he recollects.

A rejection of the decentred self does posit "the game" as a stable environment for self and story, a "grounding" for "logos and Being" as Allen Thiher suggests. Wertz challenges the earlier notion of self he offered -- the self appropriated by the game -- suggesting instead that "games are our last possibility of where every story has an unequivocal interpretation" (216). Not only does Demeter Proudfoot listen to hockey with a sense of "unequivocal interpretation," but that certainty becomes a part of his sense of self.

Gus Liebhaber similarly becomes involved with hockey as an attempt to confirm a sense of self. Liebhaber, lonely and fearful of Gutenberg's legacy, recognized that "to withdraw from society was folly. . . . He resolved to embrace mankind" (71). He tries to avoid the folly of isolation through his role as hockey referee and general patriarch at the Big Indian Arena:

Liebhaber settled all differences, on the ice or in the skating shack; he dealt out justice; he won outstanding praise for his objectivity and fairness -- he, that same Liebhaber who only recently had been alone. He was quite simply the patriarch (73)

Because Liebhaver is involved with the game, rather than being a "spectator" like Demeter, the disorder of the play is immediately apparent. His first game results in a brawl involving all players and spectators: "Much of the population of Big Indian was on the ice, kicking, flailing, bashing, screaming, crying, jerking, beating" (73). Hockey appeals to Liebhaver not because of its chaos, but because the game and its rules grant him the authority to assert order in bedlam. "Liebhaver was the hero. He walked over to a box on a post by the skating rink shack and turned out the lights. He was able, that night, single-handedly, to assert order" (73). The wild play is not a threat to his role as referee; it provides him with an opportunity to assert order and to assert himself, the hero. Being referee confirms for himself and Big Indian his sanity and his self: he thinks he has drawn the line that will keep madness out.

The goal of controlling disorder is to fix or maintain order, to suppress disorder permanently. Demeter, now three removes from the disordered world he rejects, expresses his desire to be contained permanently within his hockey ritual. "Oh, how we hate to see spring come to this land," Demeter says (123). The beginning of the hockey season is signalled by the "comforting fall of snow," making Demeter's conception of hockey's season an ironic pastoral of frozen sterility, and seemingly a "freeze" against disorder and the proliferation of meaning. It is appropriate that Demeter -- who hopes man, "in the sterility of his own lust, [will] screw himself into oblivion, erase himself like a rotting pestilence from the face of God's creation" (174) -- is fascinated by a sport that in his pastoral image tries to hold on against, or hold off, the re-birth of spring. Demeter has no desire to re-play himself into the "disorder" of the world beyond his ordered arenas. His desire is undone, however, by the larger play of the world; the coming of spring and summer will melt his isolation.

The status and authority that Liebhaver attains as referee moves him, he feels, beyond the threat of "anonymity" that "penniless, friendless," Gutenberg faced (73). Liebhaver cannot guarantee his status in the game itself, but he:

hit on the notion that he might avoid Gutenberg's fate by making a few autobiographical notes. *I am become my own legend*, he typed on the big machine; he was secure, there in the night, the matrices falling into place at his command.

(74)

Liebhaber's grammar raises doubts about his sanity; his security, authority, and legend are short lived. Neither hockey nor autobiography freezes one's self, immemorial, as both Demeter and Liebhaber imagine, but instead the play of games and writing keep life and meaning moving across the otherwise sterile earth. Tiddy Lang brings Liebhaber the news that her daughter Gladys was impregnated by everyone at the hockey game (75). Liebhaber, "the man who had given [the people of Big Indian] justice, truth," was undermined by the carnival¹¹ of the hockey brawl (75). He cries out, "Fuck!," naming the act of transgression, the excess, that was the "the world's deceit of her wistful fools" (75). "Madness" and the play of the game are not dispelled simply by officiating hockey or writing autobiographical notes. The uncertainty and disorder that Liebhaber felt he had excluded were present, even generated by, his act of bringing order to the brawl: he should not have turned off the lights.

The play (of hockey) in Kroetsch's novels crosses the arbitrary (red) line between madness and reason, and by association, the play of language overwhelms the writing self. Liebhaber's arbitrary "ordering," his attempt at drawing a line between madness and reason, only encouraged more play, more madness.¹² Demeter Proudfoot similarly finds his desire for human sterility and a stable "self" unfulfilled. He "completes" his biography of Hazard Lepage with an account of contraception,¹³ but "Demeter's" mythological fertility and the continuance of his name as the name of Martha Proudfoot's daughter suggest both reproduction and the fluidity of sexual and personal identity.

Kroetsch's representations of the authorial "self" engaged in a game with language consistently depict language's overwhelming of the "self." If language consumes the writing self, that subject which both consumes and is consumed as Johnnie Backstrom suggests is his fate (95), what is the fate of the reader in the game of language? Is it the task,

the role, the "position" of the reader to make sense of the excess, the madness that flows over, or even through, the writing self? The repetition of the number "five" in *The Studhorse Man*, for example, establishes a pattern, but the recurrence of fives also seems excessive, outside the pattern. The apparent "reason" of Kroetsch's novels might drive one crazy in an attempt to make sense of the game.

Miss Boxer cuts a five of hearts, and from then on the fives are inescapable: five rummy players, five fingers, five vowels, five senses, five points on the compass as recognized by the Indian, the five petalled Alberta rose (51); five neat columns of bills at the wedding, each column headed by a stack of five bills (105); five days passed between Hazard's dream of being hounded and abused and the actual fact of this abuse (114); five years John Backstrom, the owner of the funeral home in Notikewin, site of a mysterious break-in, had been away (119); Demeter refers to "The Five Horses" of Li Lung-mein as exemplary representations of the equine (134); Martha owned five virgin mares that Demeter tried to mate with Poseidon (140, 160); and the five of hearts comes up again --the parish priest's housekeeper, Mrs. Laporte, was playing solitaire when Hazard arrived, the five of hearts showing on the bottom of the deck (143). The five of hearts seems to tie this numerology together, and point to the procreative process, but many of the fives -- the five fingers, vowels, senses, compass directions, the five days and the five years -- seem merely incidental facts, excesses that appear to belong to the pattern, but do not really make sense.

The "temptation of meaning,"¹⁴ the temptation to make sense out of the numbers, leaves one trying to make sense of "fours" as well. Four-play, in *The Studhorse Man*, ironically comes after the procreative process of five-play: the fire-truck arrives at the parish house, scene of Hazard's encounter with Mrs. Laporte, in four minutes (145), and Demeter used a four-tined fork to clean up after Poseidon finally bred with Martha's mares in Hazard's mansion (174). While I seem to be playing with numbers, the autonomy of self is as much at issue for the reader as it is for the author. The "game" of reading seems to be a choice of: 1) playing the game the author has or may have set out for readers; 2) playing one's own game with the text; or 3) engaging with the text in such a way that it plays you.

When a text presents a proliferation of numbering, as *The Studhorse Man* has done, the game I perceive myself as "directing" may in fact have been designed by the author, because I am still working closely with the text. Texts like Kroetsch's predispose the reader towards game playing, and one is no longer certain if one is the player or the plaything. Rather than playing the excess of meaning against the text, as Eco plays textual complexity against the apparent simplicity of Ian Fleming's 007 novels, one plays the excess of meaning as a part of, or extension of, the playful text. Highly playful texts protect themselves against a reader's wilful playing of their sign-system. The reader as "spoken subject," the product of Kroetsch's particular poststructuralist discourse, is fashioned like his subject of speech and the speaking subject, constituted, Silverman suggests, in and by language (50).

What the Crow Said, of all of Kroetsch's novels, has been most often regarded as a game for the reader to play or be played, a game Susan Rudy Dorscht says one can "put together and dismantle . . . in whatever way [one] chooses, telling [one's own] story" (*Women, Reading, Kroetsch*, 78). Or as Brian Edwards thinks, it is a game that Kroetsch has set up between text and reader, himself disappearing ("Textual Erotics," 71). In Rudy Dorscht's "free play," however, is an element of cheating, an ignoring of the loose but present conventions Kroetsch plays with in this novel. Neither Rudy Dorscht nor Edwards reads the lengthy schmier game as a model for reading, an engagement with a game that demands complete commitment yet yields only provisional results. Kroetsch returns to something like the "internal duplication of narrative," yet the game is so extensive it becomes a major portion of the narrative.

The schmier game suggests a new and expanded vision of "game" in Kroetsch's writing. Rather than there being an immediate tension between the play of the game -- the ongoing activity -- and the resolution of the game -- its goal or purpose -- Kroetsch's card players seriously engage in an activity that only incidentally generates a purpose. The game begins because of the "inadequacy of truth" (76), the excessiveness that resulted in Gladys' pregnancy, but the players play without knowing exactly how their game will address this inadequacy.

Valuing the game and play itself becomes the purpose. "It was the black crow who began to sense the desperate nature of the playing. Some awful pressure that the men themselves did not understand was holding them in thrall" (85). If writing holds the reader in thrall as well, this game-model is certainly not suggesting that one can put the game together anyway one chooses.

The players are at first desperate to win simply because "the consequences of not winning were too terrible to contemplate" (98). An extra-lusory purpose -- a reason beyond simply playing the game -- becomes evident when hangman Marvin Straw arrives for what he thinks is Rita Lang's wedding. Straw is to return to Prince Albert within three days to hang Jerry Lapanne, one of Rita's convicted correspondents, unless the card players can keep him in the game:

Liebhaber, at that instant, for the first time in his life, cheated at cards. He withheld an ace and Marvin Straw, finally, counted two points. . . . A couple of the men at the table had noticed Liebhaber's gesture: and they too began to understand. A man's life was at stake. (106)

This purpose changes the dynamics of the game somewhat: "They were playing to win, and to win they had to lose" (108). To achieve the new "purpose" of the game, however, complete commitment must be given to the new structure of the game. Just as one reads literature for many purposes, one must first be committed to the text, to a reading and understanding of that text, before it can serve an extra-textual purpose.

