Tasting the Imported: Metatext and the Poetics of Survival in Robert Kroetsch's "Sketches of a Lemon"

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Abstract:

This paper explores Canadian poet Robert Kroetsch's long poem "Sketches of a Lemon" as a metapoetic investigation into the tensions inherent in Canadian literary production shaped by imported forms, cultural dislocation, and linguistic hybridity. By reading the lemon as a symbol of the foreign-botanically, historically, and aesthetically-the poem becomes a meditation on poetic inheritance and its transformation. The analysis argues that Kroetsch engages in a form of textual survival, where writing about an imported object evolves into an allegory for negotiating transplanted literary traditions. Through recursive gestures, tactile metaphors, and deliberate formal disruptions, the poem foregrounds its own making, turning the act of writing into its central theme. The paper proposes that in contemporary Canadian poetry, especially in a multicultural and postcolonial frame, metapoetry functions not as self-indulgence but as a necessary mode of cultural and aesthetic adaptation, and situates "Sketches of a Lemon" within a broader discourse of poetic survival and cultural reinvention.

Keywords*: Metapoetry, Canadian literature, Poetic form, Cultural inheritance, Survival*

Introduction: Imported Forms and the Crafting of Canadian Literature

Canadian literature is shaped by an enduring tension between inherited forms and those forged within local conditions. Much of its early poetic and narrative production drew upon aesthetic conventions, genres, and structures imported from Britain, France, and the United States. These frameworks, described by Robertson Davies as "imported furniture" (*The Merry Heart* 37), offered cultural legitimacy yet often proved incompatible with the Canadian landscape and consciousness. Writers such as Duncan Campbell Scott and Charles G.D. Roberts adopted British poetic forms in an effort to claim cultural authority. However, these forms frequently functioned as colonial attire-means of entry into the literary domain that nonetheless failed to accommodate the distinct material and psychological realities of the Canadian environment.

Nevertheless, these inherited structures served as provisional scaffolds, enabling the development of literary voices attuned to Canadian conditions. Poets like Dennis Lee articulated the inherent contradiction in writing with a colonial vocabulary, stating, "The problem is to write in English in a way that allows the land to speak" (*Savage Fields* 104). Canadian writers engaged these imported forms not simply to reproduce tradition but to interrogate and revise it. What gradually emerged is a palimpsestic literary consciousness, one in which older European models remain legible beneath texts that also disrupt and reconstitute them. Nicole Brossard articulates this creative tension when she declares, "I have to begin with borrowed words, the language of the other; but I will twist them until they break open" (*Intimate Journals* 101). Her formulation encapsulates a poetics of resistance situated within dependence with an aesthetic that undermines inherited authority from within its own linguistic structures.

The instability of inherited metaphors becomes especially pronounced in Canadian representations of nature, where Romantic tropes of renewal and harmony often collapse under the weight of an environment perceived as vast, indifferent, or hostile. Margaret Atwood has observed in *Survival* that the Canadian landscape resists idealisation and frequently generates narratives of survival and fragmentation. Writers such as George Bowering and Robert Kroetsch have engaged with canonical forms such as elegy, the settler journals etc to fracture and recontextualise them through irony, disjunction, and local texture. This mode of writing fragments and dissolves the speaking subject and the illusion of narrative authority. Thus, Canadian literature increasingly defines itself through acts of transformation rather than rejection, and reshapes the borrowed into the indigenised, unsettled, and recognisably distinct.

Review of Literature

A growing body of scholarship interprets "Sketches of a Lemon" through Canadian postmodernist frameworks, emphasizing Kroetsch's formal play and critical stance toward inherited poetic traditions. For example, Nicole Markotić's edited collection *Robert Kroetsch: Essays on His Works* includes Dennis Cooley's essay "Even Stevens," which reads Kroetsch's lemon vignettes with Wallace Stevens's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," considering the role of self-parody and formal

experimentation. Gary Geddes, Robert Archambeau, and Jon R. Flieger similarly explore how Kroetsch's fragmented, ironic techniques destabilize traditional lyric coherence, converting seemingly playful gestures into substantive theoretical inquiries . Albert Moritz's 1981 review situates Sketches within what he terms Kroetsch's "risk-poetics," interpreting the poem's deliberate hesitation as a challenge to the lyric's promise of symbolic unity. Tanja Cvetkovi, in her essay "How Do You Grow a Lemon in the Postmodern Garden?", explores the poem's technique of naming, un-naming, and re-naming through negation, arguing that this strategy offers a postmodern affirmation through absence and invites readerly engagement with meaning-creation

