COLLECTING IN KROETSCH'S ALIBI AND THE PUPPETEER

"A SHADOWY GODGAME":

COLLECTORS, COLLECTING, AND COLLECTIONS

IN ROBERT KROETSCH'S

ALIBI AND THE PUPPETEER

By

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of collecting has been a popular metaphor in Canadian literature throughout its history, but particularly in the literature of the last thirty years. However, there has been little corresponding critical attention. In this thesis, I study how the treatment of the collector/collecting/collection nexus in Alibi and The Puppeteer by Robert Kroetsch, a central figure in the (disputed) Canadian postmodernist movement.

In the introductory chapter, I raise some key issues of the collecting phenomenon, which leads to a discussion of the incorporation of collecting and its issues in texts by Canadian authors. I give a brief reading of collecting in John Richardson's Wacousta, which I suggest is the Ur-novel for collecting in Canadian literature. After Richardson, I turn to Kroetsch and his concept of postmodernism, before proposing to argue that the characters in Alibi and The Puppeteer collect as a means of playing "god." In Chapter One, I give a close reading of the character Deemer, who is the primary figure of the godgame. Chapter Two consists of readings of Deemer's opponents in the game. To conclude the thesis, I discuss the use of collecting in other novels by Kroetsch, and I finish with some general observations on collecting.

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". . . Alibi is a mystery novel with an international chase, a hidden conspiracy and perhaps a shadowy godgame." Robert R. Wilson

"To collect up to a final limit is not simply to own or to control the items one finds; it is to exercise control over existence itself through possessing every sample, every specimen, every instance of an unrepeatable and nowhere duplicated series. It is to be unique. For the collector is then like God—not the God who created the world, but the God who chose to obliterate his own creation." John Elsner and Roger Cardinal

Introduction

> *"I am in a kind of godgame when I write. I get into the godgame when I have to use situation, character and language to make that character experience desire." Robert Kroetsch*[1]

We all know someone who collects—an aunt who collects commemorative plates, a friend who collects beer bottles from around the world—or maybe we ourselves are the collectors—of bells, wooden decoys, Elvis memorabilia, or dolls, perhaps. If we are of a more privileged class, then we may prefer Fabergé eggs, Flemish tapestries, or Impressionist masterpieces. For those of us who are not and/or do not know collectors then, at the very least, we will have visited a museum or art gallery at some point in our lives. In his book Collectors and Curiosities, Krzysztof Pomian tells us that evidence exists to suggest that humanity has been collecting since the Neolithic period, and, after nearly ten thousand years,[2] we must wonder what it is within us that prompts this behaviour, what it is that compels us to be collectors.

It might seem that what constitutes "collecting" is a straightforward matter; however, my reading on the subject has made me aware that it is more complex than it seems. As Susan M. Pearce notes in her text Museums, Objects, and Collections, "A good deal of ink has been spilt in the effort to pin down the

difference between 'collecting' and 'accumulating' or 'hoarding'" (49). Pearce herself dedicates two and a half pages to sorting through attempts to define collecting, and ultimately concludes that "[c]ollections . . . come about because individuals select objects and specimens out from all the available material of the world, and put them together in a way which renders the meaning of the group more than the sum of its individual parts" (66). However, it is Pomian who offers a more helpful definition of collecting: "a set of natural or artificial objects, kept temporarily or permanently out of the economic circuit, afforded special protection in enclosed places adapted specifically for that purpose and put on display" (9). I would like to add to this definition the ideas that "the collection replaces origin with classification" (Stewart 153) and that in a collection "aesthetic function" replaces the "use value" of an object (Stewart 159).

Surprisingly, there is not a great deal of scholarship on the phenomenon of collecting, considering humanity's history in that area. That is not to say that studies have not been done. On the contrary, there are texts and essays on the subject, several of which are extremely well done, including some pivotal work by Walter Benjamin, Jean Baudrillard and Susan Stewart. However, most of these deal more with museums, than with private collecting. Is it that collecting is so commonplace we tend to overlook it? Or is it that collecting had been a predominantly upper-class phenomenon and, therefore, did not come under scrutiny until the rise of the middle class in the nineteenth century? Whatever the

reason, I did find adequate material on collecting, but I found that my best material came not from a book, but from personal experience.

Recently, I visited a gentleman in Bruce County, Ontario, who owns a large collection of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century farm and household implements, and vehicles. The octogenarian collector has filled his barn, yard and outbuildings, some of which he built specifically to house his collection, with items he has collected over several decades. The collector opened up the buildings so that we (my parents and partner went with me) could wander through at our leisure, but he ended up accompanying us on our tour, offering information about any items in which we expressed an interest: what it was, how it had been used, when it was built, and where it came from. My parents found this private museum of particular interest, since, living in the same county, they knew many of the people from whom the collector had acquired the items, but especially because they remembered seeing or using similar items when they were young. As I listened to my parents reminiscing with our host, only twenty years their senior, about churning butter, stooking wheat, and driving a Model-A, I realized that the collector, through the possession of that myriad of objects—from combine harvesters to liquor barrels, the tools of his grandfather's shoe-making business to the complete uniform and kit bag of a World War I infantryman—had gathered his youth around him and had taken control of it.

In his essay "The System of Collecting," Baudrillard comments on the personal connection between the collector and the collection:

> The singular object never impedes the process of a narcissistic projection, which ranges over an indefinite number of objects: on the contrary, it encourages such multiplication, thus associating itself with a mechanism whereby the image of the self is extended to the very limits of the collection. Here, indeed, lies the whole miracle of collecting. For it is invariably *oneself* that one collects.
>
> We are now in a better position to appreciate the structure of the system of possession: a given collection is made up of a succession of terms, but the final term must always be the person of the collector. (12; original emphasis)

The collection not only represents the collector himself,[3] it represents power. In my meeting with the collector, I noticed that he offered information every time we expressed interest in an item, and we could only trust, just as with the labels in any museum or gallery, that the information was accurate. This is what Ludmilla Jordanova calls "the cult of authenticity" in her essay "Museums: Representing the Real?" (258). The collector controls the narrative of his collection and gains his power from the viewers' "good faith" (258), that is their acceptance of the given narrative. Alternatively, the power of the collector is lost if the viewers question or resist the given narrative.

The same who had originally directed me to the collector told me a story, whether "true" or by now a "rural legend," about this same collector that nicely demonstrates what a collector gains from his collection. A man from Montreal learned that the collector had in his possession a 1923 Indian motorcycle and

offered $50,000 for it. The collector refused the offer, saying that nothing in his collection would ever leave Bruce County, where the collector himself was born and has spent his entire life (the collection, in fact, has been willed to the Bruce County Museum). Again, we see in this story that the collection is an extension of the collector's self, but we also see that the power the collector attains through his collection is more than the power of knowledge/narrative: the collector also has power over those who value and desire the objects he possesses. However, as Baudrillard notes, the monetary value ascribed to an object is secondary to the sense of subjectivity gained through possession of an object: "It is true that one peculiarity of the object, its exchange value, is governed by cultural and social criteria. And yet its absolute singularity as an object depends entirely upon the fact that it is *I* who possess it—which, in turn, allows me to recognize myself in it as an absolutely singular being" (11-12). In other words, the possession of the object reinforces, or possibly even creates, a sense of subjectivity. It would follow, then, that if the object were particularly rare (and, therefore, valuable), the possessor/collector's sense of subjectivity, of singularity would be more intense than if the object were somewhat rare or, especially, commonplace. It would also follow that the collector's sense of his own subjectivity would intensify proportionately to the accretion of valuable objects. Furthermore, the amount of power that the possessor of an object has over the one who desires that object depends on how strongly the "desirer" has invested himself in the object, that is

how great his sense of himself as subject would be if he were to become the possessor. If the investment of self is great enough, it is reasonable to suggest that the one who desires the object would feel that he is as much under the collector's possession as the object, and, conceivably, would go to great lengths to regain his sense of self.

In her book On Longing, Susan Stewart recounts what she terms "a legend of collecting" (160) which also illustrates the lengths to which a collector will go to protect his sense of self:

> There is a story of a wealthy English collector who long believed that a certain rare book in his possession was a unique [sic]. One day he received a bitter blow. He learned that there was another copy in Paris. But he soon rallied, and, crossing over the Channel, he made his way to the rival's home. 'You have such and such a book in your library?' he asked, plunging at once *in medias res.* 'Yes.' 'Well, I want to buy it.' 'But, my dear sir—' 'I will give you a thousand francs for it.' 'But it isn't for sale; I—' 'Two thousand!' 'On my word, I don't care to dispose of it.' 'Ten thousand!' and so on, till at last twenty-five thousand francs was offered; and the Parisian gentleman finally consented to part with this treasure. The Englishman counted out twenty-five thousand-franc bills, examined the purchase carefully, smiled with satisfaction, and cast the book into the fire. 'Are you crazy?' cried the Parisian, stooping over to rescue it. 'Nay,' said the Englishman, detaining his arm. 'I am quite in my right mind. I, too, possess a copy of that book. I deemed it a unique.' (160)

Stewart uses this story as "an account of the ways in which collection is the antithesis of creation" (160), but it also works well as an example of how a collector's sense of self can become intertwined with his collection, how the intensity of one's sense of one's own subjectivity can be dependent upon the perceived uniqueness of an object. It also shows that the investment of self the first

man had made in his book was greater than the investment of the man who owned the second copy. The second man, whether cognizant of the fact or not, had great power over the first man, that is until he gave his book over to the first man's possession. In the case of the collector from Bruce County, it would seem that his perception of himself as subject, as "I" as mirrored in the Indian motorcycle is equal to, if not greater than, that of the collector from Montreal.

In his essay "The Discourse of Museums: Exhibiting Postmodernism," Robert R. Wilson writes, "All collections claim a kind of totality, if only implicitly" (101), and as I looked at "my" collector (I have to wonder how he would react to the idea that he, too, has been collected) and his collection, I assumed that, given his age, the years he has been collecting, and the lack of available space, his collecting days were behind him and that his collection was complete. However, I then heard him telling my father about his recent expeditions to auction sales and about having to smuggle found treasures out of the local municipal dumps since certain by-laws had been passed. It occurred to me then that there will always be something more for him to collect. As Wilson notes,

> if a collection is essentially conceptual . . . then it is also the case that all concepts are collections. Not merely butterflies, but all 'reality' . . . may be collected, its scattered bit or its undifferentiated wholeness drawn into conceptual nets. Collections thematize the elaborate paradoxes of categories (of conceptual nets in general): the slopping, breaking boundaries, the endless possibilities of multiple inscription, and the voracious cannibalism of categories (as when, as games do, and even texts, one category swallows another). (99)

From this, we can postulate that no collection can ever be truly complete, or that, if a collection is deemed to be complete, it is done so arbitrarily, as Mieke Bal suggests:

> If completion is possible, perfection is dangerous. Completion may be a simple way of putting an end to a collecting narrative . . . in order to begin a new one. The collection that harbours all items of a given series will have no trouble extending itself laterally, and will start a new one. Perfection, the equivalent of death in the sense that it can only be closely approximated, not achieved 'during the life time' of the subject, is one of those typically elusive objects of desire like happiness, or the satisfaction of any other desire. Perfection can only be defined as the ending; as what brings collecting to a close by default. It is an imaginary ending that owes its meaning to the contrast between it and what can be called the contingent ending. The latter is the product of such contingent happenings as running out of space, disposing of collections, changes in desires, changes in forms of storage, sales, gifts or death—not death as constitutive force in subjectivity but as arbitrary event. (113)

Bal further suggests that since the concepts of perfection and death are so closely linked, collectors might purposefully avoid striving for "perfection" in their collections (113). Certainly for "my" collector, completion and/or perfection will be achieved only in death.

The connections between collecting, the self, power and death have made the collectors/collecting/collections nexus so attractive and compelling for writers of fiction. From the very beginnings of Canadian literature, collecting has often been written about, not only because of the connections I have outlined, but also because of its relation to colonialism and to the binary of finite/infinite space (wide open space is something Canadians, in particular, have always been aware of and

have grappled with). In Wacousta, John Richardson uses a collection of Native American "artifacts" housed within the fort of Michillimackinac to symbolize the British colonialists' sense of "victory" over the Native Americans. The collection includes, among other objects, head-dresses, bows and quivers, war clubs, "the scaly carcass of some huge serpent, extending its now harmless length from the ceiling to the floor . . . [and] an alligator, stuffed in the same fashion" (291). As well, in the collection there is

> upon an elevated stand a model of a bark cane, filled with its complement of paddlers carved in wood . . . executed with such singular fidelity of feature, that although the speaking figures sprung not from the experienced and classic chisel of the sculptor but from the rude scalping knife of the savage, the very tribe to which they belonged could be discovered at a glance by the European who was conversant with the features of each. (292)

The collection in Wacousta is interesting in that, as a "museum-like apartment" (Richardson 292), it represents a blending of public and private spaces. As well, as the "museum" is situated in the women's quarters, I would argue that it represents the internalized dogma of the commander's daughter and niece in the superiority of the British forces, and, in particular, the naiveté of the aforementioned women as to the true state of affairs between the British and the Native Americans. Through this private museum, Richardson represents the link between collecting and colonizing: when colonizers collect the implements, artwork, and/or religious emblems of a culture, they are not only collecting that culture, but also rendering it extinct. As John Elsner and Roger Cardinal note in their introduction to their text

The Cultures of Collecting: "[c]ollections gesture to nostalgia for previous worlds (worlds whose imagined existence took place prior to their contents being collected) and also to amusement" (5). Furthermore, Susan Stewart observes that "the collection marks the space of nexus for all narratives, the place where history is transformed into space, into property" (xii), and that "the collection presents a metaphor of 'production' not as 'the earned' but as 'the captured' (164). Certainly, the inclusion of the stuffed serpent and alligator in the fort's collection represents the British notion that the 'dangerous beasts' of their new colony have been "captured" and permanently subdued. As well, the description of the statues of the Native paddlers as being so detailed that "the very tribe to which they belonged could be discovered at a glance by the European who was conversant with the features of each" (Richardson 292) reflects the British colonialists' idea that the Native American tribes have been "captured" through the process of analyzing and cataloguing their dominant features, given that cataloguing is another form of collecting.

In suggesting that the tribal identity of the carved paddlers could be identified "at a glance by the European who was conversant with the features of each," Richardson raises the issue of the collector/subject possessing the object through the gaze, or the "glance." Baudrillard writes,

> It can be said that the object is itself the perfect pet. . . . they [objects] incline obediently towards myself, to be smoothly inventorized within my consciousness. . . . And there is never a hint of exclusivity about such

> subjective inventorizing: any thing can be possessed, invested in, or, in terms of collecting, arranged, sorted and classified. The object thus emerges as the ideal mirror: for the images it reflects succeed one another while never contradicting one another. Moreover, it is ideal in that it reflects images not of what is real, but only of what is desirable. In short, it is like a dog reduced to the single aspect of fidelity. I am able to gaze on it without its gazing back at me. (11)

Through their collection, the British colonizers, and specifically the fort commander/ curator, are attempting to historicize the Native American cultures, to represent these cultures through objects which can be possessed and manipulated, and to represent themselves as the captors, the victors. The colonizers also represent themselves as "civilized," in opposition to the "savage," through the presence of objects from Europe representing music, reading, writing and refined artwork:

> One solitary table alone was appropriated to whatever wore a transatlantic character in this wild and museum-like apartment. On this lay a Spanish guitar, a few pieces of old music, a collection of English and French books, a couple of writing-desks, and, scattered over the whole, several articles of unfinished needle-work. (Richardson 292-93)

Unfortunately for the British, their attempt to relegate the local Native American tribes to the past, in addition to their belief in their own superiority, lull them into a false, and fatal, sense of security.