Having successfully delayed Straw and interrupted the game with excessive drunkenness, the play resumes with the purpose of playing until John Skandl returns to Big Indian. The players are out of money and Skandl would be "the richest and rashest player ever. Their finely honed card skills would make them all winners" (118). This purpose needs some refining when it is apparent Skandl is not coming immediately:

they would play until one man had all the real money. The winner must use it to leave Big Indian and travel in search of John Skandl.

The battle went on for six hours, some of the men

desperate to win, desperate to leave the game, the granary,
the town itself. (120)

The goal again may be extra-lusory -- to leave the game -- but it still requires a complete commitment to the game. Even Isador Heck, who does not believe in the existence of a world beyond the Municipal District of Bigknife, "couldn't resist bidding four on such a near-perfect hand" (121). He receives the same hand three times, and makes the bid three times, to win the game. Conventions cannot be ignored in a "deep" playing of a game.

That purpose fulfilled, the game reverts to a simple desperation to win. After 151 days of playing, Liebhaber still wants to refuse Tiddy Lang's invitation for all the players to return to her home for food and warmth. "'No,' Liebhaber said. He was ahead in the game, about to win a few nails and some pieces of broken glass and a pile of round stones they'd dug up from the frozen riverbed with their bare hands. 'Never'" (126). The "spell" of playing is finally broken by the other players' desire to leave the game and return to their lives, but they have fully addressed the "inadequacy of truth" by committing themselves to an irrational activity. "Truth" is a commitment, however irrational, not an objectively given fact. The "game" of this novel seems to require a commitment to the discontinuous, often vague narrative. Reading the schmier game metafictionally, one is not invited to construct "tellings" any way one desires, although extra-textual "tellings" may arise from a deep involvement with the text.

The schmier game is a new kind of game representation for Kroetsch because it is a major event in the narrative, more than a metafictional "aside" or parallel -- although it is that too. The "action" is metafictional, but so is the "attitude," the players' involvement in the game. Kroetsch seems always to have recognized writing as being game-like, but he moves further towards a vision of the whole story, the whole text, as a game that engages both writer and reader. Crow presents a series of games and play -- hockey, schmier, Gladys bouncing her ball, Joe Lightning playing shuffleboard -- that confront the reader and make him or her account for the relation between textually represented games and the games of writing and reading. The fiction to follow takes this pattern further.

Reading *Alibi* and *The Puppeteer*, one cannot focus on the represented games for metafictional guidance -- only one formal game is depicted in the two novels¹⁵ -- but the reader is positioned by the informal game of collecting. The reader is a collector of stories as well as a specimen "collected" by the texts' narratives. One "enters" and is "en-tranced" by the mysteries and erotic play of these two novels, much as the players of *schmier* were engrossed by their game. The experience and emotions associated with playing games become more dominant than the "mechanics."

"It may be," Kroetsch says, "that entering a book is a kind of ritualistic act just as entering a football stadium is" (*Labyrinths*, 53). To "enter" a book or a sports arena, or for a man to "enter" another body, is ritualistic primarily by virtue of the "pre-start" state of mind induced, the anticipation of participating in an unfolding, a disclosure, and a climax. To "enter" is not to merely open the pages of a book and begin reading, nor to simply penetrate and "do it," nor to hand over your ticket and walk through the turnstile; to "enter" as Kroetsch's *Alibi* suggests, is another version of giving one's "self" up to the game, a ritual passage over thresholds in the unmaking or re-making of self.¹⁶ Entering *Alibi*'s eroticism as voyeur, mystery-game as plaything, or word play as player engrosses the reader in a "whole-body" ludic experience.

The masculine connotation of sexual entry requires a female counterpart for involvement with the text/game, unless, of course, Kroetsch is merely constructing the reading subject as male. William Dorfendorf, the writing subject of *Alibi*, makes journal entries, a process Karen Strike, Dorf's "editor," sees as Dorf stepping outside himself: "You invent yourself, each time you sit down to make an entry, and I feel envy. Watching you" (61). Karen, as the keeper of human rules (24) and fixer of "self" through photography, is less likely to "enter" language and invent herself, but she does "touch" herself as Dorf tells her about his sexual encounter with Julie Magnuson. This masturbatory touch gestures towards a balancing of "entry" and "touch," although masculine imagery continues to dominate both terms. Karen's orgasm is phallic -- "She came hard and long" (27) -- and does not rival the experience of Dorf entering Julie in the Radium Hot Springs: Dorf

felt as if he was entering her with his whole body because "the water was the temperature of the inside of her body" (24).

Kroetsch initially seems to pair "entry" and "touch" as male and female ways of sexual "knowing" or experience, but upon entering the mud bath at Laspi in his traditionally male way, "prick first" (166), Dorf suddenly finds himself "in touch with the world; . . . the world was my body" (167). Dorf begins to appropriate the touch as the preferred way of knowing and being because he is brought to a phenomenal orgasm at the hands of female bathers (179-80). Touch also brings him to ecstasy in the dark cave of the final "official" chapter: "We must simply find each other. We must touch into being and then be touched" (225).. To be touched and to be "named" -- "naming ourselves into new names" (227) -- is to re-figure the subject, to move outside, in ecstasy, the "old self." The touch accomplishes what Dorf's journal entries accomplish. Ecstasy is the experience of being in the game and out of self, whether entered or touched or named into new, and discontinuous, being. Kroetsch has doubled the possibilities for male ecstasy, but in doing so, he does not "redress" the exclusion of the female reader.

Robert Lecker believes that *Alibi*, as an erotic text, can never allow the reader to "enter" or "touch" the story: "The text reminds the reader that he is separate, alone, and watching" ("Contexts of Desire," 87). The text as "striptease" seems to be constructed as female, and Lecker has constructed the reader as male: "he is separate, alone, and watching". While it seems to be impossible to circumvent the gendered implications of "entrance," if the text is considered a game rather than a striptease, it can be engaged with metaphors other than just sexual. The text as a game and particularly as an enigma, first engages the reader with a mystery -- why is the text an alibi? -- then engages the reader not as a "solitary" observer but as a "called upon" witness to an alibi. Those who know that Jack Deemer, Dorf's boss, is "collecting the world" are "part of the conspiracy" (25) according to Dorf. Those who read Dorf's journal entries may not believe him, but all alibis, as enunciative acts, call upon witnesses for support or contradiction. *Alibi* may be "erotic" in withholding its disclosure, but as one becomes engrossed by the mystery and a witness to the "undoctored" samples of Dorf's journal, including his alleged shooting of Dr. Manny de Medeiros,

one becomes a part of a textual conspiracy. The reader has been "collected" into the net of the story.

Alibi in its very title also "collects" the reader in series of puns. An "alibi" is an excuse, but comes from Latin meaning "elsewhere". The reader's distance from the text implied by Lecker -- his or her position elsewhere -- is traversed by the "entertained" reader, the reader who enters, is en-tranced, and is "held" by the touch of the text. The puns literally construct and possibly disgust the reader as one who "enters." The authorial game of punning may bring the reader into the game of the text, but it may also lead him or her back to "elsewhere," or simply nowhere. The series of puns and the text itself can be seen figured as a collection of locks:

mounted in doors that were mounted in the middle of a large room, doors that led from nowhere to nowhere, the exquisite complexity of their locks available to any who would look, the secret connivance of figure and letter and sign, available, teasing the eye that would know, confounding the mind with the very unwillingness to hide. (14-15).

Unlocking the "significance" of the puns and texts seems less important than admiring their complexity, than being "teased" by their openness and unwillingness to hide. *Alibi* is very much "performance," as Lecker suggests (87), but an author's "play with language" always requires more than a passive presence of a reader. The text constructs an en-tranced reader.

The language game both collects and is collected. It collects the words and intentions of all speakers, but it also requires its players -- its speakers, writers, and readers -- to express all that it has. To be an agent for Jack Deemer, collector, and an agent of language, Dorf had to be a "completely free man" (7), an open site which would allow language and the collector's desire to each manifest itself (133). Yet Deemer's desire, and language, can only take shape through Dorf:

The collection itself only confirms the discontinuity of this scattered world; it's my talk that puts it together. I rave the world into coherence for Deemer; he sits there on his little hill called a mountain, Mount Royal; he sits

there, silent, and now by God he wants to collect the law too. (195)

Dorf's ravings, in turn, are edited and organized by Karen Strike, and readers further order and "edit" the text they read. Does the reader, by virtue of his or her diachronic position -- the "last" to come to the text -- assume the position as "supreme" collector, or does the assembler's "intention" or desire to "collect the law" determine the viewer's perspective? Questions of the subject's autonomy still pervade Kroetsch's game/text -- "who is the puppet, who the puppeteer?" (*The Puppeteer*, 123) -- but in *Alibi* and *The Puppeteer*, money proves to have a role in the control of language and the construction of subjectivity.

Kroetsch does not abandon his poststructuralist belief in language's pervasiveness in *The Puppeteer*; he just introduces a "competing interest." Writing is still not an easily willed act for this novel's authorial figure, Maggie Wilder. She is an aspiring author and apparent teller of this tale, but she must enter a different persona to write; she must put on a wedding dress which tells its story through her. "Wearing the dress, she could hear the story she intended to tell" (2). Is Maggie a writer, or an auditor hearing, reading, or transcribing somebody else's story? She is writing what she considers the autobiography of the dress (15). Jack Deemer, in the end, wears the same wedding dress to tell his story through Maggie. The writer does not appear to be the puppeteer.

Readers, like Deemer reading over Maggie's shoulder, or the readers on the calendar in Maggie's kitchen, are figured more like the puppeteer. The calendar suggest the power and danger of the printed word circulated and read by the "wrong" eyes:

The Japanese print on the calendar beside the fridge was by Utamaro. In the upper left-hand corner a man read a love letter while behind him his mistress, raising a mirror to cast more light, tried to read over his shoulder, while under the verandah a spy read the trailing end of the long letter. (6)

Maggie finds that she is "known" by the collection of stories she has published, just as the letter writer will be "known" to the unintended readers. Thomas Bludgett, when Maggie meets him for the first time,

accuses her of not looking like the picture on the back of her book (26). He also makes imputations about her knowledge of Greece and possession of the much-sought-after wedding dress. Maggie, the speaking subject, has been constructed by at least one of her readers.