Despite rich formal and theoretical readings, existing analyses often overlook the material and cultural dissonance inherent in the lemon as an imported object within a settler-colonial space. Critical works, like those by Fitzpatrick foreground intertextual links to Stevens or Ponge and emphasize logocentric critique, yet they do not sufficiently address the embodied, ecological implications of the lemon's foreignness. Cvetkovi's contribution is significant as it focusses on how the poem's absence-centered structure, affirmed through negation, underscores a formal resistance rooted in displacement. Nevertheless, there remains scope for scholarship to interrogate more deeply how Sketches stages an ecological and cultural meditation on transplantation, hybridity, and survival through its metapoetic engagement with an alien botanical presence.

Metapoetry and the Canadian Condition

A metapoem is a poem that turns its attention to itself as a poem. It reflects on the act of writing, the role of the poet, the limits of language, and the very structure of poetic expression. It is a form of literary self-awareness, where the poem does not merely deliver content but comments on its own mechanisms. In a metapoem, the poem becomes both the object and the subject of discourse, enacting a kind of recursive loop. This self-reflexivity often emerges from a crisis of representation when language is felt to be inadequate, compromised, or estranged from reality. The metapoem performs that inadequacy, staging the failure of meaning not as a flaw but as a condition of poetic production. Rather than pretending that poetry neatly unifies emotion and language, the metapoem exposes the seams, the gaps, and the awkward joints where meaning stumbles.

This poetic self-consciousness becomes more than an aesthetic choice, and attains a philosophical stance. The metapoem resists closure, completion, and transparency to open up poetry to fragmentation, contradiction, and interruption, often drawing attention to the materiality of the word itself. In doing so, it refuses the illusion that language can serve as a pure or stable conduit between the self and the world. Robert Kroetsch observes this paradox that the metapoem explores as, "The moment the poem names the world, it begins to lose the world" (*The Lovely Treachery of Words* 56). This insight defines the poetic formation that always risks destroying the very text it seeks to preserve. Thus, the metapoem effects a site of struggle in a field where poets confront the limits of their own tools.

In the Canadian context, metapoetry takes on a particular urgency. Canadian poets have historically contended with imported literary traditions and a fractured cultural identity, conditions that often render straightforward expression extremely abstruse. The metapoem is a space where this suspicion is not only acknowledged but turned into creative practice. When Dennis Lee writes in *Savage Fields* "We're trying to crawl out from under the weight of other people's words" (97), he articulates this collective anxiety about language as colonial residue. At this point, metapoetry is the poet's attempt to register that weight, to make visible the foreign scaffolding that supports the Canadian poetic voice. In doing so, the metapoem offers a path toward decolonization, not by replacing the old language with a new one, but by exposing the fractures in the old and transforming it.

"Sketches of a Lemon": A Metapoem that Transforms the imported

Robert Kroetsch's "Sketches of a Lemon" functions as a metapoem by foregrounding the process of poetic construction and the failure of language to fully capture experience. The poem deliberately fragments its subject, the lemon into shifting images, tentative metaphors, and unresolved observations, exposing the instability of representation itself. Rather than presenting the lemon as a fixed symbol, Kroetsch uses it as a pretext to explore how language falters in the face of sensory and emotional immediacy, focussing not to the lemon as object but to the act of writing about it. The poem thus constitutes self-reflexive act, staging its own incompleteness and transforming

that incompleteness into a poetic principle. By refusing symbolic closure, "Sketches of a Lemon" enacts what Kroetsch describes as "a poetry of process" (*Labyrinth of Voice* 205) where the poem is not a finished artifact but a continual interaction with language's limits.

Moreover, Canadian geography, history, and identity are themselves marked by fragmentations as a vast and discontinuous landscape, bilingual tensions, and the haunting presence of indigenous erasure. Metapoetry provides a means to speak through this complexity without resolving it. It legitimises doubt, hesitation, and interruption. Canadian poet and translator Robert Bringhurst, in *A Solid Form of Language* remarks that "language is not a thing we use; it's a place we live" (16). For Canadian poets, this "place" is unstable and contested. Metapoetry, then, evolves into a form of habitation within that instability, a poetic dwelling in a space where foundations are always shifting. In this way, the metapoem is not merely an experimental technique; it is a necessary form of literary self-scrutiny in a country still searching for a voice that feels like its own.