My purpose in evoking Wacousta is not to begin a discussion of the history of the collecting metaphor in Canadian literature. Rather, I evoke Wacousta because it is the Ur-novel for the collecting metaphor in Canadian literature. In one very brief scene concerning a collection, Richardson raises several issues—order versus chaos, subject versus object, power versus powerlessness, colonizer versus

colonized—which have become key issues for contemporary writers and which are often raised through the collecting metaphor. In the past thirty years, there has been a marked increase in the attention given to collecting in Canadian literature, with many of the major authors addressing it in various forms and to varying degrees: Margaret Atwood, Timothy Findley, Robert Kroetsch, Margaret Laurence, Anne Michaels, Alice Munro, Michael Ondaatje, Jacques Poulin, Jane Urquhart, Rudy Wiebe, to name a few. Of the authors mentioned above, only one, Robert Kroetsch, in addition to featuring collecting to lesser extents in several other works of fiction, has written novels in which the story centres on collecting—Alibi, The Puppeteer, and Badlands—and it is for this reason that I will be discussing the metaphor of collecting in his fiction.

Although Kroetsch does not incorporate collecting into his first novel, But We Are Exiles, he does articulate what it is that certain characters in his subsequent novels are attempting to achieve through collecting:

> No confusion about who is to do what and who did what. From bunk to galley to the wheelhouse again, six hours on, six hours off, and always out beyond the wheelhouse the thin band of shoreline and trees, separating water and sky. An order maintained as precariously as that maintained by the hands on the wheel. The chaos held in check. . . . (19)

For the collectors in Kroetsch's novels, collecting is "the thin band," the means of erecting the boundaries they need to keep chaos and death at bay, to prevent them from being lost in the abyss of time, to give them the power and control they crave, and/or to define their, and others', identities.

In an interview with Lee Spinks, Kroetsch says,

> I'm not a collector in any way myself. I'm fascinated by it though because collecting functions as a model for what culture is in a way . . . . It's a very long story, I know, but even by the time you move from a culture of hunting and gathering to whatever comes after, collecting becomes possible and ultimately significant. And the idea of collecting as a metaphor for this kind of development is very interesting to me. . . . I think [the collector] has a strong impulse to make the world cohere in any way possible. In a certain way, he's a modernist, I suppose, in my sense of what a modernist is. Collecting also throws up interesting interpretative problems because it insists upon taking things out of context. Nowadays we tend to believe that context is so important; but by taking things out of context and placing them in a museum, or whatever, it's possible to radically alter their meaning. And that makes us uneasy. Just look at our contemporary unease about past archaeological and anthropological studies. We live in an age of enormous doubt and the urge to collect is an interesting expression of this condition. (14-15)

In discussing what it is that fascinates him about collectors and collecting, Kroetsch has opened the proverbial can of worms on the issue of what constitutes modernism and, by extension, postmodernism.

Although this issue has always been difficult, there seemed to be a general, if uneasy, consensus reached for a time, particularly with the publication of Linda Hutcheon's book The Canadian Postmodern in the late 1980s. However, recent scholarship has once again blurred the lines and to define a Canadian text as modern or postmodern is more problematic than ever. As it is not my intention to attempt to create the modernism/postmodernism schema in this thesis, and as I cannot see my way clear to avoid the issue, I propose to conduct a close reading of two of Kroetsch's novels, Alibi and The Puppeteer, in the "Kroetschean"

postmodernism tradition. To make the matter as clear as I can, I will use Hutcheon's definition of Kroetsch's postmodernism:

> Kroetsch is aware that we are taught to read or interpret by ordering, by unifying (by violence, if necessary) parts of the text. His novels attempt to combat this taught (and learned) impulse in the name of process: incompleteness, not wholeness, is valued. Like the archaeologist, we may have only shards' . . . but that is more exciting and provocative than finding something whole: 'why tell it all?' As a postmodernist Kroetsch has a radical suspicion of systems of thought that totalize experience. Multiplicity, fragmentation, incompleteness, and discontinuity are preferable, even if they are effective only when their opposites are posited as the dominant forces: single vision, unity, completeness, and continuity.
>
> This does not apply only to narrative form. The radical challenges to the humanist notion of the self as coherent, unified, and stable by contemporary psychoanalysis and philosophy have left their mark on Kroetsch's theoretically self-conscious work. He too wants to combat 'the preposterous notion of self' in the name of the subject as 'a kind of fragment, a shifting pattern'. . . . Consistent with his valuing of process, Kroetsch denies that the sense of self is ever a completed thing, a product; it is amorphous and ever changing. Like us, then, the character in a novel must be shown to be the 'consequence of many stories'. . . . (172-3)

As I will show in this thesis, Hutcheon's definition of "Kroetschean" postmodernism is significant for my reading of Kroetsch's treatment of collecting in his novels, as is the following quotation from Walter Pache's essay "Aspects of Postmodernism in Canada: R. Kroetsch and G. Bowering":

> By the time Canadian reaction [to American postmodernism] set in, sometime during the seventies, John Barth and Ihab Hassan, to mention only a few prophets of the movement, had announced the end of modernism as the leading literary movement of our time. . . . In their view, the end of psychological and social realism in literature is at hand; this is caused by the loss of a unified world picture to be reflected by fiction. The development, moreover, of new media for transmitting facts as well as moral and emotional experience deprives fiction of one of its primary functions. In a short story with a significant title "The Death of the Novel," Ronald Sukenick sums up

this breakdown of the conventional framework of modernism:

> The contemporary writer . . . is forced to start from scratch. Reality doesn't exist, time doesn't exist, personality doesn't exist. God was the omniscient author, but he died; now no one knows the plot, and since our reality lacks the sanction of a creator, there's no guarantee as to the authenticity of the received version. (130-31)

Regardless of how the modernism/postmodernism debate stands at the moment, I must work from Kroetschean postmodernism as critics like Hutcheon and Pache have defined it. The idea of the absent God is of particular importance to my reading of collecting in Kroetsch's work, because it is my intention to show that in the novels Alibi and The Puppeteer Kroetsch portrays collecting as "a shadowy godgame" (Wilson 104).

When asked if The Puppeteer was intended as a sequel to his novel Alibi, Robert Kroetsch replied that he had conceived of the two novels "as a diptych: the notion from art of two facing pictures" (Spinks 14). Although the diptych is an unusual form to evoke when discussing two novels, it is more in keeping with Kroetsch's playfulness as an author than a straight sequel would be, and, in the case of these two novels, it works. Both Alibi and The Puppeteer can stand alone as literary works (although the impact and significance of the revelation in The Puppeteer that Jack Deemer is the narrator and that Papa B is Dorf is lost on those not familiar with Alibi); however, these novels work best when placed side by side, reading one in terms of the other.

The reading back and forth between the two parts of a diptych becomes something of a game. The reader must pick up clues from one part and match them with clues in the other part in order to see a more "objective" picture than those drawn by the two narrators[4]. The idea of this cross reading as a game is particularly apt for these two novels, given their labyrinthian natures, the unreliability of their respective narrators, and the game-playing that goes on within the novels themselves. Kroetsch remarks,

> In games, players and spectators are different. Their relationship to each other differs from one kind of game to another, of course. But in reading, we are both spectator and player. . . . I was thinking of the act of reading while you [Robert R. Wilson] were talking about Through the Looking Glass. There is a curious parallel in Alice in Wonderland with the character who is totally frustrated (you know, which door is she supposed to go through? and so forth). The reader identifies with the character, but is also holding back as a spectator, laughing, or understanding the game rules. There is an interaction between character and reader. (Neuman and Wilson 69-70)

With Alibi and The Puppeteer, however, the reader is no more certain than the players of the rules, nor even of who is actually playing the game. Furthermore, the game in which the characters are involved is more intense than that of the reader, as the characters are playing a godgame, which is about realizing there is a game being played, figuring out the rules, figuring out who is "god," wresting power and control from others, maintaining power and control over others, and surviving, for it is a game played to the death. Wilson describes the godgame as

> a game-like situation in which a magister ludi knows the rules (because he has created them) and the player does not. The term 'godgame' may be extended to include all instances of a certain kind of literary illusion, common

> to both the baroque and the modern periods, in which a victim within a confusing, shifting web of incidents attempts to think his way out or through (that is, discover the rules), and in which the process of thinking, or playing the game, may be described from the inside as a succession of states of consciousness. (Neuman and Wilson 67-8)

Given the description of the type of game played in Alibi and The Puppeteer, and my discussion up to this point, it should come as no surprise that this godgame is about collecting.

In considering the examples of collectors and collections cited in the introduction to this thesis, it would seem that discussing collecting in terms of "game" or "play" is inadequate, given the seriousness in which it is undertaken by collectors, as well as the connections between collecting, power and death. However, like all games, there are those players who take the game very seriously, who play for very high stakes, and who play to win. As to why collecting is viewed as play, Pearce writes,

> For collectors, collecting is characteristically a leisure-time activity which happens at a different time and in a different place to that of the working day . . . The distinction between the economic activity of working to make a living, and collecting, is usually very clear in the collector's mind: collecting is voluntary and the collection is separate and distinct; it will not be sold or dispersed except in serious necessity. It is set aside from daily life, like all the fenced-off enclosures in which games are played, and acquires a sacred character of apartness from the profane world, enshrined in its display shelves and cabinets. Collecting, like all sport, has the character of ritual activity which is carried out for its own sake with all the social and emotional quality which this implies. (50)

If we think of Jack Deemer's collecting in Alibi, or what we know of it through William William Dorfendorf's (Dorf's) narration, we can see that it is consistent with

Pearce's definition of collecting as play. Deemer is an oilman, who uses his wealth to purchase collections. He "enshrines" his collections in four separate warehouses in Calgary, and, as Dorf imagines it, he goes to the warehouses after the workday to view his possessions. However, Deemer is a serious player, who pushes the limits of the game. Although technically collecting is his leisure-time activity, it is also his obsession, and, accordingly, he has "collected" agents, Dorf being only one, whose job it is to be continually collecting collections for him. In essence, then, Deemer alters the rules of the game by turning play into work and by involving others in his obsession. It is through this alteration of the rules that Deemer initiates the godgame of Alibi and The Puppeteer. For my discussion of these two novels I will go player by player, beginning, of course, with the collector himself, Jack Deemer.

Chapter 1

"Old Jack the Almighty"[5]

> *"I was interested in Jack Deemer's impulse to collect everything, to collect the world in a sense. This obsession of his had several consequences: one was that he would want to collect other peoples stories and, ultimately, other people. I had planned that in a vague way all along." Robert Kroetsch*[6]

That Jack Deemer is the master of the game appears to be evident to the reader from the outset of Alibi: he gives the orders to his agents as to where they should go next to collect a collection for him, and then he changes the rules of the game by commanding, "Find me a spa, Dorf" (7). However, Dorf, the narrator of the novel, implies on numerous occasions in the text that Deemer *is* the god of godgame, that he is somehow more than human (for readers familiar with Kroetsch's penchant for magic realism, this idea is characteristically Kroetschean[7]).

The idea that Deemer is "god"[8] is conveyed, first and foremost, through his name, Deemer—one who deems. As well, Deemer collects "the world," everything from everywhere, provided that "everything" already constitutes a "complete" collection (until the spa). Dorf describes Deemer's voracious need to collect in the

following way: "Jack Deemer himself, my notorious employer, was an artist in his own right, a kind of looney sculptor intent on tacking together, or assembling in warehouses at least, all the loose pieces, all the high-class garbage of the riddling earth" (Alibi 20). Deemer is piecing together the puzzle of the world in an attempt to figure out the "riddle" of our life on this planet. To this end, he must decide what pieces are needed to solve the puzzle and collect them accordingly. In doing so, Deemer "deems" what is important in this world, and, as Dorf tells us, people believe in Deemer's determinations: "his collection had come to be worth millions, his attempts of spending money had, it turned out, succeeded only in making him richer, as each collection I acquired for him proved to be worth more than whatever Deemer had paid" (68). Pomian suggests that

> a collector is only taken seriously when he manipulates large sums of money. Only when a collection is made for investment purposes, is locked up in a bank vault and is worth more than its weight in gold does it impress; anything else is perceived merely as a narcissistic and slightly frivolous pastime—nothing more than a trifle. (1)

According to Pomian, then, only the very wealthy are taken seriously in the collecting game—they are the "gods" of collecting.

As a collector Deemer is taken so seriously that the value of his collection increases solely because of his interest in them, since the collections are no longer seen once they pass into his possession. In his discussion of collecting and the invisible, Pomian writes,

> Man himself . . . finds he is placed in a hierarchy or in one of a number of hierarchies. At the top there is inevitably a man or semiophore-men who represent the invisible: gods, God, ancestors, society taken as a whole, and so on. At the bottom, on the other hand, are thing-men who have at the most only an indirect link with the invisible, while between the two extremes are those in whom meaning and usefulness are to be found in varying degrees. This hierarchical organization of society is projected onto space, as the residence of the semiophore-man, be he king, emperor, pope, grand pontiff or president of the republic, is seen as a centre from which one cannot move without also being increasingly distanced from the invisible. (32)

As Dorf tells us, Deemer is "invisible": "I might explain that I have never once met Jack Deemer, at least not face to face; he's a great one for sending messages" (Alibi 7); "He's a recluse now, Jack Deemer—or at least so rumor has it. . . . He's simply a name. And a legend, of course" (13); and,

> I was expecting a large old man to come down the steps of the bus. Or a tall old man with thick eyebrows. Or even a man who was old and skinny with a small rifle for a cane and the voice of a barking dog. It wasn't really clear in my mind. I had seen no other head than Fish's own in the bus' windows. Expectation alters perception. I looked for an invisible Deemer. (212)

Using Pomian's model cited above, those in direct contact with Deemer—his secretary, Julie, Manny, Fish and Karen (in Alibi, Dorf and, therefore, we the readers have only *their* word on this)—would be the "semiophore-people," those people who represent Deemer, the invisible, the god. Dorf and the other agents would come further down in the hierarchy, while those people who have no contact at all with Deemer and yet who value his collections, and, therefore, his "Word," would be the "thing-people," the objects to Deemer's subject. However, using Deemer's model, *all* "others" are objects to his subject.

Deemer has his collections brought to Calgary, about which Dorf writes, "In each of the four quadrants of that mathematical city, he has a warehouse. I forward the collections as he gives direction: To SW. To SE. To NE. To NW. He has a compass in his head that tells the rest of us all and nothing" (Alibi 107-8). That Calgary is the city in which Deemer houses his collections is significant in that it is designed in quadrants,[9] and so it represents another way in which humanity orders its existence on earth: we lay out a "mathematical city" in the vastness of nature to give ourselves the same sense of order and control that we get from collecting. The four directions Dorf lists represent not only the corners of the city, but the four corners of the world, as though the warehouses encompass the world in its entirety, as though Deemer is creating the world—his own compacted, controllable world. This idea is supported by Baudrillard, who explains collecting in this way:

> Possession cannot apply to an implement, since the object I utilize always directs me back to the world. Rather it applies to that object once it is *divested of its function and made relative to a subject.* In this sense, all objects that are possessed submit to the same *abstractive operation* and participate in a mutual relationship in so far as they each refer back to the subject. They thereby constitute themselves as a *system,* on the basis of which the subject seeks to piece together his world, his personal microcosm. (7; original emphasis)

Stewart also discusses the creation of "the homemade universe" (162) , which she relates to the subjectivity of the collector:

> The ultimate term in the series that marks the collection is the 'self,' the articulation of the collector's own 'identity.' Yet ironically and by extension, the fetishist's impulse toward accumulation and privacy, hoarding and the

> secret, serves both to give integrity to the self and at the same time to overload the self with signification. (162-3)

Is Deemer a fetishist? According to Stewart, "[t]he boundary between collection and fetishism is mediated by classification and display in tension with accumulation and secrecy" (163), and Bal notes that "[p]sychoanalytically speaking, fetishism is a strong, mostly eroticised attachment to a single object or category" (105). Although Deemer is obsessive in his collecting of collections, there is no suggestion in Dorf's narrative that Deemer is erotically attached to them. Furthermore, Deemer makes no secret of his collecting, although he does keep the collections for his private perusal.