Maggie's husband, Henry Ketch, finds out through her writing the reason she married him: "I read your goddamned story. You got married to a wedding dress, not to me. Don't tell me about it" (224). Maggie tries to convince Henry that the story is not about them, but he has read a version of his wife and himself in the discourse. The writer, like the writer of the love letter, cannot control who will read her words, or how they will be taken.

Deemer takes up a position behind Maggie not unlike the one figured in the calendar, "reading over her left shoulder," even as he says, "Maggie Wilder is writing this" (17). Deemer presents himself as philanthropic patron, helping Maggie to tell the story of "her" wedding dress, but, in his position as reader and teller, he is able to tell himself into her story:

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.

Surely I was that stranger. Had I intruded myself into their passion? Had I been invited? Was Papa B, behind his little gang of puppets, somehow calling into Maggie's presence a presence that was mine? Who was the puppet, who the puppeteer? (122-123)

Karaghiosi is the famous Greek puppet Papa B (Dorf) has invoked to help him tell himself back into the world, but Deemer cannot resist the temptation to insert himself into the story.

Deemer may at first appear to be Lecker's ideal voyeuristic reader in that he imagines Maggie undressing for him, even though she did not know him at the time. Yet Deemer blurs the distinction between text and reader that Lecker insists is necessary in the erotic text. By telling himself into the story he is no longer the puppet controlled by narrative hands. Deemer realizes the reader's potential as puppeteer,

although his dual role as both reader and storyteller will eventually undermine him.

Deemer's privileged position as "puppeteer," as controller of both a text and "free agents" like Dorf, Maggie Wilder, or Karen Strike, is the direct result of his wealth. While Kroetsch's previous novels have featured penniless, will-less characters like Johnnie Backstrom falling into language, or wilful but "marginal" characters like Demeter Proudfoot and Gus Liebhaber being unable to control the proliferation of meaning, Jack Deemer represents the material, political will that does control the distribution or circulation of meaning. His wealth almost puts him outside the game of language, in a re-deeming position:

maybe he was trying, I decided, over a fresh glass of beer,
maybe he was trying to put the world back together again.
After killing someone. Maybe, instead of just trying to buy
the world, he was hoping to buy it and reassemble it too.
According to his own design, of course. (*Alibi*, 37)

While Kroetsch has always figured himself and his authorial characters as "playthings" of language, Deemer is on the verge of asserting his "design" over language. A "millionaire Calgary oilman," Deemer has the means, the will and the "pastime . . . to collect anything that was loose" (*Alibi*, 7). What all his collections, gathered in four warehouses in Calgary, mean or say when regarded as a whole, may, in fact, be beyond his ultimate control, just as Kroetsch has repeatedly shown all texts are collections beyond the control of their authors. But as an "artist" Deemer has at his disposal the resources, the means, to write "the final book" ("For Play," 131).

Reading, writing, and collecting are all games, but not necessarily the innocent activities Kroetsch's poetics suggests. The lack of political will figured in Johnnie Backstrom is sharply in contrast with the material, political force Jack Deemer claims to assert: "You don't put together a collection of collections without first putting together a little heap of the stuff that buys collections. Once in a while I had to make the rules fit the occasion" (*Puppeteer*, 71). One of his projects is to "stop the flow of time so I could take a closer look" at the "death" of Julie Magnuson (73). He employs Karen

Strike and her photography skills; she needed the money and he had it (73).

Deemer's ability to cover-up his "murders" might also be the result of making the "rules" fit the occasion. Fish, in *Alibi*, tells how Deemer's partner supposedly died of food poisoning, but it was in fact murder because "the well was Deemer's first million" (39). The logic escapes Dorf, but in *The Puppeteer*, Fish is working for Deemer -- a means of control -- and Deemer takes the opportunity to tell his own version of the story. The partner was struck by a falling beam and left with plenty of food to survive (205). Fish's and Deemer's stories concur that the man was eaten by a family of lynx, but Deemer has "untold" at least one version of his "self" constructed by others. Starting as a reader, Deemer takes over the "game," the telling, to the point where *The Puppeteer* becomes his first-person narration. The paradox of being the reader/puppeteer is that he is then transformed into the teller, the puppet. One's identity, regardless of wealth, is never stable.

Deemer, like the other "ordering" figures of Kroetsch's fiction, does not desire to lose himself in the game, but recognizes that he is not fully beyond the game's play: "Collectors too are collected, as I well know" (175). Deemer's transformation from reader to teller is the fruition of his "self" being collected and constructed by language, regardless of wealth. Deemer has taken to wearing the dress that Maggie had done her writing through, a dress that by the end of the novel he is beginning to fill-out, "especially at those recurring times when I have a tendency to retain water" (265). To put on a piece of clothing, to wear a particular disguise in *The Puppeteer*, is to become that person. As Deemer is transformed by the dress he is transformed from reader to storyteller, from puppeteer to puppet, from collector to collected.

The reader "outside" the text, like Kroetsch outside the text, is never subject to the same dramatic "fall into language" or transformation through language as are the characters of fiction, but he or she is variously constructed as puppet or puppeteer. Presented with the two versions of Deemer's partner's death, or presented with the numerous relations of *Alibi* and *The Puppeteer*, the reader has to evaluate the "authenticity" of tellings, or more aptly, pull together

the narrative threads of the two novels. But in speaking of some synthesis, even formulating it in a reading, the reader in turn becomes a "teller" and now the puppet of language. "Who is the puppet, who the puppeteer," speaks to the simultaneity and fluidity of reading and creating.

Collecting, Robert Wilson suggest, is a game, and not surprisingly, collecting is also closely associated with language:

The concept of collection . . . stands for the wider one of language. . . . Language collects, as postmodern writers persistently observe, and (the gap between signifier and signified being the only absolute in which one may possess absolute confidence) it does so arbitrarily: discourse is a verbal collection, a lexical museum, much as a collection is an ocular discourse. (*Palemedes*, 120-21)

The "arbitrariness" of collections, the arbitrariness of the language game and its construction of subjectivity, is an invigorating and joyous process for Robert Kroetsch. He will not play his games with language unless he is promised the opportunity to lose, which suggests he has little inherent to lose. He entices his readers into a similar experience of chaos and order, an experience of only the most temporary, provisional order. Such seems to be the privileged position of poststructuralism, a philosophy that treats life only as a game, in all the frivolity and seriousness that a game implies.

Chapter Three: Ford -- Life is Not a Game (but language is)

Richard Ford's apparent postmodernism is a puzzle in that his views of indeterminacy and pluralism seem irreconcilable with his tightly realistic prose, the prose of naturalism, "the way the world is." The traditionally realistic form of Ford's fiction would seem to suggest that language, for him, is transparent -- a picture rather than a game -- yet his fiction and aesthetics articulate a world in chaos, a world at play.

Although Ford seems to be stretched between a traditional realism and postmodern sensibility, Alan Wilde would not likely be comfortable in considering Ford a "midfictionist." Ford has little experimentation in his work to oppose the traditional realism, the necessary tension needed for Wilde's definition of "midfiction." Wilde would likely group Ford with his friend and fellow realist Raymond Carver, both "practitioners [of] a pinched and meagre resignation, a resentfully cynical acquiescence to "things as they are" and, so it is implied, must be" (4). The "real" midfictionists, according to Wilde, include Max Apple, Stanley Elkin, and Donald Barthelme. Kroetsch, I think, could be considered among this group.

Yet Ford's realism is not so pinched and meagre as it might first appear. The exuberance and excess of chaos and madness are seldom overtly manifested in Ford's writing, but they are clearly on the verge of pushing through the tight control he and/or his narrators struggle to maintain. Realism's transparency may seem to disconnect it from epistemology, but Arthur Saltzman suggests that realism is actually a "mode of inquiry instead of stylistic program per se" (424). Realism or minimalism, as Saltzman prefers to label the writings of Carver, Ford, Ann Beattie, Tobias Wolff, and Mary Robinson, is not a "boiling down of the world" (423) but a "way of asking questions about the contemporary world" (424). Ford's realism may be asking, "Can we make sense of the world in straightforward ways?"

Another non-traditional feature of Ford's realism is that it has to be asserted, rather than merely accepted as a representation of "things as they are." Realism becomes a way of "structuring the void,"¹⁷ an assertion of, as well as an inquiry into, knowledge.

Knowledge is never certain for Ford's characters, but they attempt to satisfy themselves with the "solidity" of an experience. Gesturing at or against "monsieur texte," Derrida, Ronald Sukenick seems to be speaking for the realist or minimalist movement: "Language is a self-contained system. Oui, monsieur. But the art of fiction and poetry lies precisely in opening that system up to experience beyond language" (11). Ford, in his first two novels, *A Piece of My Heart* and *The Ultimate Good Luck*, tries to open that system up from the outside using a third-person narrator. In his two most recent novels, *The Sportswriter* and *Wildlife*, he tries to open the game up from the inside, each novel narrated in the first-person.

Ford does not overtly offer his texts as games to be played, although the reader has to constantly respond to the possibility of irony and the presence of lies. He treats the "language game" pragmatically, as a system that can work, rather than a system that needs to be constantly questioned and reflected upon. The reflexivity of games in his fiction suggests that holding onto the illusion too long is ultimately destructive.

A hard-nosed pragmatism is evident in many of Ford's characters, supporting a pragmatic view of language. The pragmatic view of language offered by Richard Rorty in "Is There a Problem about Fictional Discourse?" (*Consequences of Pragmatism*, 110-138) is that it should in fact be recognized as a game and not a picture, and consequently there would not need to be any philosophizing about language and its ability to express any correspondence or "picture" theory of "truth." But Rorty also recognizes that the "picture theory of language" is absolutely essential for irony, for the tension between appearance and reality, and for the gap between language and the thing it tries to speak about. The picture theory of language is "employed" as a strategy in certain games. Language is a game, but its users still have to make it "work" to their advantage. Rorty for that reason privileges Wittgenstein's metaphor of language as a "tool," making a pair like Rorty and Ford considerably less playful than Derrida and Kroetsch, but not completely opposed in their views of language.

