

**A Sample of the 2015 Thesis, *Loving Strife***

*Pages 56-57*

The history of literature tells the continual story of one generation undoing another—an undoing that no single generation can complete. As Susan Sontag writes in her preface to the English translation of Roland Barthes’s *Writing Degree Zero*,<sup>37</sup> “there is no writing which can be lastingly revolutionary.”<sup>38</sup> Each book rewrites its predecessors, while every author enters an ongoing dialogue that dates back to the undocumented birth of language. “The tradition has to be one of change,” Kroetsch tells us, emphasizing that developments are grounded in inheritance (*Abundance*, 16). Change and tradition, experimentation and canon, then, confound and produce the other in an *Auseinandersetzung* pattern [i.e., a *loving strife*]. Kroetsch writes in his poem, “I Try to Steal My Identity”: “We like telling stories to the young, but the young / don’t like to listen. It is their refusing to hear / that gives new syllables to their tongues” (*Too Bad*, 78). In North America, in the 1960s and 1970s, a generation of thinkers (poets, critics and artists alike, none too few appearing in Kroetsch and Spanos’ journal) seem to have protested their heritage as much as embraced the *tabula rasa* or *terra incognita* of their new future. A canonized and ossified version of literary modernism (represented by writers T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and James Joyce alongside critics I. A. Richardson, F. R. Leavis and Cleanth Brooks) provided a reliable rallying point for both spiritual revolt and theoretical deconstruction. Ezra Pound, for example, became a figure held up as exemplar of elitism, fascism and unearned appropriation, although he is also the poet who wrote, early in his career, that “The Chief God in Hell is Convention / begot

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<sup>37</sup> First published as *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1953).

<sup>38</sup> Barthes, Roland. *Writing Degree Zero*. Trans., Annette Lavers and Colin Smith. Boston: Beacon Press, 1964. xix.

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by that sturdy sire stupidity / upon Pale Fear.”<sup>39</sup> Successful revolutionaries inevitably become the new “old guard” to subsequent generations who find it easier, by far, to critique the overly burdensome and tired past, or the villainy of one’s neighbours, than to interrogate personal practices or escape cultural and biographical backgrounds.

Thank you for reading! The entire essay, housed on the University of Calgary’s thesis repository, can be accessed via the following link:

<https://prism.ucalgary.ca/handle/11023/2335>

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<sup>39</sup> Pound, Ezra. “Poems Withdrawn from Canzoni.” *The Collected Early Poems*. Ed., Martz L. Louis. New York: New Directions, 1976. 221.