Whether it is Deemer who portrays, or thinks of, himself as a god, or whether it is Dorf who perceives him in such a way, Deemer's vast collection of collections does serve to "overload the self with signification," as Stewart suggests. Dorf writes,

> While I puzzle out the whole world, old Deemer, alone at night, does it all again, repeats it exactly in a warehouse in Calgary; Deemer, alone, after a day of getting richer prowls through one of his warehouses full of collections. . . . What does he do there at night? What gives him his insomnia? Is he looking for his own lost innocence, assuming once he had it? Does he ask forgiveness from the blank night? Is he a mad alchemist of the darkness, proposing to turn it all into light?. . . . He with all that collection of collections that he bothers to show to no one. Perhaps he only winds his clocks. . . . Deemer, there, alone at night, in the four corners of his warehoused universe, acting out reality. (Alibi 107-9)

Once again, Dorf uses a puzzle motif, but here his use is somewhat ambiguous. There are two possible meanings when he writes, "While I puzzle out the whole

world, old Deemer, alone at night, does it all again, repeats it exactly in a warehouse in Calgary": one, Dorf is admitting to his involvement in the godgame, to his own god-like power (an idea I will return to in the next chapter); and/or, two, he is using it to emphasize the difference between himself and Deemer, in the sense that Dorf "[puzzles] out the whole world" as most of us do, mentally, while Deemer does it literally—the world is his jigsaw puzzle.

Regardless of how Dorf tries to define himself in relation to Deemer, the passage cited above is important for the references Dorf makes to Deemer as a god-figure. Dorf mentions the "blank night" and wonders ironically if Deemer can take the darkness and "turn it all into light," which evokes the Judeo-Christian myth of Creation: "God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Genesis 1:3). Also, when Dorf writes, "Perhaps he only winds his clocks," he evokes the Deist theory of God as "Clockmaker" (Labrousse 55), which postulates that God created the "universal clock" (55), set it going, and then absented Him-/Her-/Itself, leaving "man a mere cog in His vast machine" (70). The idea of Deemer as "Clockmaker" or "Great Architect of the Universe" (59), as God is also called in Deism, is also suggested in the idea that Deemer is constructing his universe piece by piece, or, rather, collection by collection, and by the idea that Deemer sets the action, the godgame of the novel (itself a universe), in motion with one message and then absents himself from Dorf's quest/s.

During a conversation with his sister, Dorf asks rhetorically, "If Deemer could purchase the whole universe, where would he put it?" (Alibi 89), but he unwittingly answers his own question when he later refers to Deemer's collection as his "warehoused universe" (109). In his essay "The Collection of Material Objects and their Interpretation," J. Geraint Jenkins writes, "No museum, however large it may be, can ever hope to record, let alone collect, the vast variety of tools and implements, utensils, and furniture, dwellings and workshops that the inventive genius of man has devised over the centuries" (121). However, Deemer is attempting to do just that. In essence, Deemer is creating his own universe in Calgary, which leads us to wonder, if god, however we might conceive of "god" (if at all), "purchased" the whole universe, where would he put it? Here? Humanity considers the universe vast, even infinite, but perhaps the entirety of our universe is in someone's warehouse, and that warehouse is in someone else's warehouse, ad infinitum. Perhaps even our universe is on the head of a pin in a collection of pins in someone's warehouse. Or, perhaps our universe *is* someone's warehouse[10]. Kroetsch, in having Dorf represent Deemer as a mad collector/god-figure, is playing with the notion of boundaries and boundlessness: the warehouse represents a controllable whole, marked and contained by its walls or boundaries, but the warehouse placed en abyme denies the possibility of a bound or enclosed space, and instead offers only the idea of boundlessness, infinity.

The bound/boundless binary is evoked not only in the contemplation of god's warehouse/s, but also in the contemplation of the collections themselves. Stewart writes,

> the space of the collection is a complex interplay of exposure and hiding, organization and the chaos of infinity. The collection relies upon the box, the cabinet, the cupboard, the seriality of shelves. It is determined by these boundaries, just as the self is invited to expand within the confines of bourgeois domestic space. For the environment to be an extension of the self, it is necessary not to act upon and transform it, but to declare its essential emptiness by filling it. Ornament, décor, and ultimately decorum define the boundaries of private space by emptying that space of any relevance other than that of the subject. (157)

Stewart further argues that

> [t]o play with series is to play with the fire of infinity. In the collection the threat of infinity is always met with the articulation of boundary. Simultaneous sets are worked against each other in the same way that attention to the individual object and attention to the whole are worked against each other. The collection thus appears as a mode of control and containment insofar as it is a mode of generation and series. And this function of containment must be taken into account as much as any simple Freudian model when we note the great popularity of collecting objects that are themselves containers: cruets, pitchers, salt-and-pepper shakers, vases, teapots, and boxes, to name a few. The finite boundaries these objects afford are played against the infinite possibility of their collection, and, analogously, their finite use value when filled is played against the measureless emptiness that marks their new aesthetic function. (159)

The collector wants to collect, contain and control, to create order in an often chaotic world, to erect boundaries around a piece of the infiniteness that is the universe, thereby creating his own universe—in effect, to play god. We see these desires in Deemer, but we must wonder at his choice to collect collections, since there are infinite possibilities not only of collections, but also, in most cases, of what

each collection contains. Deemer has chosen to collect that which has the least possibility of finitude, and yet for someone who desires to be the god of the godgame—the Zeus of the collecting gods, as it were—his is the logical choice. Deemer wants to collect, contain and control collections, since they represent the desire and the attempts of others to collect, contain and control. As Deemer collects, he is taking power from others and amassing it; he is eliminating all the other gods in the godgame, one by one. Given that the idea of boundlessness applies not only the to the universe, warehouses and collections but also to the collectors, the gods of their own universes, the next logical question is, who will collect Deemer? Who or where is the ultimate god? Is there such a being? Can the abyss really be endless, boundless? These questions apply also to Dorf as writer. Dorf is writing the journal, but Kroetsch is writing Dorf writing the journal. Is someone writing Kroetsch? Do the writers also stretch ad infinitum? Is the ultimate writer "god"? I will return to this question later in the chapter.

Often Dorf's depictions of Deemer as a god-figure are written tongue-in-cheek, as when he refers to him as "old Jack the almighty" (Alibi 79). "The almighty" does evoke an image of god in his heaven; however, it is also a sarcastic jab at the earthly power Deemer has obtained through his wealth. Dorf also comments that "Deemer, at least, had the grace of his exuberance, tempered by a perfect ignorance. He believed he could collect everything, and set about doing so" (47), suggesting that, although Deemer believes that he can collect the world, both

materially and mentally (mentally in that he wants to reach a comprehensive understanding of the world), Dorf knows that it is an impossible goal. The phrase "perfect ignorance" is particularly fitting for Dorf's depiction of Deemer-as-god since it evokes the idea of the perfection of god, even in ignorance, but, at the same time, it denies any suggestion of divinity by emphasizing Deemer's human failing: his ignorance, his non-omniscience. Dorf is often ambiguous in his writing, and this ambiguity keeps the reader in a continual state of uncertainty—exactly where they should expect to be when caught up in a godgame.

Dorf is not the only character in Alibi who leaves the reader feeling uncertain of the meaning of things. In fact, all of the characters in the novel often exhibit behaviours or say things that are open to multiple interpretations. On a trip to Budapest to buy a collection of teeth for Deemer, Dorf encounters a collector who had "lost his nose in a war somewhere" (105-6). Dorf writes,

> Teeth, [the collector] explained, because of their constituency, will survive when all else is gone. Teeth, he said, absent-mindedly picking his nose, may well be our only immortality . . . [he] was somehow master of all that immortality and only the direst of straits had brought him to his transaction.
> 'You are looking into the mouth of God,' he whispered. And he gave me a wink. (106-7)

By obtaining the collection of teeth, Deemer has become the new "master of all that immortality," and, so, "the mouth of God" becomes the mouth of Deemer: one god usurping another in order to become the only god, which happens every time Deemer collects someone else's collection. The wink, however, suggests that there

is a double meaning in what the host has said. Perhaps the host is suggesting that the closest we get to immortality is through our teeth, and that "god" is only the representation of the idea of, or the desire for, immortality or eternity. The original collector of the collection of teeth, Dorf's host, shows signs that he is not immortal, since all of the teeth in his mouth are decaying: is it that "he was somehow master of all that immortality and only the direst of straits had brought him to his transaction" (Alibi 106-7)?, or that he is living, or, rather, dying proof that collections cannot bring immortality? There are multiple meanings and ambiguities to be found throughout Alibi. What else can you expect from a text in which the meaning of someone "absent-mindedly picking his nose" is unclear? After all, how does one "pick" a rubber nose?

Not all of Dorf's references to Deemer-as-god are made tongue-in-cheek, nor are all particularly ambiguous. To Julie, Dorf says, "you are everything and capable of everything and I would grant you everything if I were Deemer' (126). Not only does this express Dorf's desire to have the power that comes with Deemer's wealth, it also suggests that Dorf believes Deemer's power is somehow extraordinary, possibly even omnipotent, since Dorf uses the word "grant" rather than "buy" or "give."

In Alibi, Dorf and Julie make plans to go "to Cape St. Vincent itself where Prince Henry the Navigator, collecting together his cartographers and his mariners, prepared the way for that greatest collector's agent of all, a certain Mr. Columbus"

(Alibi 143), which introduces the concept of collector as colonizer. In recent years, particularly because of the protests against the (European-) American celebration of the five hundredth anniversary in 1992 of Columbus' "discovery" of the "New World," many people have begun to resist the rhetoric taught to us in our youth about the "heroism" of the European explorers. The collecting process was deadly in the "New World," as the European colonizers ruthlessly beat into submission the Mayans, Incas, Aztecs, Cherokee, and Iroquois, to name only a few of the afflicted ethnic groups whose populations were decimated by the violence and disease of European "discoverers." In Stolen Continents, Ronald Wright informs us that

> [t]he great death raged for more than a century. By 1600, after some twenty waves of pestilence had swept through the Americas, less than a tenth of the original population remained. Perhaps 90 million died, the equivalent, in today's terms, to the loss of a billion. It was the greatest mortality in history. To conquered and conqueror alike, it seemed as though God really was on the white man's side. (14)[11]

Later in Alibi, Dorf comments on Karen's passion for history and artifacts: "She had got through her head, finally, the terrible excitement of Deemer's standstill quest. Philip II had gone out and gathered in his world; Deemer would stay put and do the same" (174). In the "Old World," Philip II of Macedonia violently conquered the Thracians, Chalcidicians and Greeks in the fourth century BC (Encarta '95). All the conquerors in history are collectors (themselves or through agents) of "others," of the objects of "others", and, therefore, of the cultures of "others." Like Henry the Navigator and Philip II, Deemer ruthlessly obtains that which he desires. Dorf tells

us the stories of the two men who were "murdered" for getting in the way of Deemer as he was building his fortune. Once Deemer became rich, he no longer had to conduct his own "battles," since he could afford to "collect" collectors, as Henry the Navigator had "[collected] together his cartographers and his mariners" (Alibi 143) to do his conquering for him.

Although technically Deemer's collecting, via his "minions" (Alibi 7), occurs non-violently, essentially collecting is an act of relative violence. Pearce writes, "Like love and play . . . collecting does not lack its dark side. . . . our apparently most harmless activities, like gardening or keeping pets, are all arenas for the play of will and the exercise of domination. Collections are objects of love, but they are also objects of dominance and control" (51). As well, Stewart, as a comment on the story of the book collectors included in the introduction to this thesis, notes that the "collection is the antithesis of creation. In its search for a perfect hermeticism, the collection must destroy both labor and history" (160). The violence connected to Deemer's collecting is not overt, but it is implied in the appropriation of the various collections from their original possessors: again, one god subsumes all others as part of the godgame. As well, collecting is associated with violent death, as in the story Dorf tells about a collector of animal heads:

> I'd known another collector when I was a kid. He was a farmer, four miles out of the village of Edenwolf. But every fall he was transformed into the *perfect* hunter. Every fall he went to the Rockies west of Pincher Creek, and he hunted for the *perfect* mountain sheep. He wanted a set of those curled horns that make a *perfect* circle. He died one fall in the mountains. People

> in Edenwolf claimed he found the *perfect* ram one fall, and stalked it, and shot it. And got his curled horns. And died on the way down the mountain.
> But Deemer wasn't like that. Maybe he was just a coward. Or maybe he was trying, I decided, over a fresh glass of beer, 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; my emphasis)

Later in the text, Dorf reveals that the hunter was his father, and that his mother and sisters hung the ram's head which "completed my father's collection of the heads of the regional big game. . . up there high over the toilet bowl" (77), which nicely summarizes the non-collector's empathy for the collector's obsession. The idea of the completion and, specifically, the perfection of the collection is associated with the death of the collector.[12] However, Dorf expresses the belief that in Deemer's case it is not only the completion of the collection that is associated with death, as with Dorf's father, but also the beginning of the collection. Dorf postulates that Deemer started collecting after the death, accidental or intentional, of his partner (Alibi 37). The implication of this is that his partner's death gave Deemer the desire either for the power to order life and death (to compensate for the accidental death of his partner), or for the continuation of the sense of power he got from murdering, from collecting the life of, another.

Collecting and violence are also connected in Dorf's quest for the spa: Julie threatens Dorf with death and "lures" him into the path of an avalanche; Julie is "killed" in a car accident; Dorf is "raped"; and, Manny is "killed" when Dorf shoots (at) him. Although at the end of Alibi we are not certain if any of this violence has

actually occurred, primarily because of Dorf's unreliable narration, the connection between collecting and violence is made nonetheless. In connection with the idea that violence is an inherent part of collecting, Baudrillard suggests that

> the passion for objects climaxes in pure jealousy. Here possession derives its fullest satisfaction from the prestige the object enjoys in the eyes of other people, and the fact that they cannot have it. The jealousy complex, symptomatic of the passion of collecting at its most fanatical, can exert a proportionate influence over the reflex of ownership, even at the most innocent level. What now comes into play is a powerful anal-sadistic impulse that tends to confine beauty in order to savour it in isolation: this sexually perverse pattern of behaviour is a widespread feature of object relations. (18)

At the end of Alibi, the reader is left wondering about the "deaths" of Julie and Manny. Did Dorf kill Julie in a jealous rage over her decision to return to Manny? If it was Dorf, was he acting as Deemer's agent? Did Dorf murder Manny as well, or did he only intend to fire a warning shot, as he claims? Did Deemer kill Julie and Manny out of jealousy of their affair? Is Deemer now after Dorf because of his affair with Julie? In The Puppeteer, despite Julie and Manny's reappearance, we are nearly as puzzled as we are in Alibi. As Deemer tells it, Julie and Manny staged their own deaths to get away from him, as Julie "was still under the illusion that I [Deemer] had intended her death when I paid Dr De Medeiros a handsome sum to treat her in the spa" (Puppeteer 187). Although Deemer claims that Julie imagined his plot to kill her, earlier in the novel he confesses, "I had wanted her dead; I've confessed that too. I've told you that, if not in one way, then in another. I had wanted her stone-cold dead. I took a peek into her coffin, just to make sure" (182).