There is a deconstructive side to pragmatism, Charlene Haddock Seigfried says. She agrees with Rorty "that pragmatism, like

poststructuralism, insists that it is impossible "to step outside our skins . . . and compare ourselves with something absolute" (108). But pragmatism and poststructuralism begin from different starting points:

Experience, rather than language, is the central interpretive principle privileged by pragmatists. . . . They are suggesting ways to cut off the infinite interpretive regress of free-floating language games without having recourse to metaphysically grounded absolute claims or to what Lyotard calls the "terrorism of ultimate signifiers."
(109)

The difference in starting points -- quite literally -- between Ford's *The Sportswriter* and Kroetsch's *The Puppeteer* is this very difference between experience -- starting with what one knows -- and language -- starting with how one names.

Ford's novel begins: "My name is Frank Bascombe. I am a sportswriter" (3). Bascombe continues by describing exactly where he lives and what the house looks like. Neither Ford nor Bascombe is oblivious to the difficulties of presenting experience through language -- Bascombe cannot tell us exactly what the "good life" is, nor whether he has experienced it (3) -- but rather than interrogate language further, Bascombe switches back to the facts: he is no longer married, one of his children has died, the other two are alive and wonderful (3). Chris Messenger regards a witness of sports like Bascombe as having to "play in and through language," discourse being the "field of infinite substitutions" (217), but the very point of Frank's telling is to limit that field, to be able to say, as he does, "Finally, what is left to say" (371). Ford begins in experience, often becomes entangled in language, but rather than "giving up" himself or his characters to the endless play of the system of language, he works to exhaust the telling of experience. Messenger reads Bascombe as a poststructuralist when in fact Bascombe is a pragmatist.

In contrast, Kroetsch's novel begins: "The pizza man. That was her first name for him" (1). *Alibi* ends its narrative in a catalogue of naming, and *The Puppeteer* begins in naming. The pizza man being Maggie's first name for "him," we are promised, and delivered, more names: Papa B, Papa Vasilis, Dorfendorf, Billy, Dorf. Naming is not

knowing: "You haven't even got a name I can get hold of" (99), Maggie says to the pizza man. And "he" is different names to different people: "'Dorf,' Maggie said. She didn't like calling him that. She used the name he had been given by me, by Jack Deemer" (189). A name used once is supplanted by another name, even the "same" name diachronically different. Similarly, a story told once must be retold. "You must look the part" (266), Maggie tells Deemer when he in the end becomes someone else by wearing the wedding dress. But significantly, "she tells [him] often" (266). Deemer must be "spoken into" his new identity repeatedly. Kroetsch begins in language, and remains -- in the telling and retelling, the naming and renaming -- in language.

The pragmatic appeal to experience to stop an endless game of semiosis is best defined by William James's "pragmatic rationalism." Seigfried summarizes James's rationalism as "the cognitive dimension of the drive to order our experiences satisfactorily, that is, to bring about a world in which we can be at home" (110). Ford's fiction, particularly the first-person narrated novels *The Sportswriter* and *Wildlife*, engage storytelling as a way of making oneself "at home in the world." Ford's characters are perpetually faced with loss, separation, and divorce that threatens, and sometimes ends, their lives if some sort of order is not asserted. Poststructuralist literature like Kroetsch's often leaves the reader in irrationality, chaos, and the endless game of semiosis, a world in which one is not so comfortably at home.

Games for pragmatists seem trivial, purposeless, simple, as in fact they appear to be in Ford's work. Something which comes easily and is fun is held in disregard, possibly for the reason Seigfried suggests:

Life is not a game; the stakes are too high. We can enter into various organizations of life as into a game, but we will be playthings rather than players if we forget that the rules of the game are assented to only insofar as they help us to the ends we set ourselves. (114)

Life is not a game if one believes that the subject sets the ends of play and has to follow rules only to the degree that they are useful. But pragmatism does not agree with poststructuralism that language speaks through the "subject", that the system or "game" is larger than "subject". Ford's characters are less likely to give themselves up to

language, to play, or to life, than are the characters in Kroetsch's fiction. The thematic emphasis in Ford's fiction is on "holding together" and "maintaining one's self," while Ford himself does not engage in excessive play with language or conventions.

Realism can, nevertheless, be read as a type of game, hiding its own gamefulness. It is often contrasted with the highly playful "anti-realism," but the different nature of play in realism does not exclude it from being perceived and read as a game. The failure of formal or "shallow" games in Ford's writing encourages one to look for a "deeper" form of play, a game that does not announce itself as a game but absorbs the teller and reader in authenticity. The "game" has become a dominant, even necessary image for "structuring the void," for making sense of a world without guarantees, but now that this "game of life" has been treated absurdly, exuberantly, lightly, Ford is one writer who has begun to take it seriously again.

Ford's tellings, as mentioned, begin in experience. His first two novels are told by third-person narrators, but within those narratives stories are told that re-affirm an experiential basis. When Sam Newel in *A Piece of My Heart* questions Robard Hewes's "Big Fish Story" about a rainbow trout taking an osprey under water with the osprey dug into the fish's back, Hewes replies: "I seen it. That's about as much satisfaction as I need. Though I wouldn't call it really satisfaction; its just a recollection I feel satisfied with" (106). Stories within stories are easily, unavoidably perhaps, read metafictionally, but the implication of "I seen it" is that stories are not to be questioned because they represent experience as accurately as possible. Hewes is not trying to play any games with language, although the lawyer, Newel, is of course suspicious.

Stories are to be taken seriously, but formal games are dismissed as frivolous. W.W., husband to Hewes's cousin and lover Beuna, has major-league potential as a pitcher, but lacks the conviction to pursue baseball as a career. He is belittled by his wife for "playing kid games" (12), and she stereotypes him as a "dumb jock:" "His mind ain't nothin but a baseball. Baseballs don't get suspicious, far as I know" (55).

W.W. is the first example of a recurring figure in Ford's fiction, the "natural" athlete for whom the game of life turns sour. He has not lost his ability, but he has lost his drive and direction:

W. might not turn out to be so altogether slow if he found out what was happening to his wife while he was screwing parts in BB guns. All those years when he could've been cashing big pay checks, but instead ended up building air rifles for three-eighty an hour and pitching Industrial League at Forrest City, might just have built a big reserve of unrelieved nastiness that he could start relieving if he could just catch somebody diddling his wife and figure a way of getting a shot off. (56)

Athletes, Frank Bascombe says in *The Sportswriter*, "are happy to let their actions speak for them" (61), and although W.W. is not happy, he does want to relieve his nastiness through action. In the first scene of his pitching in the novel, he "expel[led] one spiteful pitch after another that no one could ever hit or even halfway see" (10), communicating his anger, frustration, and impatience through his playing.

Physical actions provide "clear" communication, but they seldom allow for the complex or double communication that language permits. While W. was "screwing" parts in BB guns, Beuna was "screwing" Hewes or other men; the language of the above scene builds on *double entendre*. The "shot" W. hopes to get off is an orgasmic release not only of his marital frustrations, but the frustrations of lost opportunities, a lost way of life. Taking a shot would put W. back in control of some aspect of his life.

Although Hewes, the focus of the novel, would prefer not to admit chaos into his life, he does get caught, literally and passionately, in a self-destructive sex game with his cousin Beuna. She implores him to "tear me up. . . . I don't want there to be nothing left when you get finished" (150). Hewes tries to maintain some distance, some sense of contact with a larger-world context even as Beuna tempts him further into the game. He resists her requests to take her away to Memphis, but he also cannot stay away from her even when he knows W.W. is looking for him. He comes to feel "like a man in a tornado" (150), and that his

life, like Beuna's, has turned into a hurricane (157). "[P]art of his existence sag[ged] out of control down into the sink of unmanageables" (157). W.W. does finally catch and chase Hewes in what is both the prologue and final scene of the novel, but Hewes has already been shot by a local kid. Hewes's life and death re-affirm the pragmatic credo: Life is not a game; the stakes are too high.

Writing, for Ford, is an act of control, an act he does not "give up" to the play of games, although he is willing to regard it as being like a choreographed ballet:

As we read, we can sense the precarious nature of any literary construction, its barely containable excitation of words which mimics our own suffusion in experience, and whose eventual style, like a ballerina's line, is an expression of the manner by which chaos is conditionally and beautifully held at bay. ("Introduction" xvii)

A Piece of My Heart ends with death, but not chaos, as Ford describes Hewes's gunshot with a domestic simile, as like having hit oneself with a hammer: "the pain is delayed and stays inert in your thumb for a long number of seconds before it flies up, and you have to lie down just to get yourself ready" (295). The pain and horror are not allowed to overwhelm the scene; Hewes hears himself both "roaring" and merely saying "'Oh, oh'" (295).

The failure of games from a pragmatic point of view is the failure to make the game "work" for oneself, the player. The player becomes the plaything -- "absorbed in what they are doing," Bascombe says (*Sportswriter*, 62) -- and therefore oblivious to or vulnerable to a life outside the game. Hewes fails in his game, just as W.W. is absorbed by baseball and fails at any "larger" sense of the game of life. For Ford to succeed as a writer/player, he must try not to engage in shallow, playful, literary games, but remain instead in a safe, controlling third-person narrator's position. He is not outside the game of language, but he is trying to maintain some distance from it.

