

# Introduction

---

DAWNE McCANCE

The December 2001 *Mosaic* special issue *Haunting 1: The Specter* opens with a “Bill Spanos in Conversation” interview. *Haunting 1* became one of our most successful special issues, and the interview—a conversation involving both Spanos and Robert Kroetsch—led to the ongoing *Mosaic* “Crossings” interview series. The Spanos-Kroetsch conversation, like their enduring friendship, is all about crossings, the “mutual haunting of each other’s lived spaces; my highly rarefied, theoretical world, his intensely felt poetic world” (6).<sup>1</sup> This pairing of theory and poetry made for “a great combination” (11) when it came to *boundary 2*, the journal that Spanos and Kroetsch co-founded and co-edited at Binghamton University in New York. The journal title itself implies border crossings. “As we moved from ‘boundary one’ to *boundary 2*, in a certain way (boundary one roughly around the time that Pound was saying ‘make it new’ or ‘you must break the iamb),” Kroetsch explains in the interview, “we were looking for the genre or the form [. . .] that would enable us to cross” (11). Whether that form was poetry or the journal’s “daring and radical” (12) essays, *boundary 2* became an early, innovative model of the kind of interdisciplinary crossings to which *Mosaic* aspires.

Robert Kroetsch was born in 1927 on a family homestead near Heisler, Alberta, Canada. Educated as a boy in a three-room prairie schoolhouse (four grades to a room), he went on to study at the University of Alberta and McGill University before

leaving Canada to do his M.A. degree at Middlebury College in Vermont and his Ph.D. in Creative Writing at the University of Iowa. He left Canada, but even as a doctoral student in Iowa, Kroetsch was writing *The Words of My Roaring*, giving voice and fabulous story to the prairie world in which he grew up. “I came from the appalling silence of Canada,” he remarks in the interview (9). Or, as he puts it in one of his essays—essays that, by the way, are as “daring and radical” as his stories and poems—“I remember the books of my childhood that did not ever mention the prairie world I lived in. Full of words, those pages were blank” (“Playing” 96). For Kroetsch, each blank page invited a new story. Once his grade twelve teacher in Red Deer, Alberta suggested that he become a writer, he never again doubted how he must spend his life (“Why” 43). Countless readers, would-be and accomplished writers, have been, and will continue to be, the beneficiaries of that decision. In nine novels (including *The Studhorse Man*, winner of the Governor General’s Literary Award), fourteen books of poetry (including *The Hornbooks of Rita K*, nominated for the Governor General’s Literary Award), and seven works of non-fiction, Kroetsch returned again and again to Alberta, embodying what Aritha van Herk calls its “zeitgeist in a way that few can claim” (27). Perhaps more than any other, he was a mentor, and not only to Alberta writers. With an influence and reputation not contained by borders, he made writing possible for others across Canada and around the world.

Robert Kroetsch died on 21 June 2011, days short of his 84th birthday, in a traffic accident on an Alberta highway not far from Drumheller and the Badlands he so loved. In gratitude for his life and work, *Mosaic* dedicates this issue to him.

---

#### NOTES

1/ See also the Spanos essay in which these words first appeared: “Retrieving Bob Kroetsch on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday: ‘A Likely Story’” (*The New Quarterly* [1998]: 186-200. Print).

#### WORKS CITED

“Bill Spanos in Conversation: With Robert Kroetsch and Dawne McCance.” *Mosaic* 34.4 (2001): 1-19. Print.

Kroetsch, Robert. “Playing Dead in Rudy Wiebe’s *Playing Dead*: A Reader’s Marginalia.” *A Likely Story: The Writing Life*. Red Deer: Red Deer College P, 1995. 87-109. Print.

\_\_\_\_\_. “Why I Went Up North and What I Found When He Got There.” *A Likely Story: The Writing Life*. Red Deer: Red Deer College P, 1995. 13-40. Print.

van Herk, Aritha. “Our Odysseus.” *Albertaviews* (2010): 26-31. Print.