He also confesses to "having wanted [Dorf] stone-cold dead" (30). As Deemer does not explain why he wanted Julie and Dorf dead, we can only assume that this death wish stems from the struggle for power in the godgame: the need to eliminate the competition, or the impulse to act out a jealous rage over the loss of a valued object to another.

Baudrillard suggests that "the passion for objects climaxes in pure jealousy" (18), and we see this idea personified in Deemer. Of Maggie's first encounter with Julie and Manny, Deemer writes,

> Julie and her dear doctor . . . standing there, together, side by side, in front of the Fountain of Diana of Ephesus. Diana. Artemis. Call the goddess what you will. She was, in any case, stolen from her place on the coast of Asia Minor where she ruled in majesty, and blood, for centuries. Some collectors resort to theft. Butcher, the Spartans called her. She-Bear. She was Ursa Major to some. She nurtured everything that lived. What kind of collecting is that? (Puppeteer 183)

That Deemer is drawing a connection between the pillaged statue of Diana and Julie is clear, which suggests that he sees her as an object that was taken from him, its original possessor. As well, Julie herself claims that she had been collected by Deemer: "I was not there to defend my reputation, so naturally I was pictured as the villain. Julie Magnuson told all those people in the Tivoli spa that I had not married her at all; I had collected her. And to make that clear, I had sent back the dress she got married in" (Puppeteer 197). The significance of Deemer returning the wedding dress lies in its status as a contemporary cultural icon (Spinks 16). Stewart writes,

> Like other forms of art, its [the collection's] function is not the restoration of context of origin but rather the creation of a new context, a context standing in a metaphorical, rather than a contiguous, relation to the world of everyday life. Yet unlike many forms of art, the collection is not representational. The collection presents a hermetic world: to have a representative collection is to have both the minimum and the complete number of elements necessary for an autonomous world—a world which is both full and singular, which has banished repetition and achieved authority.
>
> We might therefore say, begging forgiveness, that the archetypal collection is Noah's Ark, a world which is representative yet which erases its context of origin. (152)

In order to collect Julie, Deemer must first separate her from her two different contexts, both of which are represented by the wedding dress. The first context is Julie as Deemer's bride: in the twentieth century the wedding dress represents the love and the union of a woman and a man as wife and husband, but as Deemer intends to be Julie's possessor, rather her husband, he must take from her that which represents her as a bride and their relationship as a union, a partnership. The second context is that Julie is a part of many stories and of the lives of other people. The wedding dress is connected to this context through the stories Josie wove into it of what she had heard of Julie's life and the lives of which she has been a part:

> Seen close up, it was a veritable mirage of colours and forms, a story of desire, of betrayal, of ragged lust, of barbarous fulfilment. The nimble fingers of Josie Pavich had scribbled on that cloth each tattle of gossip that came to her ignorant ears. She gave wings to a fish, one human eye to a wild rose bush. And yet, in the ticklish imagining of her presumably virgin life, she overwhelmed. (Puppeteer 251)

As Stewart notes, once an object is taken out of its original context, it becomes a representative object (152), and for Deemer, Julie becomes the representation of "woman":

> Fish . . . was once again, as he had been for most of his miserable life, worshipping at the feet of his clay idol.
>
> Julie did that to men. And to women too, for that matter. She persuaded them to worship. She was beautiful, yes, but, as Maggie described her to me later, she was also cool, severe, demanding, presumptuous, arrogant. And yet, for all that, I delighted to lie in her arms, kissing one breast, then the other, then the first again, then the other, until I fell asleep. 'My little collector,' she sometimes called me, fondly watching. In a feigning of greed I sometimes pressed her nipples close together, determined to take both at once into my hungry mouth. (Puppeteer 186)

When Manny and Dorf begin their affairs with Julie, they are, essentially, pillaging a prized "object" from the collection of people Deemer has assembled. However, Dorf and Manny are also part of Deemer's collection: Dorf is one of Deemer's collection of collectors, and Manny is one of Deemer's collection of "semiophore-men" (Pomian 32). Therefore, when Julie begins her affair with the two men, she also is pillaging, although perhaps the "objects" she pillages are not as prized as she is as "object."

As I noted in the introductory chapter, the more an object is prized by the collector, the more the collector's sense of subjectivity is connected to that object and the more one would do to regain that sense of subjectivity if the object were lost. Deemer wanted Julie dead, because then no one else could possess her, and because murder is the ultimate act of collection. This would also explain why

Deemer adds Dorf, and perhaps Manny (did Deemer send Manny out to Dorf at the lake?), to his death-wish list: the collector collected. Although Deemer claims to have experienced not jealousy, but arousal when told of Dorf, Julie and Manny's ménage à trois (Puppeteer 118), we can no more trust his narrative in The Puppeteer than we can Dorf's in Alibi; the narratives are part of the godgame, after all.

In Alibi and The Puppeteer, we see Deemer's obsession with collecting grow. When Dorf believes that Deemer has covered up Julie's murder, he writes, "Deemer thinks he can take the law into his own hands, and that just because he's managed to collect a trace of the discarded world into his warehouses. . . . he sits there, silent, and now by God he wants to collect the law too" (Alibi 195). Also, when Karen arrives at Deadman Spring, she tells Dorf that Deemer sent her because "he wants pictures of everything" (Alibi 207). I will discuss the idea of photography as collecting in more depth in the section on Karen, but, for the present, I will comment on Deemer's use of Karen as a collector. As Susan Sontag notes, "To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed" (14). Photography is another means of collecting people; however, photography is also a means of capturing moments in time. In wanting Karen to take photographs, Deemer is wanting not only to collect "everything," but

also time itself. In other words, Deemer is no longer content with collecting material objects and people, he also wants to collect concepts.

In The Puppeteer, Deemer steps up his collecting obsession to yet another level:

> 'One of the icons,' Dorf said, 'is a representation of the face of God.'
> He was playing his trump card. The very notion intrigued me. It might, after all, be interesting to make a bid on the face of God. Dorf had guessed that I might be interested. Curiosity, you might say, killed the cat. (202-3)

To collect "the face of God" would cement Deemer's position as the god of the godgame, given that the collected object reflects the subject. As well, "the face of God" would complete and perfect a collection of "everything," and, in particular, *this* "face of God," since it is unique: " 'Major pieces. Major pieces.' Dorf took a deep breath before he went on. 'That one particular icon—the artist, apparently, saw him as—female. Saw her as female. God. The monks of Mount Athos—You know. Out of the public eye, if possible—Scandalous' " (Puppeteer 203). If Deemer could collect this piece, it would be a representation of himself as the god of his constructed universe in his constructed universe. This may, in part, explain why Deemer begins to wear the wedding dress on a regular basis at the end of The Puppeteer. If "the face of God" is a woman's face, then Deemer must become a woman so that, when he finds and collects the piece, the object reflects the collector's sense of his own subjectiveness. In other words, Deemer must make

himself female so that the female "face of God" is Deemer's face. This explains Maggie's comment at the end of The Puppeteer:

> Some evenings we stay in our house that isn't quite a villa, Maggie and I, and sit in the shade on the patio and Maggie puts a beach towel over the shoulders of my wedding dress and tells me to close my eyes, which is hardly necessary, and she shaves me and does my hair.
> 'You must look the part,' she tells me, often, while she is doing this. (266)

Deemer must look the part of the female "God." Unfortunately for Deemer, his collection—his universe—remains incomplete, as that ultimate object of collection eludes his grasp and his gaze. For Dorf, it is unfortunate, and also ironic, that it is not the completion of the collection that marks the death of the collector, but the quest for the completion of the collection that results in the death of the collector's agent.

Throughout both novels, Dorf is never able to fathom just how powerful, or powerless, Deemer is. In Bath, Dorf contemplates the mortality of life on earth, even for an entity as vast and powerful as the Roman Empire:

> The Roman Empire itself turned into a collection of broken stones and a warming system, a hypocaust system that doesn't any longer work.
> And Deemer wanted me to find a place that would save him from all that. I felt despair. I was up against it, I saw that. A great idea—ask him to come here, buy a piece of the action and spend his remaining years in contemplation of the inevitable end. . . . I wanted to find a goddamned spa for Deemer and get on with my own dying. (Alibi 88)

Several times in Alibi, Dorf speculates on Deemer's need for the spa (97-8, 124-25,131) and wonders if Deemer is impotent or dying: as Deemer is human, the former is certainly not uncommon, and the latter is inevitable. However, at other

times, Dorf, and others, seems convinced that Deemer is omnipotent and immortal—a god. When Manny tells Dorf that Deemer will be coming to Deadman Spring, their resulting exchange and its double meanings convey their uncertainty:

> 'Mr. Deemer would like to be here,' Manny said.
> 'Is he ever not here?' I said.
> 'How so?' Manny said.
> 'He has his minions,' I said. 'Doesn't he?'
> 'He has his inhuman need,' Manny said. (Alibi 217)

The double entendre of Dorf's question, "Is he ever not here?," and of Manny's use of the word "inhuman" suggest that, at some level, or perhaps with irony, these men question the nature of Deemer's being. This is also suggested when Fish says to Dorf, "The only solution for Deemer . . . is to go on living forever" (Alibi 57). Kroetsch uses Dorf's uncertainty about the nature of Deemer to reflect the larger questions we ask about our world and, specifically, the existence of god—questions that we cannot possibly answer. We might have faith in the existence of a god, but we have no proof. That is not to say that Kroetsch is attacking this faith; rather, he is commenting on the futility of looking for definitive answers, or a comprehensive understanding of the world in which we live through the story of several characters who are trying to do just that.

In Alibi, Dorf does not meet Deemer until the alleged encounter in the spa, and, even then, neither we nor Dorf can be sure that Deemer is actually there. The coming of Deemer is greatly anticipated, but, when finally Fish, Manny and Deemer (?) enter the cave, Dorf and the others who are waiting are blinded by the light from

Karen's flash bulbs all going off at once. This intense light is suggestive of the radiant light that it is believed one would see when trying to look into the face of god. In the subsequent blackout, an orgy of sorts begins, during which the participants call out names: "But we named our strangeness away. Ekerpah. Lionel. Jehovius. Wah" (Alibi 227). The last two names, as S. Fogel notes, are "god-like names. . . 'Jehovius' and 'Wah' (Yahweh)" (240). However, Gunilla Florby notes that

> [a]mong the scores of names ringing out Kroetsch has slipped in some belonging to his friends and fellow writers Mandel, Ricou, and Wah, as well as some of more general renown: Pausanias, Vasco da Gama and Cook, illustrious travellers representing three parts of the world where Dorf searched for his spa: Greece, Portugal and the North American continent. (201)

As before, Kroetsch uses ambiguity to deny the reader the possibility of a singular meaning or identity. Jehovius and Wah combined is Jehovah, Hebrew for God, but Wah is also the name of a friend of Kroetsch, and de Gama and Cook may have been "illustrious travellers," but they were also ruthless collectors. Even the arrival of Fish, Manny and Deemer (allegedly) is ambiguous: it could be just three men entering the cave together, but it is also suggestive of the Trinity, not only because of Dorf's portrayal of Deemer as god, but also because the "Fish" is a well-known symbol for Christ and Christianity.

It is immediately following the orgy of naming that Dorf alleges being knocked to his knees and raped, but by whom he and, therefore, we, do not know.

However, when Dorf discusses it later, he either confuses or commingles the violence of the rape with the emotion he felt over completing his search:

> I had been seized, caught from behind, surprised, ambushed, captured, taken.
>
> I believe I passed out in a kind of ecstasy at my success. I had found Deemer his perfect spa. I fell forward as I was pushed. I had found the spa and Deemer was there and I was falling, dangerously, down into those gifted waters that might now drown me dead. (Alibi 227-8)

We can only wonder if Deemer raped Dorf, since even Dorf "cannot guess" (Alibi 234). However, given that rape is about power, as well as another violent means of objectifying and collecting someone, it is not improbable, nor impossible that Deemer would rape Dorf as part of his quest to be the god of the godgame. Furthermore, Dorf's use of the word "ecstasy," which suggests the idea of rapture, "a mystical experience in which the spirit is exalted to a knowledge of divine things" (Webster's 976), evokes the idea that Dorf experienced rapture through "divine" violence. It is possible that one of the other players raped Dorf in order to master him; however, Deemer is the most logical choice. That the god-figure is a prime suspect in Dorf's rape is a pointed comment on the nature of the power of god. There are numerous examples of the Judeo-Christian God demonstrating His power through extremely violent means, such as the Flood (the Noah's Ark story is the Ur-story of collecting [Elsner and Cardinal 1; Stewart 152]), or the Red Sea un-parting onto the Egyptians. It should not be surprising, then, to associate violence with god, just as we associate violence with the collector, and the sexual nature of the

violence is particularly apt for the idea of forced submission. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is an accepted paradox that God can be both benevolent and violent, life-giving and life-taking. If our universe was created by a being who embodies this paradox, we should not expect a singularity of purpose, intention nor action from beings and objects that exist within it. Dorf himself comments that the healing waters of the spa also hold the possibility of death by drowning—life and death from the same source.

When Dorf writes that "the Roman Empire itself turned into a collection of broken stones and a warming system" (88), it is a comment on the impermanence and unimportance of collecting and collections from a historical perspective, and, consequently, a comment on the futility and foolishness of trying to play god through the process of collecting. The broken stones in themselves are nothing; that they symbolize the concept of the Roman Empire, our knowledge of what it was, is important:

> The anthropologist Michelle Rosaldo writes that 'meaning is a fact of public life, and . . . cultural patterns—social facts—provide the template for all human action, growth and understanding. Culture so construed is, furthermore, a matter less of artifacts and propositions, rules, schematic programs or beliefs, than of associative chains and images that tell what can be reasonably linked up with what; we come to know it through collective stories that suggest the nature of coherence, probability and sense within the actor's world.' (Wilson 94)

Artifacts, or fragments, are important in that they provide the clues that we can decipher to gain insight to the nature of the societies from which they come, and

they provide us with a sense of connection to the past. However, as Rosaldo notes, the artifacts themselves are not as important as the knowledge we gain from them. I have a few, small pieces of cement that I keep in a bag in a bookcase. These fragments are meaningless until I explain that I chipped them from the Berlin Wall in November of 1989, and, suddenly, those cement chips are a very small representation of history. It is no wonder, then, that Dorf portrays Deemer, who collects pieces of history and of the world on a vast scale, as being a god figure or, at least, having a god complex.

Deemer, however, is not interested in fragments: he wants only wholes. We know, though, that a collection can only be a suggestion of a whole. Deemer may not have any use for fragments, but he can never escape them: the objects are fragments of collections, which are fragments of a collection of collections, which is fragmented into four warehouses, which themselves are fragments of a city, which is a fragment of a province, which is a fragment of a country, which is a fragment of the earth, and so on. Deemer himself is a collection of fragments—bones, cells, molecules, atoms—just as he is a fragment of something larger than himself, and, as I suggested regarding the warehouses, collections and gods, fragments extend into the abyss. The universe (and the universes beyond our universe) is composed of fragments that have come together in the semblance of a whole, and yet Deemer believes he can create the boundaries which will effectively keep the fragments in and infinity out.