Ford presents both sides of the gaming coin -- the player and the plaything -- through the central figure of *The Ultimate Good Luck*, Harry Quinn, and through Sonny, brother of Quinn's girlfriend. Sonny is the athlete of the novel, like W.W. in *A Piece of My Heart*, and he too has

learned the lesson of illusion that sports both offers and masks:

"Sports is for kids, you know how that goes? Kids and niggers." He bit his lip. "Sweden, I could dex up, shave six to make spread, and waltz out loaded. But that's not sports, Harry." He looked up. "That's business. I might as well be in the fucking record business. I'm getting old in this sports shit." (28)

Sonny, even more so than W.W., has ended up "out of control" and in a Mexican jail for drug possession. In his desire to avoid the "working" world, Sonny is absorbed into the game to the point where it "works" him in an adult and corrupt fashion.

Related to the illusions of sport -- illusions of safety, of success, of simplicity -- is Quinn's perception of order in sports. The opening sentence of the novel says that Quinn needed to get lucky, and the place he goes to find that luck in Mexico is the fights. The scene reminds him of the boxing clubs of East L.A. and his times with Rae, his estranged girlfriend. The air of the arena de boxeo had "risk in it, palpable and utterly in the present, and going right into it made him feel lucky, which was how he wanted to feel" (6). The fights had appealed to Quinn when he was in L.A. because the city itself "had begun to feel flattened out and unlocatable. . . . The fights had a discipline to them and a palpable life behind them, a coherence that was correct and apparent" (65).

Quinn senses the possibility of structure and discipline in the fights, even when "risk" is in the air. But in a scene reminiscent of Kroetsch, the risk and chaos overrun the structure and discipline. The young fighters in Mexico "moved without discipline and too slowly to want to fight" (6). The "order" of the fight is broken by a bottle thrown into the ring. While the bottle distracts one boxer, the other punches his opponent's eye out. Quinn wants to make sure the girl he is with can "keep together" (6), but he realizes that he had better "get her out before she got crazy" (7). The disruption of order threatens both "self" and "sanity."

Carnavalesque scenes are rare in Ford's fiction; his characters are most often determined to keep misrule at bay. But the boxing match, like Hewes's death, is controlled with precise description and a distant

narrative voice. The narrator calmly explains how the dangling eye can be repaired: "It was just a pug's trick, he [Quinn] had seen it worked before. It looked plenty bad, but it wasn't as bad as it looked. A good corner could put the eye back, and two stitches would hold it in" (7). Chaos, disorder, and detached body parts are held together by two stitches. Would the eye still function? What about all the blood that starts to come from the boxer's nose and mouth? Language holds the disruptive forces in check when the game fails.

The boxing pandemonium is the antithesis of what Quinn learned from Vietnam: "the only thing smart you could do was try to stay efficient and keep your private shit together" (37). The boxer is unable to keep his shit, or body, together. The "unified self" is literally in danger of falling apart or breaking up. Much like Beuna's desire to be "torn up," this early boxing scene shows the proximity of chaos to the ordered world, the fragility of the "ring" which separates disorder in games from disorder in life.

Sports and games absorb W.W., Hewes, and Sonny, just as Kroetsch's characters are willingly or inevitably consumed by the play of a game or the world. Ford's pragmatism, however, unlike Kroetsch's poststructuralism, offers the possibility of a subject not subsumed by a game or language, a subject who "keeps his private shit together". Quinn does not succeed in freeing Sonny, he kills three people, and Sonny's lawyer is shot, but still Quinn reflects on his own "performance" as a success. Freeing Sonny from a Mexican jail was little more than a test to Quinn, "and he performed it under control" (197). The test completed, Quinn is free from it and its consequence. He and Rae are not in trouble, they "aren't in anything" (199).

By maintaining a mastery over the game one can, as Quinn attempts to, maintain a position as player of the game. Rorty suggests that "a pure 'language-game' view of language [eliminates] questions about 'ties with the world'" (*Consequences*, 114). If the world is chaotic but language can be separated from it, language can be separated from the chaos. Ford's narrative position in the first two novels seems to be as a "player" outside the game, a player controlling rather than being played by the game.

This "masterful" position produces non-reflexive, or limited metafictional texts, in the way Patricia Waugh suggests that a text can employ games but not problematize the relation between words and world (Chapter One, n.8). By employing a third-person narrator, the author seems to position himself outside a game with the reader. The text passes before the reader's eyes as a truck passed before Robard Hewes:

There was large writing on the sides through dust and coagulated grease; WHACK MY OLD DOODLE, and below that, TAKE ANOTHER LITTLE PIECE OF MY HEART, as though one line followed on the other and made good sense. He looked at the writing and scratched the back of his neck and wondered what that meant. (30)

As a scene of reading, Ford seems to be offering his audience little of the power and intrigue suggested by the calendar of subversive readers in Kroetsch's *The Puppeteer*. And like the "Big Fish Story" in *Piece*, this "metafictional" scene discourages reflexivity. Stories are told based on experience and reading is just an attempt to make sense of sometimes incongruent sentences. Ford employs a controlling position outside the game, and "strengthens" his position by using game-involvement within the texts as an images of loss of control.

Ford's characters struggle to maintain control of their personal lives and ultimately are concerned only with keeping themselves together in the presence of general disruption or chaos. Frank Bascombe of *The Sportswriter* is the Ford character most successful in using sports to order his life, but he no longer participates as an athlete. He writes about sports because they are simple and the writing is easy. The control Frank possess over the game -- to tell it as he "reads" it -- accounts, I think, for his relatively positive relationship with sports. Frank's control, however, like a game itself, may be an illusion; he cannot seem to write the story of the "natural" whose life comes undone.

Frank's "problem" or limitation as an athlete was that he was not able to "give it up" (27), to release himself to the game, to let the game shape him as subject. Frank seems always to have recognized a life much larger and more important, more serious, than the one-dimensionality of the athletic life: "Today I am amazed when I find athletes who can be full-fledged people and also "give it up" to their

sport. That does not happen often, and it is a dear gift from a complex God" (27). From Frank's perspective, the average person in sport suffers from an over-concentration on one, trivial thing.

Frank views "real writing" as partaking in an act similar to the giving up of one's self to language or vision: "what real writing requires, of course, is that you merge into the *oneness of the writer's vision* -- something I could never quite get the hang of, though I tried like hell and eventually sunk myself" (64). He also recognizes a process similar to the athlete's in which he was cut off from other parts of self and world. Frank sees himself and Bert Brisker, a poet turned sportswriter, as having "both got gloomy in an attempt to be serious, and that we didn't understand the vital necessity of the play of light and dark in literature" (45-46).

Frank's characterizations of sports and literature suggest that writing can be a game -- the play of light and dark -- but a particularly shallow, solipsistic game that he does not understand, nor care to understand. Sports are valued, if not intrinsically, for their socializing effect: "It's a pretty innocent part of people, and talking has the effect of bringing us all together on a good level" (90). Frank would rather talk about sports than talk about "some pretentious book that only one person's read" (90).

Frank, of course, is "writing" the book we are reading, and it would seem that he has not entered upon it by "giving himself up" to the story, by getting gloomy, or by playing with light and dark. Frank rejects the game of writing in favour of "telling something important and interesting" (369). Bascombe, and more importantly Ford, seem not to play with conventions, with reader expectations, or with form, but try to render a "completely believable telling, completely persuasive telling" (Bonetti, 88).

Reading as if involved in a game, however, makes one wary of such a "simple" intention upon the part of the writer. Frank Bascombe has no apparent reason to lie in his telling, yet he insists repeatedly that his "writing as writing" is distinct from the lies of literature:

If there is [one] thing that sportswriting teaches you, it is that there are no transcendent themes in life. In all cases things are here and they're over, and that has to be

enough. The other view is a lie of literature and the liberal arts, which is why I did not succeed as a teacher, and another reason I put my novel away in the drawer and have not taken it out. (16)

Ford's characters -- not just Bascombe -- lie to make things "easier" for themselves -- a form of pragmatism -- but in the process of exposing their lying, or exposing the "lies of literature," they are working to convince their audience that they are in fact telling the truth now.

The Sportswriter, more than any other Ford fiction, is a game because it engages the reader in the possibility of Frank being a "liar". The reader remains outside the text/game if he or she is willing to believe the story, but the reader "engages the complete interactive mechanism of lying" (635), David Simpson suggests, if the speaker/liar is questioned. The final judgement does not have to be that Frank is lying, but Ford's movement from distant third-person narration into the game of language via the first-person narrator signals a necessary counter-involvement on the part of the reader. Although playing with realism as a reader may seem to be a game played against the will of the author, the increased presence of game representations in *The Sportswriter* and *Wildlife*, and in each story the emphasis on lying -- a game of deception -- positions the reader within the game as well.

Bascombe's ex-wife, X, believes that Frank's penchant for lying is a product of his childhood in the South, "which was full of betrayers and secret-keepers and untrustworthy people" (13). Frank denies the influence of "place" on his character, saying that he didn't know any people like those X describes, yet he lies to X about "lurking" around her home, "want[ing] her to believe it was a coincidence" that he had been in the neighbourhood (12). X is doubly straightforward: an excellent, and therefore uncomplicated golfer, and the product of her childhood place, the Midwest. It was "a place with no apparent character, where there is nothing ambiguous around to confuse you or complicate things" (13).

If Frank and X clash because of Frank's indirection and X's straightforwardness, Frank finds a more compatible match in Selma Jassim. Frank meets Selma while teaching at Berkshire College, a job

Frank took to break out of the dreaminess he had fallen into after his son Ralph's death. Jassim is introduced as a "literary deconstructionist" and wielder of self-referential paradoxes: "I'll always tell you the truth, unless of course I'm lying to you" (77). While Frank is never so openly playful about lying, he can share in the joke of Selma's reading of Fitzgerald -- dropping the "I"'s from one of his novels -- while the other faculty at Berkshire College regard this insight as "ingenious" (226).

Not only is Selma's reading of Fitzgerald a joke of frivolity, it is a joke about the death of the subject, the loss of an "I". While Frank is constructing himself through language, through his telling, Selma is deconstructing the notion of being able to say "I" with confidence. The two processes complement each other -- they must both recognize the instability or malleability of "self" -- but work in different directions with different views about play. They represent in many ways the "marriage," the common bonds of pragmatism and poststructuralism, that I am proposing can be read in the writings of Ford and Kroetsch.

