

From the “Introduction” to *Post-glacial*

Kroetsch’s errant career in poetry is characterized by slow-moving divergences and a focus on place (shaped and shaping). For these reasons, I suggest “post-glacial” as an alternative to the classification “postmodern.” A term borrowed from geography, post-glacial refers to the Holocene (the past ten thousand years and counting), the present moment (despite the continued presence of high-altitude glaciers), and equally to an indeterminate future period (a possible future wherein no glaciers remain). “Postglacial” refigures in spatiotemporal terms postmodern concepts such as trace, spectre, or the presence of absence—concepts promoted by Jacques Derrida and others. “Trace,” in its postmodern sense, means that the past is never past. Drumlins, erratics, eskers, and even the flatness of the great plains are the visible work of Pleistocene ice sheets. That past haunts the present through the presence of year-round ice high up in the Rocky Mountains. These are post-glacial times we live in, although some glaciers remain. Past is now. Future arrives ahead of time. Glaciers do not melt. Ice melts. Glaciers retreat, recreating the land that remains always subject to revision. Similarly, the voices of the poet’s parents recur with increasing clarity, posthumously. Another parallel: the great literary traditions of history survive in Kroetsch’s work—quest, romance, satire—through subversive response to the weight of those inherited forms.

The present selection does not offer an “essential” or “best of” poetry collection. Instead, it draws on a blend of accessible and confounding poems from across Kroetsch’s writing career. The ordering of poems in *Post-glacial* does not follow the usual structure of advancing according to date of composition. Rather, this unique sequencing of poems uncovers the poet’s voice by beginning with moods of morning and spring, moving through undulating gradations to shades of night and mourning. A particularly tricky volume to draw from was *The Hornbooks of Rita K.*

Rita Kleinhart represents one of the writers Robert K. might have become had he been born female and had (s)he remained a permanent citizen of central Alberta, rather than having departed at a young age to become an urbanite and academic. Given their author's persistent fluctuations in form and style, each poem in *Post-glacial* represents a different version of the writer becoming.

—David Eso