If Deemer is not interested in the individual fragments, then neither is he interested in the histories they represent. Stewart writes,

> possession cannot be undertaken independent of collection and arrangement. Each sign is placed in relation to a chain of signifiers whose ultimate referent is not the interior of the room—in itself an empty essence—but the interior of the self.
>
> In order to construct this narrative of interiority it is necessary to obliterate the object's context of origin. In these examples eclecticism rather than pure seriality is to be admired because, if for no other reason, it marks the heterogeneous organization of the self, a self capable of transcending the accidents and dispersions of historical reality. But eclecticism at the same time depends upon the unstated seriality it has bounded from. Not simply a consumer of the objects that fill the décor, the self generates a fantasy in which it becomes producer of those objects, a producer by arrangement and manipulation. (157)

It is ironic that by paying attention to the fragments, we better understand the "big picture" that is our existence in, and the nature of, the universe; conversely, by ignoring the fragments and desiring only to possess wholes, we understand nothing of the "big picture" because we see only our own reflections. Collecting represents "the replacement of the narrative of production by the narrative of the collection, the replacement of the narrative of history with the narrative of the individual subject—that is, the collector himself" (Stewart 156).

Referring to Deemer's desire to possess a spa, Dorf writes, "So now, against all randomness, he wants to collect, possess, some special and immovable part of the earth itself" (Alibi 58). For Deemer, perfection is randomness eliminated, and, so, Deemer is attempting to create in his warehouses a perfect world or universe—in essence, a utopia. Michel Foucault writes, "Utopias are sites with no

real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces" (24). Although the warehouses themselves are real, the created world inside is unreal. I would argue, however, that Deemer will never create a true utopia, for if we return to the idea that the perfection of a collection is only achieved through the death of the collector, we can assume that, if the warehouses ever contain "society itself in a perfected form," Deemer will be dead. He will never enjoy or control a perfect world. However, we get the impression from the end of Alibi and from The Puppeteer that Deemer has no intention of perfecting his collection, and that he is more than content to live in an imperfect world.

Dorf describes Deemer as reclusive, which, as Baudrillard suggests, is typical of the collector:

> It is because he feels himself alienated or lost within a social discourse whose rules he cannot fathom that the collector is driven to construct an alternative discourse that is for him entirely amenable, in so far as he is the one who dictates its signifiers—the ultimate signified being, in the final analysis, none other than himself. Yet in this endeavour he is condemned to failure: in imagining he can do without the social discourse, he fails to appreciate the simple fact that he is transposing its open, objective discontinuity into a close, subjective discontinuity, such that the idiom he invents forfeits all value for others. This is why withdrawal into an all-encompassing object system is synonymous with loneliness: it is impervious to communication from others, and it lacks communicability. (24)

At the end of Alibi, with Deemer's arrival at the spa, we see the beginning of the reversal of Deemer's reclusion. In the journal entries he makes at the lake, Dorf

writes,

> And it is Billy who tells me now: Karen must fake the end of her documentary. She has persuaded her little gang to restage the arrival. She has the three of them, her men, over and over, wade into the tunnel, approach the source of the cave's healing waters. Deemer is delighted; he has become a child again, an actor, thrilled at the marvelous task of playing himself. He is happy. Reshooting. Again, he approaches; again, he approaches. (231)

In this we see Deemer beginning the process of rejoining the world—in essence, experiencing a rebirth. Furthermore, he does not seem to mind that Karen has used her documentary to collect him: he is now one of "her men." In The Puppeteer, this process continues, for not only do the main characters and the readers finally meet Deemer in the flesh, but Deemer himself symbolically "weds" the world.

The main plot of The Puppeteer concerns a woman named Maggie wanting to research and write the story of her wedding dress, which she bought second-hand. The dress turns out to be Julie's wedding dress, which Deemer returned to the dressmaker after their wedding, the significance of which I have already addressed. Deemer putting on the wedding dress represents a reversal of the collection process, since it is the use of the object as it had been intended to be used, rather than the removal of the object from its context. Deemer also stymies both Julie's and Maggie's efforts in the godgame, when he puts on the dress: as the dress has Julie's stories sewn into it, Julie herself wants to collect it, so that she can control her own stories; Maggie wants to write the story of the dress, which, in

effect, is to collect Julie's stories and, therefore, Julie. However, when Deemer wears the dress, it represents the idea that "the character in a novel. . . [is] the 'consequence [sic] of many stories'" (Hutcheon 173)[13]: the dress represents Julie's and Maggie's stories, and these stories converge in Deemer. Furthermore, as the wedding dress is a twentieth-century symbol of union, it symbolizes for Deemer his re-union with humanity. As Deemer writes, "Wearing the dress, I was no longer simply myself" (Puppeteer 251). At the end of The Puppeteer, Deemer tells us that he and Maggie have become a part of the life on the island, although he is considered something of an oddity in his wedding dress. This suggests a continuation of Deemer reintegrating himself into the world, into the dailiness of life. Deemer does not even mind being collected in the photographs of tourists (266).

This is not to say that at the end of The Puppeteer Deemer has given up the godgame of collecting all together. Deemer writes,

> I paid the piper and called the tune; I had my glimpse of the fourteen icons. Just a glimpse. That's all I was allowed. A huge icon of St George slaying the dragon. An icon that disappeared from Crete in the sixteenth century, something to do with the harrowing of hell. Messengers galore. Martyrs. A miracle or two. You name it. Those fifteen icons would have been the ultimate of my collections; I would have built for them a small secular chapel, somewhere across the lake from Deadman Spring. (264)

Here we see that Deemer still has the mind-set of a collector, because he would remove a collected object from its context by placing a religious icon in a secular chapel. It also suggests that by not having acquired "the ultimate of [his]

collections," the collections remain incomplete, and so the collector continues to collect.

Deemer and Maggie search the chapels on the island for "the face of God." However, we get the impression that completing his collection of collections is not a priority: "Maggie gets the notion that she remembers our having seen the icon that I so want to see before it is too late; she suggests we go back and check. She leads me back. Then we are not certain which chapel it was the she thought contained the missing icon, and so we start again" (265-66). As Baudrillard postulates, this is typical of collectors:

> What we have begun to suspect is that *the collection is never really initiated in order to be completed.* Might it not be that the missing item in the collection is in fact an indispensable and positive part of the whole, in so far as this lack is the basis of the subject's ability to grasp himself in objective terms? Whereas the acquisition of the final item would in effect denote the death of the subject, the absence of this item still allows him the possibility of simulating his death by envisaging it in an object, thereby warding off its menace. (13; original emphasis)

In Alibi, Deemer gave Dorf the impossible task of collecting the uncollectible—a spa—but Dorf manages the impossible, and, in doing so, he presents Deemer not only with the possibility of life, but also of death. Dorf may be too successful at collecting for Deemer's peace of mind. As Karen notes, "[Deemer] said you've never failed him. You're remarkable. You work in circles, in tangents, in loops, in triangles. But you always get to the center" (Alibi 97). Consequently, when Deemer and Maggie take over the job of collecting, they too work in circles, but they avoid

the centre, which represents perfection and death. Instead, although Deemer continues to play the godgame (he one-ups Dorf and collects all the players by writing The Puppeteer), he embraces ambiguity and non-singularity, to which his own androgyny can attest. Deemer writes, "I am a collector. Perhaps to collect is to have all and nothing. It is to heap ashes on one's own head. It is to desire all and to embrace the emptiness. Maggie Wilder, in her teasing way, came to my rescue" (Puppeteer 118).

Chapter 2

The Opponents

> *"the objects in our lives, as distinct from the way we make use of them at a given moment, represent something much more, something profoundly related to subjectivity: for while the object is a resistant material body, it is also, simultaneously, a mental realm over which I hold sway, a thing whose meaning is governed by myself alone. It is all my own, the object of my passion." Jean Baudrillard*[14]

Maggie and Henry

Maggie and Henry enter into the game in The Puppeteer, and while Maggie is caught up in the midst of the godgame, Henry remains a peripheral figure. Henry is an academic and a collector, although he is a collector on such a small scale that he is never taken seriously as a player in the ongoing godgame. As with any collector, the notion of creating boundaries is important to Henry, for whom the "world" is Mount Athos: "She thought of Henry, looking for icons, refusing to look beyond the bounds of Mount Athos to where other icons might be" (66). However, Henry commits the unforgivable faux pas of the collecting world, by placing the monetary value of a collection over its subjective value. For Henry, to possess a

collection of Greek icons is more of a convenience than a matter of control of the world and of his own subjectivity. He wants the icons in his study so that he can conduct the research for a book there: "I'm sick of looking at bad colour slides and trying to remember what I saw in a badly lit chapel. The real thing. I'll have it—there in my study. I'll never have to stay in another ratty hotel" (217). As well, Henry is an inept collector, for although he gains possession of a collection of stolen Greek icons, he cannot figure out by himself how to smuggle them off the island. For his monetary greed and his ineptness, Henry earns Deemer's contempt and wrath:

> I explained to the police, through a variety of incompetent interpreters, that I had been intent on recovering the icons for their rightful owners, whoever they should prove to be, and damn the cost. We are told that artists tell true lies; I, there on the cliff's edge spoke volumes. Henry Ketch was a two-bit chiseller who was after money.
>
> Three years for the possession of stolen icons and attempts to smuggle them out of the country would seem to me a fair enough sentence. (259)

Even though Deemer was going to buy the whole collection of stolen icons from Henry, and, therefore, would have been breaking the law himself, he does not hesitate to lie and to turn Henry over to the police to eliminate him ruthlessly from the collecting game. As the reigning god of the godgame, Deemer plays by his own rules; however, Deemer has added incentive to get rid of Henry: Maggie.

Maggie is an interesting blend of collector and non-collector, who gets caught up in the godgame Deemer has set in motion. It is difficult to know if Maggie

has become one of Deemer's collected objects, one of his agents, or one of the players. Maggie becomes involved in the game when she decides to tell the story of her wedding dress and discovers that it had been Julie's, and she exhibits the collector's need for order and control: "She counted. Six bottles of Heinz. She counted the high stools ranged empty and in a row along the counter. Seven. The world was measurable, countable, accountable; all the men in her life, and that included Henry Ketch and Tom Bludgett and Papa B and Fish, be damned for driving her to drink" (59-60);

> Maggie thought of her calendars. She wanted to run down to the kitchen and check all four at once, as if some averaging of dates might fix for her not only the day but also the moment of her disaster. Where and when had she made her wrong move? Had an ancestor somewhere in the past erred, and left her condemned to try blindly to make the accidental gesture that would set things right? She would become a collector of wristwatches, of sundials. She would scour the world, if she survived this, for ways to turn the clock back five minutes. (91)

Once Maggie is caught up in the godgame, she tries to extricate herself and to stand on what she considers to be more stable ethical ground. Not only does she offer to give the wedding dress to Julie (208), she also tells Henry that he should return the icons to the rightful owner, the Greek church (216). However, being caught up in the game also has the opposite effect, as her collector's instincts come to the fore: "Maggie wanted blindly to reach across the table and reassure him [Henry]. She was for a moment tempted to join him in his one and only crime, then tell him how to do it right" (222).

In the end, Maggie becomes both collected and collector. Through Karen's photography, Maggie is objectified and collected by Deemer:

> Let me explain in parenthesis that I, Jack Deemer, received the photographs from Karen Strike by courier the day after she took them. That was the first glimpse I had of Maggie. In one photograph she lifts herself naked out of the water, into the caress of snowflakes. Perhaps it was right then, examining that photograph, that I became interested in the icon, though I had not yet heard of Maggie's husband nor of his obsession. The little patch of sight that remains mine turned the snapshot iconic. Is not each treasured snowflake itself a kind of icon?
>
> I studied that one particular photograph. There, that February afternoon in Calgary, sitting alone in the office in one of my cavernous and stuffed warehouses, I was smitten. It had nothing at all to do with the dress that Karen, quoting Fish, made mention of in her covering note.
>
> I carry the photograph in my briefcase. In the large black-and-white photograph, Maggie's mouth is full and open, her breasts small, her stomach pulled into an exquisite, tight circle around her wet belly button as she raises her long arms in an offered embrace. The air is full of unhappy ghosts and hesitating promises. Fish is not in the photograph at all. (113)

Thus, Maggie becomes an object that Deemer can possess and carry with him at all times. In the photograph, Maggie is reduced to a collection of body parts—mouth, breasts, stomach, arms—which Deemer can interpret as he chooses. Deemer sees in the photograph an unhappy, shy and sensuous woman offering herself to him, but the issue is not about the accuracy of Deemer's interpretation, as the objectified Maggie tells us more about Deemer than about the subjective Maggie: it is Deemer who is unhappy and wants to be embraced. As noted in the previous section, Deemer has been living in a collector's isolation and wants to rejoin the real world.

Maggie and Deemer eventually meet and become coconspirators in the godgame. Not only do they look for "the face of God" together, they also write the story of the wedding dress together, which, in essence, is a means of collecting all the players in the godgame and of "one-upping" Dorf for having "collected" everyone in his journals. Spinks, interested in this joint effort at writing, asks Kroetsch in his interview whether or not Deemer "hesitate[s] between univocality and polyvocality" in The Puppeteer (Spinks 15), to which Kroetsch replies,

> Sure, although we shouldn't put the whole blame on Deemer; this is, after all, partly my fear of a single story [laughs]. There's an important point here though about the paradox of narrative: the storyteller, by writing the story down and arresting time and story makes it possible for interpretation to function. Deemer's different narratives or collections rely to some extent on the notion of a single narrative; but then the single story opens out into a number of different narratives. His activities as a collector, in a sense, almost violate the principle of story. And that's why he's positioned as both reader and writer in the text, looking over Maggie's shoulder as a reader but also intruding all the time to the point where he starts believing that it might be his story that he's writing down. (15)

As we read the story, we are unable to discern Maggie's and Deemer's voices: we are not certain who is speaking when, whether Deemer dictates to Maggie, or if he takes his own turn at writing. Regardless of how we read the narrative voices, The Puppeteer represents Deemer's, and more than likely Maggie's, victory in the godgame (at least for the time being), as all the players have been collected in the text.

Julie and Manny

Julie and Manny are ambiguous figures, and, ironically, they represent the multiplicity and the unanswerable questions that they as collectors try to deny or counteract. Their multiplicity comes, first and foremost, from their being representative of both life and death: in Alibi, Julie is a source of life, in that she has been sexually involved with all the male characters—Fish, Deemer, Manny and Dorf—and a source of death, because of her threat of death against Dorf if he should find a spa for Deemer and her connection to the deaths of Deemer's partner and the scout. Similarly, Manny is a source of life, in that he is a doctor who treats his patients with spa water, and he is a source of death, for it is Manny who kills Dorf, accidently or not, at the end of The Puppeteer. As well, both are "killed" and return from the "dead." (Interestingly, Manny fakes his death by falling into a bottomless lake, an abyss [Puppeteer 36], which raises the idea of the gods extending infinitely into the abyss, and makes us wonder, at least until we get to the end of The Puppeteer, is Manny the next in an infinite line of gods after Deemer-as-god?) Furthermore, Manny is sexually ambiguous, not only because of his involvement in the ménage à trois with Julie and Dorf, but also because, to Dorf at least, Manny embodies both male and female characteristics:

> The trough extends along a stone wall. From the long wall, eleven round mouths set in a horizontal row pour water into the trough. Standing beside the middle stream of water, lifting one foot to be bathed, was a smallish figure with long fair hair. A delicate figure, or so it seemed, wearing a velvet blouse that was belted; the blouse did not quite cover the upper thighs. The

> legs were bare.
>
> I was, quite frankly, somewhat aroused by the prospect. Imagine my surprise, even my horror, when the woman or girl turned around and proved to be, not only a male, but a dwarf as well.
>
> He was undoubtedly a dwarf, smooth-shaven, with long, flowing, blond hair; only his head and his genitalia seemed to be of normal size. He was handsome in the indigo blouse that had deceived me into thinking he must be a woman. (Alibi 111)

Finally, Julie and Manny are ambiguous in their loyalties. Dorf tells us that, when he first met Julie, she told him that Jack had told her where she could find him (11). However, the reader cannot be certain if Deemer, fearing Dorf will successfully complete his collection by collecting a spa, sends Julie to threaten Dorf, or if Julie does so on her own, wanting to prevent Dorf from finding a spa that will lengthen Deemer's—her collector's—life. Julie and Manny could be working together for or against Deemer, and Dorf even suggests that Deemer might even be Julie's agent (Alibi 131). Throughout both novels, the reader is never certain as to who is in league with whom, nor who is against whom. Kroetsch offers numerous possibilities to hold the reader in the labyrinth of the godgame.