Frank represents himself as the pragmatist: "I was the savvy, hard-nosed realist she had heard real Americans were" (228). Jassim, in the finest poststructuralist tradition, "had come to Berkshire College that fall from Paris," but she was an "acerbic cold-eyed Arab" (225). Together they were the only "anti-mystery" types in the New Critical milieu of Berkshire College: "Selma Jassim and I gave ourselves up to the frothiest kind of impermanence -- revelled in it, staved off regret and the memory of loss with it" (224). They engage, Frank says, in "the most engrossing [conversations] of my entire life -- primarily, of course, because they were stolen" (225). And he recognizes that they are alike, "both of us displaced and distracted out of our brainpans and looking for ways to get along" (228). They rediscover the "anticipation" that Frank had lost; they live a "version of life briefly perfected and that ended" (229).

Each of these common bonds suggests similar philosophies. Impermanence and a disregard or distrust of history are a part of both pragmatism and poststructuralism. "Play-giarism," or the stolen conversation, is all that is possible in the endless circulation of

language. "Displacement and distraction" may characterize both philosophies as well, although "looking for ways to get along" is more pragmatic than poststructuralist.

Bascombe phones Jassim after a long separation and at a time when his life seems "a life of chaos and confusion" (304), but of course she is no comfort. Frank is struggling through the Easter weekend of what would have been his son's thirteenth birthday. His girlfriend has just broken up with him, punctuating the separation with a punch, he is wishing he could repair his relationship with X, and a friend has committed suicide. To bring his life under control, to find a "way to get along" and make his life worth something (4), Bascombe has to tell his story.

This telling has to be sincere, even if it is a lie; Bascombe has to tell himself that he has survived and avoided "terrible, searing regret" (4), a form of chaos. He has to "enter" his telling, as Dorf does, to "invent himself," but rather than be "en-tranced" and subject to the play of invention, the pragmatist, as described by Jules Law in Chapter One, has to "assume something as true and act as though it were." Bascombe seems convinced that he has survived the worst that life can offer him -- Edward Dupuy considers him to be living the life of an "ex-suicide" -- and he is telling himself and his readers that story. While Kroetsch seems to offer a vision of deep involvement in play that is accepted as play, Ford must reconstrue the game as something more than a game. His characters must forget the play of the world to be able to go on acting.

The one thing that Bascombe cannot make sense of, even with his pragmatic rationalisation, is the life of Herb Wallagher, an ex-football player now a paraplegic. Frank approaches the interview having already figuratively written the story: "a little inspirational business on the subject of character for people with their own worries. Maybe a touch of optimism in the soup" (155). But Wallagher is the "natural athlete" of *The Sportswriter*, a character for whom life once was easy, but has now lost its certainty. His injury ended his career, and his role as "spirit coach" for his former team was impossible to fulfil, he being unable to conjure the proper spirit (155).

Bascombe prefers interviews in which "athletes feel fairly certain about the world and are ready to comment on it" (157). Wallagher is so uncertain about his "self" that he becomes an unrepresentable figure for Frank's magazine. He quotes Frank a thought from Ulysses Grant's memoirs, a thought Grant had while nearing death: "'I think I am a verb instead of a personal pronoun. A verb signifies to be; to do; to suffer. I signify all three'" (157). Frank dismisses these thoughts as wrong and Herb Wallagher as crazy, yet Bascombe is involved in the same process, telling an "I" rather than simply being a personal pronoun. Wallagher has left behind all the "lessons" football was to teach -- "Perseverance. Team work. Comradeship" (161) -- and is trying to "figure out" the life that has been handed to him. Life was clearly a game for this football player, but the life which is not a game in any formal, recognizable, sense, must be "figured out" anew.

Although Bascombe represents Wallagher in this telling, he feels he has not "properly" written about him, and "admits defeat" (369). What is strange about this defeat, though, is that Frank seems to have learned so much from Wallagher. Sportswriting taught him "that there are no transcendent themes in life" and Wallagher's short, incomplete career seems to epitomize temporality. The similarity Bascombe notices between athletes and artists, and the shortness of an athletic career, gives him a context in which to make sense of his "literary career", his career as a "real" writer. "Things are here and they are over" eliminates the longing for a "serious" career again.

Wallagher also provides a lesson about trying to figure life out. If one reads *The Sportswriter's* realism as Arthur Saltzman suggests, as a mode of inquiry, Frank's "telling" is also a questioning of his past. Much like exposing his lying to possibly cover-up his lying, Bascombe derides novelists' "clanking, obligatory trip into the Davy Jones locker of the past" (24), only to make that same trip himself. Frank's telling questions how he got to where he is, focusing particularly on the two years since his son's death. Frank lost his "voice," his ability to speak with certainty about anything after his son died, but reconstructing his past through telling gives him the feeling that his "voice is as strong and plausible as I can ever remember it" (371).

The third thing Bascombe learns from Wallagher is really something he already knew: that football, or any sport, is "a pretty crummy preparation for life" (161). Frank's father-in-law believes that "sports is just a paradigm of life" but Frank avoids the idea, preferring to suggest that "life doesn't need a metaphor" (125). Sports fail as a paradigm for life as seen through W.W., Sonny, and Herb Wallagher, because the games are not flexible enough, they demand conclusiveness, resolution, and success. These three characters are "naturals" on the diamond, court, or field, but life offers them none of the same successes.¹⁸ Bascombe, in a typical pragmatic distinction, knows that "it is one thing to write sports, but another thing entirely to live a life" (209).

Bascombe's failure to "properly" write about Herb Wallagher is due to the tight conventions of sportswriting, conventions that do not allow uncertainty or speculation. Although he denies that he is writing literature, Bascombe has found a "form," a game, in which he can begin to represent Wallagher powerfully, as well as a form which begins to structure his own existence. If the "game of writing" is to succeed, it must be more flexible than sports, it must be a game that bends rules and opens itself to contradiction, yet it must also "structure the void" so the teller can go on living.

Sports in both *The Sportswriter* and *Wildlife* represent an order and simplicity too reductive for Ford's desire to keep "chaos conditionally and beautifully held at bay". Sports, in their formal incarnations, do not provide the tension between chaos and order that both Ford and Kroetsch regard as essential to fiction. In Ford's fiction, either the athlete and his game are completely overwhelmed by circumstance in life and the game is reduced to trivial child's play, or the athlete is dangerously absorbed in what he is doing and not "likely to feel the least bit divided, or alienated, or one ounce of existential dread" (*The Sportswriter*, 62). Sports continue to be an image of failure in Ford's fiction as characters move from the former to the latter experience of games.

Wildlife's seventeen-year-old narrator Joe is both witness to his father's athletic prowess, and a struggling, often reluctant, athlete himself. Athletics is actually the source of income and stability in

the unnamed family, Joe's father Jerry being a golf pro and his mother Jeanette teaching swimming lessons. The stability of sports, following the typical Ford pattern, is short-lived, and with the "end" of sports begins the family's dissolution. Joe's attempt to tell his family's story is very similar to Bascombe's telling of his life: an attempt to understand and order a life that is not as easily comprehended as a game of golf, basketball, or baseball.

The importance of sports and sports metaphors is immediately apparent as Joe gives an accounting of his father Jerry as "a natural athlete" who could "play every sport. But he loved the game of golf because it was a game other people found difficult and that was easy for him" (2). Being a golf pro suited Jerry's "innocent" and "honest" personality, as well as a pragmatic desire for "ease". But in novels with such troubled characters, to be doing what comes naturally seems somehow wrong. Frank Bascombe faces a similar problem; he is often asked how he can write sports when there are so many serious issues for people's concern. He admits to himself that he writes sports because it is easy.

Joe's experiences with football and javelin sharply contrast his father's ability, but they possibly predispose him to the language game more so than traditional sports. Joe attempts to play football "because my father thought I could make friends by playing" but it was "a game I did not like and wasn't good at" (6). Joe "was not good at [javelin, either] and did not throw it far. Not far enough. So I quit" (175). Sport's sharp lines of success and failure are not conducive to the complex understandings both Joe and Frank Bascombe are trying to arrive at through telling. Their engagement with language is still a game, but a game in which they can control the play and shape the contours of their experience, a game in which "satisfaction" is more important than success.

For Joe to be satisfied with his telling, he must conceive of language as a game rather than a picture, for he discovers the lies of permanence figured in a photograph. The picture-theory of language, as Rorty suggests, is necessary to create irony, to show the incompatible match between word and world or to highlight the stasis of "picture" compared to the movement of "play." Looking at a picture of Jerry still

in his twenties, Joe notes:

He looked like a man who knew what he was doing. He could hit the ball out of sight any time he got ready, and was just making sure things were the way he wanted them to be. "That's the way you play this game," he had said when he showed me the picture the first time, when I was ten or twelve. "Like you know what you're doing every second. Clear your mind out. You don't have a care in the world. Then everything you hit goes in the hole. It's when you have a lot on your mind, Joe, that you leave everything short. There's no mystery to it." (110-11)

The ironies of this picture, and Jerry's "interpretation" of it, are created by Jerry's changed position in the game of golf -- an ex-pro, recently fired -- and his changed position in the (non)game of life -- an ex-husband down on his luck. The ironies are also the result of "playing" with the picture, recognizing that language is not transparent but excessively significant.

Jerry looked like he knew what he was doing, when in fact he had merely hoped to get lucky in the Gypsy Basin oil boom (1). In the picture he is "making sure things were the way he wanted them to be," but things worked out unexpectedly because life is not so easily controlled by one individual. Jerry's "control" is upset by his boss's decision to fire him and his wife's decision to leave him. Jerry looked as if he had not a care in the world, as if he had shut everything out and was playing his game, but these "other games" impinged on his own. Leaving "everything" short no longer signifies just golf balls, but relationships and commitments as well. There is no mystery to "it" -- to golf or life -- but it often unfolds mysteriously.