Like Maggie, Julie is both collected and collector; although, unlike Maggie, Julie seems to escape from Deemer's collection. In a conversation with Julie after she returns from "death," Fish comments on Deemer's continuing urge to collect her: 'I never want to lay eyes on Jack Deemer,' Julie said. 'Never again. Not ever.' 'He couldn't stand that,' Fish said. 'That's the one thing he couldn't stand. Not seeing you. Now that you're back' (Puppeteer 198). Through the gaze, Deemer

still has the power to objectify and to collect Julie, although he himself expresses things differently: "I suppose I will always be in love with Julie. I've explained that to Maggie. She laughs and says I will always be in love with whatever it is that I haven't been able to add to my collection of collections" (Puppeteer 184). To clarify this, we must note that Deemer has not been able to make Julie a *permanent* part of his collection.

Maggie's observation evokes an interesting issue of collecting. Baudrillard suggests that "[t]he practice of collecting is not equivalent to a sexual practice, in so far as it does not seek to still a desire (as does fetishism). None the less, it can bring about a reactive satisfaction that is every bit as intense. In which case, the object in question should undoubtedly be seen as a 'loved object' " (9). Can one "love" an object? If the object is collected as an extension of the collector, then the possessor becomes the subject in contrast to the collected object, and the object supplies for the collector a continual reflection of his subjectivity. Therefore, if there is love for an object, it can only be a narcissistic love. Maggie's observation demonstrates an understanding of this idea: Deemer can only "love," in the self*less* sense of the word, someone who has resisted becoming an object, and who, instead, has maintained a subjective identity.

Julie is a collector in her own right, and, as the following description suggests, she exhibits external traits that mark her as such: "She has a face that has no history. It is one of the secrets of her success. She is close to my age, I

[Dorf] was surprised to realize, but time erases her past. . . . Time creases me into sorrow" (Alibi 113). Just as the process of collecting erases the production and use history of an object, so too does it erase time itself:

> The problematic of temporality is fundamental to the collecting process. As Rheims observes, 'a phenomenon often associated with the passion of collecting is the loss of all sense of the present'. . . . the profound power exerted by collected objects derives not from their singularity nor their distinct historicity. It is not because of these that we see the time of the collection as diverging from real time, but rather because *the setting-up of a collection itself displaces real time.* Doubtless this is the fundamental project of all collecting—to translate real time into the dimensions of a system. Taste, curiosity, prestige, social intercourse, all of these may draw the collector into a wider sphere of relationships (though never going beyond a circle of initiates): yet collecting remains first and foremost, and in the true sense, a *pastime.* For collecting simply abolishes time. Or rather: by establishing a fixed repertory of temporal references that can be replayed at will, in reverse order if need be, collecting represents the perpetual fresh beginning of a controlled cycle, thanks to which, starting out from any term he chooses and confident of returning to it, man can indulge in the great game of birth and death. (Baudrillard 15-16; original emphasis)

For Dorf, who is merely the agent of a collector, time is not abolished, and so it affects him, as it does most of humanity.

Although Julie collects on a relatively large scale, like Henry, she does not collect in a way that elicits any respect from Deemer:

> Her three homes, she explained to Maggie while they chatted over a bottle of grappa—an affectation of Manny's, intended as a sign of his virility—were each of them crammed to the rafters with every kind of figurine that ever was dug from the ground or lifted from under water. 'You name it.' She gestured around at the cluttered shelves, there in her parlour.
>
> Julie Magnuson still, obviously, considered herself a collector who might make claims to being in my league. She showed no understanding at all of the difference between passion and will. (Puppeteer 207)

Perhaps it is this lack of passion on Julie's part that gives Deemer the upper hand in the godgame. When Julie and Manny fake their deaths, they are likely going underground in order to gain an advantage over Deemer. They resurface, as it seems, in order to prevent Deemer, and perhaps Maggie, from collecting Julie's wedding dress. It would also seem that they resurfaced to enact a plot to "collect" Deemer: "Dorf once acquired for me a collection of children's tops from a Chinese man in Singapore who had killed a man in Thailand in order to get them. Collectors too are collected, as I well know. Julie Magnuson taught me that much. She, or her sidekick—" (Puppeteer 175);

> Dr Manuel De Medeiros, concealed in a kitchen in one of the small, square houses built against the outside wall of the village of Kastro, pulled the trigger.
>
> The idea of motive is difficult, one might even say impossible, yet much of our so-called law hinges on just that impossibility. Who would presume to describe another's motive? Do we pretend to understand our own motives?
>
> Manuel De Medeiros had no cause to hate me. He was, after all, living with my legal wife—my, if I might offer a correction, legally dead wife. And I suppose that too raises questions. Could Julie, being legally dead, make any legal claims to accumulated property or even to neatly counted and bundled one-hundred-dollar bills? (Puppeteer 254)

Whether Manny misses Deemer and hits Dorf by mistake, or whether Manny and Julie are Deemer's agents and kill Dorf on Deemer's orders, we cannot know.

Kroetsch suggests in Alibi and The Puppeteer that there are no singular answers or identities, that life is ambiguous and complex, and he makes interpretation particularly difficult for the reader by employing two, possibly three, highly biased narrators. Deemer, as the master collector and game-player, is less

trustworthy as a narrator than Dorf. As Dorf does in Alibi, Deemer can collect all the players in his narrative, and he can manipulate his collection any way he chooses. Deemer portrays Julie and Manny in the text in such a way that they look inept and childlike, and relatively non-threatening. Of Manny, Deemer writes, "Manny De Medeiros was a scheming little devil. But I was intent on mercy, not mere justice, that bright morning" (Puppeteer 259). The mischievous child is forgiven by the benevolent god. Deemer describes his final meeting with Julie in the following way:

> Julie Magnuson and I had not spoken to each other in four years, since it is generally recognized that conversations with the dead are difficult if not impossible.
> 'If I see you again in that dress, think of yourself as wearing it to your own funeral,' Julie said. 'Get that through your head.'
> That was all she had to say. She seemed to feel she had to lean right into my mouth to say it.
> 'I take that as a challenge," I replied. (Puppeteer 262)

For Deemer, at least on paper, Julie is tough-talking, but not a serious threat. After all, one way or another, she has lost the godgame.

Fish

Fish is, not surprisingly, a continual source of questions throughout both texts and the one character we feel we know less about at the end of The Puppeteer than we thought we did at the beginning of Alibi. However, Fish is a

notable character not only because he is an enigma, but also because of his hatred of collecting:

> 'I collect *nothing*,' Fish shouted. I'd never seen him lose his cool before. The lady, obviously, was upsetting him. '*Nothing*,' he repeated. And he seemed to be persuaded that he was telling the truth.
>
> There was nothing in the world that Fish would bother to purchase and protect and own. Nothing. . . . But even [Karen] had trouble defending his will not to own so much as a few house plants. (Alibi 57-8)

As much as Deemer is obsessed with collecting, Fish is obsessed with *not* collecting, and yet he reflects the same desire for order and control as Deemer and the other collectors. As we learn in The Puppeteer, Fish does not seek life's answers in the collection of objects, but rather in the reading of books:

> Lucullus, [Fish] was saying; his villa provided the model. Read Vitruvius. Read Plinius. Maggie could have hated him then, for his sounding like Henry, Henry going on about his icons, not glancing up at the icon on the wall. Fish would not let the garden whisper in at her eyes. The geometry of the garden, Fish was saying. This, he whispered, is something Jack Deemer can't collect. There is a limit, finally, to what Jack Deemer can collect, even if he believes he can collect everything, including this, including us. The geometry of the garden was lost for centuries, and then it was found again, in the Quattrocento villa. Fish wasn't speaking to her at all, he was speaking to himself. . . . Read Boccaccio. . . . Fish was making sense of the world for her, and she couldn't follow anything he said. Read, he was telling her. Read Leon Battista Alberti. Read Martini. Maggie wanted him to tell her to look at the garden, but he was telling her to look at books. *Obiter dictum,* she wanted to tell him. (180)

Although Fish defines himself in contrast to Deemer, they are similar in their desire to have a comprehensive understanding of their world. Fish, however, turns to not to objects, but to ancient Roman and medieval writings as a means of gaining understanding: writings by generals, architects, painters and philosophers—men

who, in one way or another, ordered, even controlled, their worlds. For Deemer, his warehouses represent a utopia; for Fish, the ancient texts represent not a utopia, but a "heterotopia." Foucault's concept of heterotopias (in which he uses a mirror as an example) is revealing:

> The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. . . . But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy . . . . The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there. (24)

Like Foucault's mirror, a book is a heterotopia. When I read a book, I am real as the book is the object to my subject. As well, the space I occupy is real, for the space within the book is imaginary, theoretical, unreal. At the same time, however, as I enter this imaginary space through the reading process, it becomes the real, while the space I occupy becomes the unreal. For Fish, books make his world real not only by being the object to his subject, but also by making sense of it, by ordering it. As well, though, the books make his world unreal, since the "virtual point," the real, and, in particular, the *ordered* real, lies within their pages, "over there." Furthermore, Fish's present is the past, for his world is a reflection of the world as seen by men who lived several centuries, even millennia ago.

Despite Fish's hatred for collecting, he is a player in the godgame, perhaps even a powerful one. When Fish tells Dorf about Deemer, Julie and the death of their partner, he omits the part concerning the relationship he had with Julie before

she became involved with Deemer. It is not until after the avalanche that Dorf realizes Fish's involvement in the game. When Dorf is recovering in hospital, Fish visits him:

> He was gone before I bothered to check what he had written. And then, holding up a small mirror so I could read the message, even backwards, I saw it: 'Until next time.' In quotation marks.
>
> Fish hadn't signed the message; maybe he didn't dare. Or maybe it wasn't his, maybe he was only the messenger. Maybe he only carried the messages. I lay there for a good two hours, slowly realizing the situation I was in. And I realized, also, there was no way in the world I could stop myself from looking for the spa. (Alibi 73)

Fish's message is a veiled threat that there will be another attempt on Dorf's life, but the reader is as much in the dark as Dorf as to how Fish fits into the game. Similarly, when Dorf returns to Canada after Julie's death, he knows that Fish has searched his apartment, but not why nor for whom (Alibi 213). Fish lures Dorf to Deadman Spring by leaving the name of the spa and a fish symbol on the label of a beer bottle on Julie's coffin. As well, Fish brings someone Dorf believes to be Deemer to the spa, and he is in the cave when Dorf is raped. Again, though, we are not sure of the nature of Fish's involvement.

Deemer suggests, when he relates the following exchange between Inez and Maggie, that Fish is not only involved, but quite adept at manipulation: 'You [Inez] said that [Fish is] going to look at spas for Deemer.' 'That's what Deemer thinks.

Poor old Deemer. Fish put the bee in his bonnet. Deemer put up the cash because he thinks he'd like to live forever' (Puppeteer 134). Later, Deemer writes,

> If you ask me, Fish was the culprit. He and Julie and Manny had been in cahoots all along. Why not make matters worse for me, if they possibly could? Fish, pretending to work for me—and pretending to work was as close as he ever got—had all the while been Julie's lackey, listening in and watching out, waiting for the shift of a grain of sand that would bring down the mountain. (Puppeteer 197)

We are never sure of Fish, but neither can we trust Deemer's version of Fish's involvement as long as the godgame continues.

Karen

Almost from the beginning of Alibi, Dorf draws a parallel for the reader between Deemer and Karen Strike ("Like my boss, she's a lunatic on the subject of history" [8]), and we come to suspect that Karen is perhaps the one who can out-collect Deemer. Karen, though, does not collect objects, but images through photography and filmmaking. Karen is a constant presence in the text, and, usually, she is filming the action as it happens. At first, we believe that she is innocent of the godgame and becomes involved at all only because Dorf wants information from her, because she is working on a documentary on spas. However, when we learn that Karen is in contact with Deemer (Alibi 96), we begin to suspect that she is more involved than was first suggested, that she, too, is working for Deemer. Later,

particularly when she goes at Deadman Spring to document Deemer's arrival, our suspicions are confirmed, although we still do not know the depth of her involvment.

When Dorf and Karen joined Fish's tour group for drinks, Karen, "[h]er face lit up . . . made a circle around the table with her right forefinger, indicating she liked the circle, the friends, the antics" (Alibi 55). The circle image connects Karen to Deemer, Fish and the other collectors, in that it represents a preference for unity, wholeness, completion, order, even eternity. Like the others, Karen uses collecting (in Fish's case, non-collecting) as a means of controlling her world. This desire for order also explains her penchant for history, since history is, generally, an explanation of the world's events laid out in a linear fashion. History is a collection of stories, which many regard as unarguable truth, as objective reality. However, as we learn from the narratives of both Alibi and The Puppeteer, stories, even *his*tories, are subjective and cannot represent an "objective" truth. Bal writes,

> Objectively, narratives exist as texts, printed and made accessible; at the same time, they are subjectively produced by writer and reader. Analogously, the discursive mode of narrative feeds on this paradox. They are ostentatiously 'objective': in terms of speech-act theory, narratives are *constative* texts: like affirmative sentences, they make a statement—describing situations and events, characters and objects, places and atmospheres. . . . Yet all narratives are not only told by a narrative agent, the narrator, who is the linguistic subject of utterance; the report given by that narrator is also, inevitably, focused by a subjective point of view, an agent of vision whose view of the events will influence our interpretation of them. . . . This makes all narratives by definition more or less fictional; or, conversely, it makes fictionality a matter degree. (98; original emphasis)

History is controlled, even created, by those who write it, which appeals to Karen,

as she, too, wants to control and create history through her filmmaking: "She has a dream of one day making a perfect film, the perfect replica of a dismissed life" (Alibi 17) As a collector, however, Karen should view perfection as an ominous prospect.

In Alibi, it would seem that Karen is involved in the godgame only as one of Deemer's agents: we do not have any indication that she is collecting for herself, nor that she, in any way, is trying to gain the upper hand. However, what we do see in Karen, through Dorf's narrative, is an increasing awareness of the power and the thrill of being a collector. When Dorf and Karen are in Greece, Karen goes to see the ruins of Philippi. and there she first realizes not only the power in collecting, but also the limitations to Deemer's kind of collecting:

> 'Any traces of a Roman spa?' [Dorf] asked.
> 'Of course,' she said. 'A heap of treasures that even Deemer couldn't steal. You should spend a few minutes having a look.'
> She pretended defiance, but she had been tempted all the same. I heard that in her voice; she was bitten, caught; she had, like Deemer, learned a longing.
> Karen was become obsessed. . . . She had got through her head, finally, the terrible excitement of Deemer's standstill quest. (173-74)

As Sontag notes, "Photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire" (4). Karen realizes the sense of power over the world and over history that one can gain from collecting/photography, and she also realizes the limitations of Deemer's kind of collecting. Deemer collects material objects, but there are some

things that cannot be collected. Karen can collect through photography and not be limited in the same way as Deemer—Karen can collect the ruins at Philippi, where Deemer cannot.

It is in The Puppeteer that we see Karen come into her own as a collector. At first, she is still collecting for Deemer, "making a film of the lake bottom. Every damned inch of the lake bottom where the corpse [Manny] might have got silted over or snagged" (56). As the lake is considered to be bottomless in the area Manny "died," Karen is, essentially, documenting and mapping the abyss for Deemer. Even though Karen is collecting for Deemer, she is seen as being as obsessed and manipulative as Deemer:

> 'She's as crazy as old Deemer himself. He wants to collect everything in the world. She just wants an exact copy. When the world ends' — he [Fish] gasped again for air — 'she'll make a copy of that too. She'll make an exact copy of the end of the world. For Deemer to add to his collection of ends of the world.' And then he said bitterly, 'The way she's adding us.'
>
> Karen Strike asked no permission, said nothing. She was invisible and soundless, until her camera snatched out of the darkness its small, lightning record. After a flash the darkness was all the more intense, brightly black. (Puppeteer 80-1)

It is Deemer himself, though, who acknowledges that Karen has power that he does not, and it is for this reason that he needs her. He writes,

> And while my sight faltered, as it sometimes does, I went on studying the clues she brought back in cans and packages to my warehouse shelves. Sooner or later. That was our motto, and a useful one too. Sooner or later.
>
> I was . . . employing Karen to photograph a square mile of lake bed, a tedious task surely, and yet a task that in its own unlikely way bore fruit. Karen Strike and I—she was intent on making films and needed time and equipment. She needed money. I have money. I needed to stop the flow

> of time so I could take a close look. I wanted to know, I had to find out, why the coffin that Dr De Medeiros shipped back from Portugal came to my warehouses empty. (Puppeteer 73)

In order for Deemer to dominate Manny and Julie in the godgame, he needs Karen to act as his eyes. Deemer's faltering sight represents weakness, perhaps even impotence. As the god of the godgame, Deemer struggles to maintain his position. He fears what Julie and Manny may be plotting, and he needs Maggie to help him collect the players in his narrative. As well, Deemer seems to be confessing that while he was preoccupied with studying clues, he missed seeing that Karen was becoming a powerful collector—his opponent , rather than his agent.

In time, Karen almost beats Deemer at his own game:

> Karen, for all the bags and boxes she was lugging around, was nothing if not efficient. She wanted photographs of Dorf's, so to speak, second appearance, as he was hauled up over the edge of the cliff wearing, in addition to his usual garb, a considerable collection of thistles. That was too much for me. I decided I must duck into the cool of the chapel. (Puppeteer 260)

Karen out-collects Deemer; that is, she is willing to go further in her collecting obsession than he, to the point of collecting on film the mangled body of Dorf. In photographing Dorf after his death, Karen is exhibiting a power in the godgame that, up to that point, Deemer lacks—the power to give immortality:

> After the event has ended, the picture will still exist, conferring on the event a kind of immortality (and importance) it would never otherwise have enjoyed. While real people are out there killing themselves or other real people, the photographer stays behind his or her camera, creating a tiny element of another world: the image-world that bids to outlast us all. (Sontag 11)

Although a photographer is behind the camera, she is a part of the violence occurring in front of the lens, or, alternatively, she introduces an element of violence to an otherwise placid scene. Hutcheon writes, "One could argue that there is, of course, an implicit aggression in any use of the camera. Think of the verbs we use to talk about it: we load, aim, shoot a camera" (48). In The Puppeteer, Karen's potential for violence is not only implicit in her photography, but also explicit when she, in a motor boat, nearly capsizes the small boat carrying Maggie, Fish, Ida and Josie. Of the incident, Deemer writes, "I didn't pay Karen Strike to play games with people's lives. Her maliciousness was her own, not mine, and, say what you will, her taunting of people with death by drowning was not my idea" (Puppeteer 77-8).

If Deemer does not pay Karen "to play games with people's lives," it is because he pays her to do his leg-work for him while he plays games with people's lives. Deemer's hypocrisy aside, we can see in this incident that Karen is not only demonstrating the photographer's propensity for violence, but also her transition from agent to player. Although it is a temporary victory, Karen succeeds in becoming the god of the godgame by collecting Deemer himself: "Karen Strike, the idiot that she could be at times, snapped a picture of me and Julie standing face to face. 'For the Calgary *Herald,"* she said. 'This will make the front page back home'" (Puppeteer 262). Up to this point, Deemer has been seen by only a few people, but her photography makes Karen powerful, and she collects Deemer and puts him on public display. Furthermore, after she takes his picture, she and Julie leave

together, lugging her camera equipment with them, indicating that Julie has severed her partnership with the inept Manny and has aligned herself with the person whom she sees as having power enough to match, or even beat, Deemer. In the end, of course, Deemer beats Karen at the godgame: he matches his pen to her camera, and wins.

Dorf

Just as Karen almost out-plays Deemer in the godgame, so too does Dorf. Alibi, or the journals that constitute it, represents Dorf's successful bid to collect the collector, although, in time, Deemer turns the tables on Dorf and re-collects him. Like the other collectors in Alibi and The Puppeteer, Dorf represents the desire for singularity of meaning, for absolute knowledge of the world around us, while at the same time he embodies multiplicity and ambiguity. When Dorf first receives the telegram from Deemer saying, "Find me a spa, Dorf" (Alibi 7), Dorf "turn[s] the piece of paper upside down and trie[s] to read it that way" (7), and he describes the telegram as "waiting like a bomb in [his] mailbox" (7). What this demonstrates is Dorf's desire to find the "right" way to read the message, as though by turning it upside down he could understand its meaning, pinpoint exactly what it is that Deemer wants. The message, however, remains ambiguous: it is open to multiple interpretations (hence the bomb metaphor, for the message, like a bomb, has the potential to "explode" into fragments in the reader's hands), just as Dorf himself is

multiple, ambiguous. In discussing Kroetsch's postmodernism, Hutcheon writes,

> The split subject in Kroetsch's work is usually a doubled subject: William William Dorfendorf of Alibi is the most explicitly doubly named. Or the subject may be multiple. As Madham says in Gone Indian, the northern prairies have great consequences for 'human definition': 'the diffusion of personality into a complex of possibilities rather than a concluded self.' (174)

Dorf's name is not the only thing about him that represents multiplicity: he is both victor and victim, collector and collected, subject and object. As well, his address is both temporary and permanent (Alibi 73). However, his name offers the strongest clue that Dorf is untrustworthy. When Sylvia, Dorf's sister, remarks, "Billy . . . you deliberately refuse to tell the truth," Dorf replies, "In my slight exaggerations . . . in my careful and deliberate tilting of the mirror, you might, if you chose to look, recognize truths that have forever been denied to you" (Alibi 86). However, if we take this advice and look in the mirror, we see that "Dorf" is "frod," a fraud, a liar. Dorf represents the doppelgänger, the subject and his negative other self.

Although Dorf "[has] a nose for perfect collections" (Puppeteer 72), he is not really a collector, because he does not possess those objects that he collects (as described in a chapter heading in Alibi, Dorf is "the man who collected nothing and found it everywhere" [51]). However, Dorf, like Deemer's other opponents, has the collector's need to order and control. Where Deemer collects to gain a sense of order and control in the world, Dorf counts and catalogues:

> 'Did you drink water as directed yesterday?' he [Manny] asked.
> 'I feel like a sluice gate,' I [Dorf] said.
> 'Did it make you feel better?'

> I had to admit it. 'I felt open to the world. I was in contact with the world. Life flowed and I was part of its flowing.'
> 'And what did you do then? How did this experience of 'a flowing life' manifest itself?'
> 'I counted hydrangeas,' I said. (Alibi 131)

Counting hydrangeas is imposing a human system of order and control on nature. Dorf does not flow with life; he stands against the flow and tries to control its course. In addition to counting flowers, trees (Alibi 140), and butterflies (Alibi 146), Dorf catalogues as a means of controlling his world. Dorf drives to the forest of Buçaco in Portugal, which is a collection of trees gathered from all over the world, beginning in 1628 (Alibi 117), and as Dorf walks through this forest, he makes a catalogue of trees:

> They [the monks] received their orders and jumped to it; they built a wall around the forest, declared the trees inside, the pines that were already there, the maples and laurels that were planted, to be sacred trees.
> And then the trees began to arrive from the New World. And the monks planted them, too, in their bounded forest: the Mexican cypress, the white ash. And then, from other explorers: the monkey puzzles, the ginkos, the gum trees from Australia, the Himalayan cedars, the arbutus, the sequoias, the Oriental spruces.
> Deep are the woods, dark, peaceful. I, again, the happy man. The original and wandering man, returned to the forest cool. Three hundred varieties of exotic trees, come to that place as if trees had up and learned to travel. I marveled, day after day, at the audacity of that monkish collection. (117)

In Dorf's fantasy of himself as "[t]he original and wandering man," he is Adam to Deemer's "God," and, like Adam, who named all the creatures in Eden (Genesis 2:20), Dorf catalogues not only trees, but also the merchandise in a Greek market (Alibi 190), the objects in his ransacked apartment (194), pizza toppings and "great

cities of the New World" (195-96), flowers in Julie's funeral bouquet from Fish (198), animals (202), and even the people at the Deadman Spring spa and their ailments (209) in an attempt to order the world around him and, thereby, to gain some sense of comprehension, control and/or mastery.[15] Dorf writes, "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" (Alibi 195). Dorf understands, as Deemer will in time, that the human sense of mastery on earth comes not from collecting objects, but from the power of language.

After Dorf learns from Fish that Deemer and Julie "murdered" a scout who was looking into their oil operation, he writes, "A scout, I reminded myself, is simply an innocent man who does the dirty work for someone else" (Alibi 91). Through the writings he leaves behind at the cabin on the lake, Dorf would have us believe that he is an innocent pawn in, or a victim of, the godgame, that he has become involved involuntarily. Wilson writes,

> The godgame plays upon, and calls forth, the essential human fear of puniness: of being weak, entrapped, depersonalized, and made a victim. Hence it makes vivid latent anxieties, or even deeper anguish, about a crucial aspect of human existence that is at once a quality of mind, of history, and of society. The fear of puniness, of being helpless and of being less than one would wish to be or ought to be, runs deeply and pervasively. The godgame, despite the elusiveness and paradoxical mutism of this fear, captures and articulates it precisely. (Neuman and Wilson 74)

The journals Dorf leaves behind are his "alibi," with which he hopes to convince any who read them of his innocence in Julie's and Manny's "deaths," and of his innocence in the struggle for power. He wants us to believe he has been "entrapped, depersonalized, and made a victim." However, Dorf is not the innocent he would have us believe. As a doppelgänger, Dorf has a dark self to match his innocent one. Hutcheon writes,

> Dorf's first life, as a husband, father, and museum curator, ends when he points a gun at his wife's lover and realizes that he could indeed pull the trigger. In his second life he rejects all human ties that cannot be dealt with 'in financial terms': he organizes his time around the whims of a reclusive Alberta oil millionaire, Jack Deemer, a man bent on collecting anything there is to be collected. (177)

But Dorf also has a third life, which begins with his rebirth out of the smelly woman's primordial mud in, appropriately, Greece, the cradle of Western civilization. In his third life, he is no longer content to be the agent, the pawn; rather, Dorf comes out of the ooze wanting to control his own life, and other lives. The dark side has emerged: Adam wants to be God.

Dorf's first attempt to take control occurs at Deadman Spring, where he assumes the running of the spa. In taking control, Dorf is attempting to change the rules of the game: the pawn tries to become king; the mortal man tries to usurp the god. However, Dorf's brief time of control of the spa is brought to an end with his rape, Dorf's reminder of his place in the game from Deemer or one of the other (presumably male) players. Dorf's second attempt to take control comes out at the

cabin, where Deemer sends him to rest. Here Dorf rewrites his journals, an act which represents his control of Deemer and the others, as they are "collected" and "displayed" as Dorf sees fit.

Dorf uses language as his means of becoming the god of the godgame, which evokes the issue of the power of language and the issue of class. Bal writes,

> collecting is an essential human feature that originates in the need to tell stories, but for which there are neither words nor other conventional narrative modes. Hence, collecting is a story, and everyone needs to tell it. Yet, it is obvious that not every human being is, or can afford to be, a collector. The essentializing gesture obscures the class privilege that is thereby projected on the human species as a whole. (103)

Neither Dorf nor most of the other players can compete with Deemer's financial ability to collect objects. As a millionaire, Deemer is of the upper-middle class, and he can play the game accordingly. Dorf is of the middle class and, therefore, is limited in the ways he can participate in the game. He tries to run the spa, but he is still under Deemer's control, since Deemer is the owner of the property. As a writer, however, Dorf can transcend the limits of his own class, for he is more powerful as the master of the narrative than Deemer is as a collector of the world. The reader, of course, should read Dorf's (and, later, Deemer's) narrative critically, because of its use as a weapon in the godgame.

It is possible that Dorf also attempts to control the game by eliminating Manny. Although Dorf tells us that he is trying to warn Manny away from the osprey when he shoots (at) him, and that he believes Deemer sends Manny to threaten him

(Alibi 236-37), again, we cannot trust Dorf's narration of the events. Even if he was trying to protect the osprey, Dorf is playing god by "deeming" that the ospreys' lives are more important than Manny's life. Furthermore, by shooting (at) Manny, Dorf plays "god" by creating the decisive moment for the ospreys: he startles them into a fall "into the hollow air of the abyss" (Alibi 238) from which they must soar victorious or die in the attempt. It is the mandala—"a design of the whole damned world" (Alibi 237)—painted on the bow of Manny's boat that seems to be our clue that Manny's "death" is not as accidental as Dorf would have us believe. The mandala as a symbol of the world as multiple, yet contained is also a symbol for the objective of godgame. The owner of the boat (who could be any of the players) places a mandala on the bow to symbolize that he or she has collected and controls "the world," and we can only assume that Dorf sees Manny's arrival in the mandala-decorated boat as a challenge or a threat and tries to kill him. Again, though, who is in league with whom, and who is against whom remains unknown.

Although we are left with many questions at the end of Alibi, we do know that Dorf out-plays his opponents in the godgame. He collects them in his journals, and he leaves the journals so they know they have been collected. For the reader, the commentary of the chapter headings indicates that someone has collected Dorf's journals. Hutcheon and Florby suggest that Karen is responsible for the addition of the chapter headings (170 and 199, respectively), but it could be any of the other players, particularly Deemer, since he is the one who then takes up the pen in The

Puppeteer to write his version of events. After finishing his journals, Dorf goes into hiding to avoid, we assume, the attempts of the other players, particularly Deemer, to collect Dorf in turn. Deemer admits to wanting Dorf dead, and it can only be because Dorf "collected" him, since, having looked in the coffin and having discovered Julie is not dead, revenge for Julie's "death" cannot be the motive.