Joe recognizes the irony of this picture, and the irony of it being the only "sign" of his father left in the house after Jerry and Jeanette have separated. This picture represents Jerry at the pinnacle of success and control in his life; to come home now he would "find everything in his life and my life and mother's, too, out of all control and out of all sense" (111). Reflecting on these times from some undisclosed point in the future, Joe is trying to bring an order to that "wild" time. Language, as Frank Bascombe discovers, is considerably

more flexible for structuring experience or the void than is a formal game.

Joe's parents confront him with observations about the irrationality of life, of certain experiences, and it is at these times that he is forced to ground language in experience. He "reports" his father's description of fighting an immense forest fire:

"It takes you outside yourself is what it does," he said.

"You see everything from outside. You're up against so big a thing out there." He looked up at me again and at my mother, and he blinked his eyes. "Everything seems arbitrary. You step outside your life and everything seems like something you choose. Nothing seems very natural."

(138)

The natural-realism of "He looked up at me again and at my mother, and he blinked his eyes" is Joe's realism and pragmatism embedded within the anti-realism of his father's statement. He grasps the physical, literal, experience within this "unreal" statement. He appeals to, or focuses upon, the body at a time when the subject as identity seems to be in doubt.

Joe's mother, in a passage that parallels the above passage in many ways, "writes" to Joe about the absence of absolutes:

"I am wondering if my own parents ever saw the world as I do now. We are always looking for absolutes and not finding them. You get an itch for the real thing, and you are not one yourself: Love, at least, seems very permanent to me."

(173)

The absence of absolutes and the insubstantiality of the subject are now common themes in postmodern, gaming fiction. Jeanette's last statement, however, that love seems permanent to her, reveals the pragmatic strategy the whole family uses to cope with irrationality -- they hold on to some permanence, and to some (apparent) absolute. They chose a truth and live with it.

At the point of separation, however, even the permanence of love is lost, and Jerry says, "I don't know what makes life hold together at all" (141). *Religio*, the Latin root of religion, means bond; religion is a means by which people try to hold their lives together. But

religion, in the formal, institutionalized, form does not seem a factor in *Wildlife* or *The Sportswriter*. Even the "secular" religion of sports fails to provide the order or certainty the characters desire. Only language, grounded in experience, can make sense of a life.

Ford's writing consistently engages characters in chaotic situations -- chaotic not in the sense of being frantic, but thoroughly immersed in loss -- but either they "put" themselves together through realism, or Ford's third person narrator controls the scene. The language does not break down, even when describing Robard Hewes's death, the carnivalesque boxing match, or Jerry's "breakdown" -- his attempt to burn the house of his wife's lover. Jerry is trying to keep himself "from burning up in the fire he himself had started" but Joe describes it with cool detachment: "He seemed both excited and calm at once, even though one of his boots was on fire" (161). Joe describes the smell of the wood burning, the sight of flames at the front of the house, and the feel of the heat in the air. The narrative, although first-person, is not narrowly focused on the chaos of the situation but takes in the wide scope of Joe's senses and experience.

Wildlife attempts to engage the reader, I think, with this close attention to detail, and with a symbolic resonance that Ford's earlier novels do not employ. The "fires" of wildlife provide an "overdetermined" symbolic coherence that seems incongruent with stark realism, and particularly with Ford's earlier fiction.¹⁹ Yet the symbol of the fire is "thrown" at the reader from the blood-red swirling cover illustration (Vintage U.K. Edition), through to the immense fire in the Montana mountains, the fire Jerry starts at Jeanette's lover's house, and to the ironic implication of "home fires" burning while Jerry is off fighting the mountain blaze.

Symbols, as Peter Hutchinson suggests, have considerable importance when considering literature a game. They can "function both as 'enigmas' and 'parallels'" (115). In *Wildlife* the fires present a chain of coherence that is not particularly enigmatic; the significance of the symbol seems to be its presence in the writing of an otherwise natural-realist author who until now had not developed any extensive symbolism. Joe is not merely reconstructing his and his parents' lives, but is making "literature," making a game of that telling. There is

nothing trivial in this game; a "wrong" telling would only distort, destroy, or introduce chaos into the experience which he now feels at home with. He recognizes language's destructiveness, its potential to cause chaos, and the need to treat the game as more than a game:

And there are words, significant words, you do not want to say, words that account for busted-up lives, words that try to fix something ruined that shouldn't be ruined and no one wanted ruined, and that words can't fix anyway. Telling my father about all I'd seen or telling my mother that she could rely on me to say nothing, were those kinds of words - better off to be never said for simply being useless in the large scheme of things. (116)

Language that is "just gaming" indeed becomes "useless in the larger scheme of things" unless "gaming" is inseparable from a larger world. But that is the poststructuralist position. Ford's pragmatism, and the pragmatism of his characters, separate the trivial gaming from the deep play that no longer seems a game.

In trying to unravel the potential lies, the symbols, and the role of the games in Ford's fiction, I am resisting the "efficacy of language." Ford uses this phrase to describe his experience of Faulkner, both in "The Three Kings" and in his interview with Bonetti: "There are all kinds of things in Faulkner the meaning of which you don't know, but you kind of luxuriate in the language, in almost an osmotic way" (Bonetti, 79). Edward Dupuy in turn uses this comment to construct his version of Frank Bascombe, story teller:

As the teller captures the efficacy of language, so the reader relents to its power. Telling and reading are really the opposite sides of the same coin -- language. In Ford's view, the reader must surrender himself, give in, to the text. Reading to satisfy a system or to justify an abstraction is not real reading; it is antithetical to relenting. Relenting demands personal involvement on the part of the reader, not detached analysis. (98)

I agree that a reader should expect and/or create personal involvement in a text, but "relenting," as Dupuy's comment suggests, does not have to relegate the reader to spectator. Rather than accept the realist

illusion of language as a picture, I think it must be considered as an involved, "deep" form of playing that would like to deny its gamefulness.

Ford's statements on poetics and aesthetics consistently assert and poke fun at his seriousness. He has lived through Barth and Barthelme, and knows that literature "isn't like life in any way but that one referential way" (Bonetti, 87), yet he creates texts that are deliberately "life-like", texts that possess the illusion of being a life told. At the depth of his playing is a need to forget the game and take writing and language as seriously as one would take life.

Conclusion: Expanding the Field

All who write may be playing the "writing game," but as a game with conventions rather than rules, the writing game manifests itself in varied forms. Robert Kroetsch and other authors with poststructuralist inclinations may be the most obviously playful writers, but even the serious realists like Richard Ford are engaged in a game with language. In considering two different enactments of the writing game, I have been detailing not only writing, but also reading and the text itself, as involved either in the process of playing a game, or as the product of game playing.

Kroetsch and Ford, of course, represent only two manifestations of the game of writing, manifestations I have connected with poststructuralist and pragmatic philosophies. Both are within the radical, materialist spectrum of play, as outlined in Chapter One, and clearly reject or parody what Christian Messenger calls the "bourgeois aesthetic of idealist order" associated with Friedrich Schiller and Hans-Georg Gadamer (9). Whether wanting to get on with getting lost in chaos, or just getting on with life as capably as possible, Kroetsch's and Ford's characters and novels reject the idealist synthesis that many of the more popular sports novels offer.

Sports fiction in more overt manifestations than Kroetsch and Ford presents a very different experience of the game of writing. For Robert Detweiler, "it is as if the particular order of the sport involved, the regulations of the particular game, provide a ready-made structure for the novel that obviates much of the need for creative plot action" (52). That "order" also resists the tension of chaos and order, and seldom questions the construction of subjectivity.

For example, W.P. Kinsella's baseball novels, *Shoeless Joe* and *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy* are conservative, idealistic, wish-fulfilment novels in which "the religion of baseball" serves to hold lives together and put everybody in their proper, desired, yearned for place. Injustices are righted, the good are triumphant. And those who want to witness this justice pay a modest twenty dollars, for "it's money they have, and peace they lack" (*Shoeless Joe*, 212). As Neil Randall clearly demonstrates, *Shoeless Joe* is a fairy-tale structure with clear

divisions between good and evil ("*Shoeless Joe: Fantasy and the Humour of Fellow-Feeling*"). Popular literature and movies are consistently within the idealistic realm of play, providing in the end a stable and predictable world.

Because of the predictability and stability of such fictions, writing that engages a radical play-spirit is more thoroughly and closely studied, although less often produced. One of the most celebrated novels of sports literature, Robert Coover's *The Universal Baseball Association, Henry J. Waugh Proprietor*, engages many of the themes examined in Kroetsch's writing: play, madness, the ordering and construction of myth and story, the erasure of self. Thomas LeClair felt in 1987 that Don DeLillo's *End Zone* was overshadowed by the *UBA*, although the two novels share a deconstructive play-spirit. DeLillo's recent work has received considerable attention, helping to establish what can be construed as the poststructuralist game-play model.

As the list of significant works of ludic fiction continue to divide into the nostalgic and radical modes, Ford's work, and the work of other pragmatic realists like Harry Crews -- *The Knockout Artist*, *The Body* -- become increasingly important for breaking down, or at least diversifying, the terms of the play-spirit binary. And as Linda Hutcheon suggests, many "ex-centric" positions have to be recognized as part of "postmodernity", and therefore players of different games. Feminist views of play and game, informed by exclusion from male dominated sports as well as unique "gaming" experiences, produce a wide but reasonably coherent range of represented "games".

Nicole Brossard's *Mauve Desert*, for example, provides an interesting contrast to Kroetsch's *Badlands*. While both are concerned with the problem of "translation," of re-telling a story, Kroetsch chooses to suggest that "feminine" re-tellings are carnivalisations or completions of the male text, parodies of the primary text. Brossard elects to present "translation" as an "opening up" and an extending of the primary text. Brossard's open text, sounding suggestive of the nostalgic side of play, is paradoxically more radical than the carnivalisation of a text, yet contained within a conservative structure.