As Maggie tells Deemer, Dorf "collects" the players a second time by representing them with shadow puppets. In Maggie's attic, Dorf reenacts the entire drama (perhaps "comedy" would be a better choice) of Alibi, not only for Maggie's pleasure, but for his own sense of control:

> His version of Jack Deemer had a calendar for a head, a pair of spectacles where one might have expected his private parts. His arms were six, and certainly not human, his fingertips each concealed in a thimble. His legs, attached to the outline of an old-fashioned wooden cradle, were rows of dominoes. His eyes were Chinese copper coins, each with a square hole in its centre. And out of this dog's breakfast, Papa B contrived to make a story as monstrous as the man.
>
> I have not done things by halves in my life, granted. Fish was a competitor for Julie Magnuson's hand. Papa B got that much straight. But, in the little show he put on for Maggie, hoping by that perversity to awaken her to other perverse longings, he had me bury Fish alive. (Puppeteer 135)

After Julie resurfaces, Dorf comes out of hiding, believing, perhaps foolishly, that he is safe, and he lures Deemer to Greece with the prospect of collecting "the face of God." Of Dorf contacting him, Deemer writes, "I was fishing and delaying at the same time, trying to get a glimpse into the workings of his treacherous mind. It wasn't that I was afraid of him. In a curious way, he was incapable of hurting a fly" (Puppeteer 203). Deemer and Dorf make the other out to be the villain, and we can

never know the truth, but we have to wonder why Dorf changes tactics and tries to stop Deemer from collecting the icons. Is this part of the godgame, a way of gaining the upper hand, or is it Dorf's attempt to stop the godgame and Deemer altogether? Is Dorf afraid of what Deemer's power would become if he collects the icon? Of their final encounter, Deemer writes,

> I need not bother you with the details of our talk. He accused me of wanting, in my collector's need, to box up the very darkness that I lived in. I ignored his exaggerations. He said I would crate up lakes and beaches if I could find a way. Tell me how, I told him, and I'll make you a rich man. He said I wanted to put words themselves under lock and key and I said, mocking his unstoppable tongue, good enough, I'll buy that too, go on out and get me a collection. He accused me, in his maniacal, hoarse whispering, of trying to steal the face of God. He had simply lost control of his judgement as well as of his imagination. I told him I did not want to vomit in disgust inside a chapel. (Puppeteer 252)

We can trust neither Dorf's representation of Deemer, nor Deemer's of Dorf. In the end, we know only that Dorf may have collected Deemer for a time, but that Deemer is the ultimate collector, the one who gains control and who is the god of the game, having written the narrative of The Puppeteer. However, if we look back over this analysis of Alibi and The Puppeteer, and if we consider again the idea of the abyss and the possibility of endless repetitions into infinity, we must wonder if Kroetsch is not the true collector here, since Dorf writes Deemer, Deemer writes Dorf, but Kroetsch writes them both. Do writers also stretch endlessly into the abyss? Is "God" or "god" the ultimate "writer"?

Conclusion

> *"The desire to reassemble the world—to reshape its contours, give it fresh emphasis, transform it into a mosaic of emblems—must lie hidden, always and already, within the desire to collect." Robert R. Wilson*[16]

As Kroetsch is a writer of the "high postmodernism" movement, in which "multiplicity, fragmentation, incompleteness, and discontinuity" are favoured over "single vision, unity, completeness, and continuity" (Hutcheon 172), collecting is depicted negatively in several of his novels, as it represents the attempt to erect boundaries and to create a singular world, one that is orderable and controllable.

In Badlands, which, like Alibi and The Puppeteer, is largely about collecting, William Dawe is obsessed with searching the Alberta Badlands to find a complete skeleton of a dinosaur he proposes to call Daweosaurus. Like Deemer, Dawe values only the whole and misses the importance of the fragments. Both men look to forever and forget about today, although Deemer is somewhat "redeemed" at the end of The Puppeteer. Also like Deemer, Dawe wants to immortalize himself through collecting, although not through the actual possession of the objects

collected, but by getting his name in the history books for having found "Daweosaurus."

Dawe, too, is playing a godgame, wanting not only to immortalize himself, but also to control those who accompany him on his quest. Unlike the players in Alibi and The Puppeteer, however, Dawe states explicitly why it is that he plays the game when he states, "There is no God" (35). Dawe, then, is attempting to fill the void created by the absence of God. He needs to believe there is a controlling force, but since "there is no God," he must become that force. Dawe has two opponents, Web and Sinnott, who also try to fill the void "created" by the absence of God. Not only do they try to outplay Dawe in the godgame, they succeed. Like Dorf and Deemer, Web uses narrative to become the god of the game. While Dawe tries to immortalize himself through the collection of bones, Web immortalizes himself in the tall tale, an oral narrative tradition. When Web tells Dawe of his "encounter" with Anna Yellowbird in the midst of a twister and how they have found the "perfect *specimen*" Dawe has been seeking (Badlands 207; original emphasis), Dawe knows he has been outplayed, for a tall tale such as that will outlive the fame Dawe will receive as the head of the expedition. Like Karen, Sinnott uses photography to collect the world, to which his advertisement attests: "Travelling Emporium of the Vanished World/ We Specialize in Everything" (Badlands 113). Dawe wants power and immortality, but just as he emerges from the Badlands,

Sinnott photographs him, which makes Dawe a part of the past, the "vanished world," and which Sinnott the god who confers Dawe's immortality upon him.

Dawe is balanced in his obsession by several non-collectors. Anna Dawe and Anna Yellowbird throw away Dawe's field notes—his collection of narrative fragments and his one means of controlling both the members of his "hunting" party and his own life. McBride and Grizzly are also non-collectors, who prefer a domestic life to Dawe's quest for fame and glory. McBride leaves the "hunting" party early in the expedition to return to his wife and his farm, while Grizzly secretly cohabits with Anna Yellowbird in a house made of dinosaur bones—fragments. This house of fragments represents the occupants' contentment to live a life that is characterized by multiplicity and ambiguity, while the whole dinosaur skeleton Dawe searches for, even though it is a "collection" of fragments, represents his desire for singularity and unity.

Kroetsch also uses collecting in The Studhorse Man, in which Demeter writes the biography of Hazard Lepage, his rival in love, in order to collect and control him. Hazard himself represents the anti-collector, for in one notable scene, he not only commits the sacrilege of making love to a woman in a bed in a museum, he also takes a Northwest Mounted Police uniform off a wax dummy and wears it on his journey home. This represent the process of un-collecting—the aesthetic value of the object is re-replaced by its use value—and it also represents an undermining of the museum's authority, for what the power of the museum had

made past, Hazard makes present. Kroetsch also uses collecting to a lesser degree, and for similar purposes, in Gone Indian and The Words of My Roaring. In all the novels I have listed above, collecting is depicted negatively, as a futile attempt at gaining control and power.

In The Man from the Creeks, Kroetsch's most recent novel, however, collecting is depicted less negatively. Although in the novel Kroetsch deals mainly with accumulation—of mining equipment, supplies, food, trade goods, wealth—he uses collecting to represent a transition, both from an "uncivilized" to a "civilized" culture, and from a working to an upper-middle class. In the novel, after searching for months, Benjamin Redd hits a mother lode of gold and brings it back to town to be weighed. The gold will be used as currency, except for one nugget, which "was the size of a very small brain. A golden brain. It was oblong and smooth and dented at the same time. It glowed iridescent and alive, there in the light from the lamps" (Creeks 280). Ben intends to give this unusual nugget to his lover, Lou, as symbol of their love, but when he and Lou are killed in a gunfight with Dan McGrew, his gold is passed down to Lou's son, Peek, the narrator of the story.

As with the other narrator's discussed in this paper, Peek "re-collects" the story in order to take control of it from someone else; in this case, it is Robert Service, who had written a less-than-accurate poem, according to Peek, about the story of Dan McGrew, Lou and Ben, "the man from the creeks." After their deaths, Peek digs down into the permafrost under his cabin and buries Lou with the nugget

where no one will disturb her. In the introduction to Collectors and Curiosities, Pomian discusses at some length the idea that funeral objects constitute collections because they are removed from their own context and their use value, and because they are put on display, although for the dead, rather than for the living. He writes that in many early civilizations,

> a whole series of measures was taken to protect the tombs from pillage, that is the reuse in this life of what is intended to remain with the dead forever in the life beyond. Attempts were made to disguise the location of the tomb or to make intruders lose their way, by building mazes or digging false graves. Divine assistance was sought in the form of curses invoking heavenly wrath upon the heads of possible robbers or profaners. Inspection and monitoring systems were set up. Secondly, and very importantly, the objects were placed in the tombs to be seen by those living in the next world. (12)

In letting people believe that Lou is in the coffin buried in the public cemetery, while in reality he buries her in the permafrost under their house, Peek is exhibiting the same kind of behaviour exhibited by ancient civilizations to protect the dead from the living and to ensure that the dead have what they need in the next world. As the gold nugget is buried with Lou, it changes from a "thing" to a semiophore:

> From the Upper Palaeolithic onwards, however, the invisible was 'projected' into the visible, being represented at the very heart of the latter by a specific category of objects, not only natural curiosities, but also everything that was painted, sculpted, carved, shaped, embroidered and decorated. This meant that the cleavage was now to be found within the visible itself. On one side, there were *things, objects which were useful in* that they could be consumed, could provide a means of subsistence, render raw materials fit for consumption, or even act as protection from the vagaries of the climate. All these objects were handled, all underwent or brought about tangible modifications, and all gradually wore out. On the other side were ranged the *semiophores, objects which were of absolutely no use,* according to the above definition, but which, being endowed with *meaning,* represented the

> invisible. They were put on display instead of being handled, and were not subjected to wear and tear. (Pomian 29-30; original emphasis)

As a "natural curiosity," the nugget becomes a semiophore, a representation of the invisible, which in this case is not only Ben and Lou's love, but also Peek's love for his mother.

Pomian also suggests that "the gathering and above all the production of objects representing the invisible constitute proofs of the emergence of culture in the true sense of the word" (29), and with this in mind we can interpret Peek's gesture—the secret burial of Lou and the inclusion of the nugget—as a moment of cultural emergence amidst the "uncivilized" frenzy of the Klondike Gold Rush. It is also, however, a moment of class transition. With the deaths of Lou, Ben and Dan McGrew, Peek not only inherits the gold from the mother lode and the money Lou had earned in the saloon, he also becomes the manager of the saloon. Peek, therefore, goes from being of the working classes to the being of the upper-middle classes, having both wealth and a managerial position. When Peek chooses to bury the nugget with Lou, he is representing his new class position, for he is able to place its aesthetic value and its value as a symbol of the invisible over its monetary or use value. Furthermore, how he buries Lou also represents his upper-middle classness:

> I made a bed of spruce boughs and roses. I shaped the roses out of red crêpe paper. Dozens and dozens of roses. More than I could count. That was the rule I made for myself. There had to be more roses than I could

> possibly count. I placed Lou's body on that soft bed. I placed in her cupped hands the gold nugget given to her by Ben. It filled both her hands. (305)

Although this may not seem to be an overly extravagant burial monetarily, we must remember that Peek probably had to arrange to have red crêpe paper shipped into his remote Alaskan location, for which he would pay a substantial amount. Peek also spends a great deal of time not only building fires to melt the permafrost as he is digging the grave, but also making the paper roses. As well, by his description, Peek buries Lou as royalty is buried, with a symbolic object placed in the hands. This is not an ordinary burial in the Klondike of the late nineteenth-century.

In The Man from the Creeks, Kroetsch depicts collecting not as part of a godgame (although Peek is playing a game of control by telling the story his way), but rather as a natural occurrence in an emergent culture and in the upper classes. As it has been occurring for thousands of years, and despite some negative connotations, collecting must serve an important purpose in humanity. Baudrillard writes,

> collecting simply abolishes time. Or rather: by establishing a fixed repertory of temporal references that can be replayed at will, in reverse order if need be, collecting represents the perpetual fresh beginning of a controlled cycle, thanks to which, starting out from any term he chooses and confident of returning to it, man can indulge in the great game of birth and death.
>
> This explains why it is that to be surrounded by our personal possessions—the collector amid his private collection being the extreme example—is a dimension of existence as essential to us as it is imaginary. It means every bit as much as our dreams. It has been said that if, in an experiment, one were to prevent a person from, dreaming, severe psychological disturbances would rapidly ensue. It is equally certain that if a person were deprived of the possibility of escaping and regressing within

> the game of possession, if that person were prevented from marshalling his own discourse and running through a repertory of objects imbued with self and removed from time, mental disarray would follow every bit as promptly. We are incapable of living in the dimension of absolute singularity, in uninterrupted consciousness of that irreversibility of time signalled in the moment of our birth. It is this irreversibility, this relentless passage from birth to death, that objects help us to resolve. (16)

Although collecting is for some a natural coping mechanism, one means of giving people a sense of control over their lives in this world, like so many other things it has the potential to be taken to extremes, as it is represented in Alibi and The Puppeteer. In these novels, collecting goes beyond coping and becomes part of a struggle for dominance, something that is, as well, all too human. I will conclude this study on collecting as represented in Robert Kroetsch's Alibi and The Puppeteer with an appropriate comment by Bal:

> In [James] Clifford's analysis, collecting defines subjectivity in an institutional practice, a definition he qualifies, with Baudrillard, as both essential and imaginary: 'as essential as dreams'. Essential, but not universal; rather, this particular need is for him an essential aspect of being a member of a culture that values possessions, a qualification that might need further qualification according to class and gender. And it is imaginary to the extent that it partakes of the formation of subjectivity in the unconscious, which is itself the product of the collision and the collusion of imaginary and symbolic orders. Deceptively, collections, especially when publicly accessible, appear to 'reach out', but through this complex and halfhidden aspect they in fact 'reach in', helping the collector—and, to a certain extent, the viewer—to develop their sense of self while providing them with an ethical or educational alibi. (105)

NOTES

1. Neuman and Wilson 67.

2. In the most ancient city to be discovered so far, Çatal Hüyük in Anatolia, which flourished between 6500 and 5700 BC, the contents of the tombs already differed widely according to the gender and social status of the person buried there. (Pomian 11-12)

Pomian, in the first chapter of his text, spends considerable time explaining why objects placed in tombs with the dead should be considered to be collections.

3. Risking political incorrectness, I have chosen not to use the "his/her," "s/he," "him/herself" constructions, not only because I find them somewhat awkward to use, but also because in the adult years collectors tend to be male, as Baudrillard has observed:

> For the child, collecting represents the most rudimentary way to exercise control over the outer world: by laying things out, grouping them, handling them. The active phase of collecting seems to occur between the ages of seven and twelve, during the period of latency prior to puberty. With the onset of puberty, the collecting impulse tends to disappear, though occasionally it resurfaces after a very short interval. Later on, it is men in their forties who seem most prone to the passion. In short, a correlation with sexuality can generally be demonstrated, so that the activity of collecting may be seen as a powerful mechanism of compensation during critical phases in a person's sexual development. Invariably it runs counter to active genital sexuality, though it should not be seen as a pure and simple substitute thereof, but rather a regression to the anal stage, manifested in such behaviour patterns as accumulation, ordering, aggressive retention and so forth. The practice of collecting is not equivalent to a sexual practice, in so far it does not seek to still a desire (as does fetishism). (9)

4. I purposely do not suggest here that the reader can use the clues to reach an answer, to solve the mystery. As Hutcheon notes, "[Alibi has none of what Kroetsch called the murder mystery's 'promise of a wrap-up ending, a solution, an untangling, a resolution of mystery.' As postmodern fiction this novel offers no solutions, resolutions, or untanglings" (176).

5. Alibi 79.

6. Spinks 14.

7. For those readers unfamiliar with Kroetsch's appreciation of magic realism, see Neuman and Wilson, 158-59, and also Kroetsch's novel What the Crow Said.

8. I do not want to use "God" in this thesis, because, in general, I am not referring to the Judeo-Christian God, but rather to a generic concept of a divine being. As well, I cannot assume that Dorf has the Judeo-Christian God in mind when he refers to Deemer as playing or as being a god. Therefore, I will use the word "god," unless I am specifically discussing the Judeo-Christian God.

9. I have never been to Calgary, but Dr. Stan Dragland assures me that this is so.

10. An idea first suggested to me by Dr. Dragland.

11. I highly recommend Stolen Continents by Ronald Wright. It is a powerful and well-written book, discussing the conquest of North America from the perspective of those who were defeated. He stresses how violently the Europeans came to the New World and, more importantly, how the spread of disease made their victory much easier.

12. See pages 7 and 8 above.

13. The original quotation in Labyrinths of Voice is "Maybe character is the *congruence* of many stories" (189; my emphasis).

14. Baudrillard 7.

15. The abyss comes to the fore again as I catalogue Dorfs catalogues.

16. Wilson 106.

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