Mauve Desert is paradoxical because it is open, erotic, and non-heroic, yet the narrative ends in death and the containment of female desire. What the open text offers that the closed does not is a destabilization of power structures. It also risks the "death" of its own energies. Closure affirms a structure and completes it, much as Kinsella's novels, despite baseball diamond foul-lines that extend infinitely, are novels of closure because everything and everybody who matters is in place. Openness allows the possibility of a "re-play," a continuation towards a new structure or the dissolution of an old structure. Repetition in the closed text is a maintenance of the status quo. One of the last things said in the source text of *Mauve Desert* is that "everything must be attempted again like a backhand, a lob in mindspace" (45), and translation must be attempted again and again. The fulcrum upon which this experimental novel swings is a tennis match between fictional source author and fictional translator, a playing and re-playing.

The feminist sport novel also addresses the masculine rhetoric and control of play and games. Jenifer Levin's *Water Dancer* utilizes the rhetoric of "touch" separate from any connotations of "entrance" as employed by Kroetsch. The "touch" of *Water Dancer* signifies the end of a long-distance swim, as well as sexual and personal intimacy. Marge Piercy's *The High Cost of Living* examines the dilemmas faced by a feminist who enjoys the experience of karate, but is uncomfortable with the "masculine" qualities of sport: aggressiveness, domination, competitiveness. No one writer has consistently engaged feminist relations to sport or games over a career of writing, but the "feminist sport novel" does provide an interesting contrast to the poststructuralist and pragmatic game/text models.

The African-American sporting experience also produces a unique conception of the game/text model. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* provides a contrast to Ford's pragmatism. The game is not to be dismissed or controlled so that it best serves its players; Ellison offers that: "Life is to be lived, not controlled; and humanity is won by continuing to play in face of certain defeat" (564). Not far removed from the feminist position, Ellison envisions playing and replaying until the game is "made right". Barry Beckham's *Runner Mack* is less

hopeful, his novel beginning and ending with Henry Adams, a young, black baseball prospect, being hit by a Mack truck. During the course of the novel, however, Henry is "educated" by Runner Mack about the black movement, the need for resistance, and the power of language and knowledge. More like Ford's fiction than Ellison's -- although also more experimental than Ford -- Beckham's novel speaks of the quest for a "poem that will free them" (125), literally Adams and his girlfriend, but figuratively, blacks in America.

Examining the writings of Robert Kroetsch and Richard Ford from a whole-game perspective -- the author's engagement with language games, the games he plays with language and readers, and the game of reading -- provides only two play-game experiences. But I think my approach suggests the usefulness of further examination of this whole-game experience, and affirms the need to pay closer attention to actual game representations in fiction. The pervasiveness of "games" in our culture and the importance of "playing into being" makes the writing and unrighting of games a necessary subject for further study.

End Notes

1. M. H. Abrams' famous coupling of analogies accounts on the one hand for the mimetic function in art, and on the other hand for the expressive function of art. The game-model too considers mimesis and production, as well as giving a stronger account of the reader's position.
2. Margaret Atwood actually considers "national" literatures to be both mirrors and maps: mirrors not of the artist's but of the reader's world, and maps of the mind, both the author's and the "nation's" mind. The game-model focuses more closely on the word than on the world, and is more likely to speak of the maze or labyrinth of the text than the map.
3. Christopher Ames's study of the "party" in contemporary fiction looks at "party scenes" in Joyce, Woolf, Fitzgerald, Waugh, Henry Green, Pynchon and Coover as variations on the Bakhtinian model of the novel -- disparate discourses coming together on a single plane. The "festive vision" each writer promotes has the potential to engage the reader, although Ames concentrates most of his effort on discourse analysis.
4. Richard Rorty sees in Heidegger's work a move towards "reification of language" and in Wittgenstein's work a move away from the reification presented in the *Tractatus*. From Rorty's pragmatic point of view, Heidegger's "reification" was a "way of distancing and summing up the West," a way "to break free of metaphysics," although in the end it becomes "one more in a long series of self-conceptions" (*Essays on Heidegger and others: Philosophical papers*. Vol. 2., 65)
5. Linda Hutcheon's discussion of the "subject in/of/to history" clarifies that the postmodern decentering of the subject is not a denial, but a historicizing, situating, differentiating -- "by race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and so on" -- of the subject (*A Poetics*, 159).
6. Kaja Silverman distinguishes the linguistic philosophy of Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce on the basis of the subject's position: Peirce "makes the human subject [the] support" of signifying

relationships (4). Peirce, like Wittgenstein, is a pragmatist.

7. John Caputo clearly distinguishes between the language game views of Heidegger and Rorty, and suggests in passing that Rorty is aligning himself with Derrida's reading of Heidegger, emphasizing the deconstructive, but not the recollective side of Heidegger. My aligning of Saussure-Heidegger-Derrida in opposition to Wittgenstein-Rorty is not meant to set up a binary, but to make distinctions within a group of thinkers who hold many, but not all things in common. Derrida and Rorty particularly seem to have a stake in both poststructuralism and pragmatism.

8. Linda Hutcheon, Patricia Waugh and others anticipate Wilson in commenting on the significance of games in texts as metafictional scenes, although Wilson offers more thorough analysis. Hutcheon regards "the game" as one of four diegetic or narrative structures -- the others being the detective story, the fantasy, and the erotic -- employed by covert metafiction to alert the reader to an emphasis on process rather than product (*Narcissistic Narrative*, 31-33). Waugh provides a reminder that all texts which are playful or contain games need not be predominantly metafictional. If "the reader is never required systematically to connect the artifice of the narrative with the problematic 'real' world, or to explore the mode of fictional presentation," (43) the game exists in the text for a reason other than to make the reader self-conscious.

9. Alan Aycock suggests that traditional chess and its organizations represent "logos," an order that is disrupted by chess carnival or "skittles." Aycock provides five skittle examples: 1) "blitz," or speed chess; 2) a game with an extra "pocket knight," 3) a blind chess, in which the players see only their own pieces; 4) a form of team chess in which captured pieces are passed to a teammate for use on his or her board; and 5) "bughouse" in which captured pieces remain on the board, but in configurations otherwise impossible to achieve (36).

10. Foucault says, "The madman's voyage is at once a rigorous division and an absolute Passage," a confinement to the ship, but the ship offering freedom, the "thousand roads" of the sea (11). Demeter, in his

landlocked tub, playing pirates with his "perky fellow," would probably want to resist the movement of this image, but revels in his isolation.

11. Kroetsch says in "Carnival and Violence: a Meditation:" "The promise of the carnivalesque is a promise of renewal by destruction," or, as in *What the Crow Said*, carnival results in birth by brawling. See Randall and Ball for more on carnival in Kroetsch, and see Wilson on "The Play of Carnival and the Carnival of Play" (Chapter 2).

12. Foucault says that with the creation of "houses of confinement . . . more than one out of every hundred inhabitants of the city of Paris found themselves confined there, within several months" (38). The establishment of criteria for insanity resulted in widespread "insanity".

13. Susan Rudy Dorscht suggests that the "pill" invoked at the end of the novel as the by-product of urine from pregnant mares "arrests the plentitude of meaning and becomes a metaphor for the sterilizing of language" ("How the Studhorse Man Makes Love," 30). But the fact that the mares "must be pregnant" (*The Studhorse Man*, 173, Kroetsch's emphasis) further re-enforces that the assertion of order creates a further disorder.

14. The "temptation of meaning" is Kroetsch's phrase from *Labyrinths*: "The temptation to read metaphorically, from the simplest kind of superstition up to the most elaborate theological system is a temptation of meaning" (15). Kenneth Hoepfner (229ff) and Susan Rudy Dorscht (*Women, Reading, Kroetsch*, 78) also make use of this phrase in their analyses of *What the Crow Said*.

15. The only representation of a formal game in *Alibi* and *The Puppeteer* is a card game William William Dorfendorf plays with his fellow Greek mud-bathers. This may be the only "straight" game Kroetsch has represented, in fiction or non-fiction, and not surprisingly, it is the perfect model for communication:

I could hardly speak a word of Greek, except for "Te kanis, and yet we spoke to each other, all of us, through hearts and diamonds and spades and clubs, through the passing back and forth of small coins, through nods and friendly

grimaces. We had a language that whole nations might envy.
(*Alibi*, 176)

Communication based on strict rules that cannot be broken, and communication without words, has the capability of being infallible, but is also horribly limited in scope and practicality. The card game is a good example of where a notion like "language game" may start from. But language, and writing, eventually have to move beyond the confines of a strict game setting in order to say what it is trying to say. The introduction of words and emotion is both necessary and confusing.

16. Don DeLillo's Cotter Martin, a boy of fourteen longing to see the third game of the Giants - Dodgers play-off in 1951, makes an unforgettable, gate-crashing entrance into the Polo Grounds:

He picks up speed and seems to lose his gangliness, the slouchy funk of hormones and unbelonging and all the dumb-hearted things that seal his adolescence. He is just a running boy, a half-seen figure from the streets, but the way reveals some clue to being, the way a runner bares himself to self-examination, this is how the easy-gaiting kid seems to open to the world, how the blood-rush of a dozen strides brings him into eloquence. ("Pafko at the Wall," 37)

Cotter transforms himself to make the entrance, and is in turn transformed by the "excitement of a revealed thing" when he first catches a glimpse of the diamond (37).

17. "The void," according to Jerome Klinkowitz, is the void left the absence of a subject that is knowable, that can be written about. "Writers surely create something, but their fiction is no longer seen best in terms of subject or even content, but rather as a structuring act that becomes its own reality" (2).

18. John Updike's Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom, particularly in *Rabbit, Run*, would be the "paradigm" of the "natural athlete" frustrated by the world beyond the sports arena. The possibilities of "play" are liberating, both on and off the field, but these athletes have trouble playing when not directed by the rules of the game.

19. Christine Brooke-Rose suggests that "Realistic fiction tend[s] to overdetermine the referential and the semic codes, and could, but might not, underdetermine the proaieretic and/or the hermeneutic and/or the symbolic" (128). Realistic fiction can be symbolic, but Ford's writing, till *Wildlife*, had not foregrounded a symbol quite so dramatically.

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