"Sketches of a Lemon" offers a meditation on instability, foreignness, and the failures of inherited frameworks. The lemon, introduced as an object of scrutiny, is also an imported fruit in Canada, and its estrangement from its native soil takes the form of a metaphor for the broader condition of transplanted cultural forms. By declaring "A lemon is almost round. / Some lemons are almost round. / A lemon is not round" (*Completed Field Notes: The Long Poems of Robert Kroetsch* [hereafter *CFN*] 76), the speaker confronts the inadequacy of inherited descriptors. The attempt to name, classify, and define falters, and the object defies the neat boundaries of European logic, revealing the disjunction between the borrowed categories and the materiality of the new world. The lemon's foreignness is not resolved through poetic description, but it is deepened.

This displacement mirrors the struggle of writing in a landscape that has been historically framed using borrowed literary conventions-elegy, sonnet, epic-traditions formed in different climates, histories, and cosmologies. "Sketches of a Lemon" presents the moment these traditions collapse under the weight of specificity: "How can one argue that a lemon / is truly a lemon, / if the question can be argued?" (*CFN* 76). The act of naming through writing constitutes a problem, not a solution. This is not a failure of

perception but a failure of the tools themselves, that is, an epistemological crisis rooted in the mismatch between the form and the environment. The poem is a site where the foreign and the native clash, not with violence, but with absurd uncertainty. This calls into question not only how one writes about a lemon, but how one writes about Canada.

The poem is thus positioned as a theoretical intervention into the trajectory of literary representation. The issue it foregrounds is not solely ontological-concerning what a lemon is-but methodological-addressing how one can write truthfully about an environment using tools that are extrinsic to it. The poetic form, like the lemon, has been imported, yet it too resists naturalisation. The poem's own instability, its repetition, hesitation, and abrupt dismissals become the performance of this very resistance. Contextualising it, Canadian critic Linda Hutcheon observes in *The Canadian Postmodern*, "The postmodern in Canada is not a playful choice, but a necessary response to cultural doubleness" (45). "Sketches of a Lemon" enacts this necessity as the lemon refuses to become round, just as Canadian writing refuses to become European, despite the forms it borrows. In this, "Sketches of a Lemon" not only problematises the imported, but it theorises the impossibility of seamless transplantation. It interrogates not merely the content of writing, but its conditions of possibility-how writing occurs, in what language, and whether the aim is not resolution, but the perpetuation of inquiry itself.

Kroetsch's inquiry leading to the realization of the availability of a lemon unfolds into a subtle critique on absence, authorship, and the problem of poetic form. The speaker, turning to Smaro, and asks whether a lemon is present in the kitchen. Her response-"No"-terminates the poetic pursuit, "So much for that" (*CFN* 76). The missing lemon here operates as a signifier of a missing frame, a symbol for the unavailability of an aesthetic or conceptual apparatus capable of adequately capturing the contours of local, situated experience. The absence extends beyond the lemon itself, signalling the inability of an imported form to establish legitimacy or adapt authentically within an unfamiliar cultural context. The question is not only whether the lemon exists physically, but whether its metaphorical infrastructure can hold in a Canadian context. The imported

figure, unable to find material substantiation, turns into a void around which the poem begins to circulate.

This absence is epistemological, for the invocation of the lemon presumes the availability of a formal system in which the lemon can signify, but that system is revealed to be hollow in the face of lived specificity. The poet's dependence on a borrowed and extrinsic symbolic tradition, perhaps, from Mediterranean lyricism, where the lemon resonates sensuously and symbolically, collapses in the domestic, unpoetic Canadian kitchen. The refusal of the lemon to appear, to be found, indexes a broader refusal of the environment to submit to inherited semiotic regimes. What results is a performative withdrawal, "So much for that" (*CFN* 76). This phrase operates as closure, but it is a closure that admits defeat, a structural curtailing that reveals the futility of imposed poetic architectures. As such, the poem presents absence not as lack but as resistance. The Canadian context resists legibility through forms not indigenous to its textures, climates, or discursive histories.

This moment also exposes the instability of authorship in the face of environmental contingency. The poet's authority is suspended by the domestic, immediate and unliterary voice from the kitchen which nullifies the symbol, and in doing so, redirects the poem from expressive presence to formal negation. The absence of the lemon is thus the absence of sanction to proceed with the poem as planned. It compels a poetics of poetic composition marked by erasure, deferral, and fragment. In this way, the poem depicts a failed transmission of the impossibility of importing both fruit and form into a context that withholds confirmation. The Canadian poem, then, must emerge not from available icons, but from the recognition of their inaccessibility, from what is missing rather than what is given.

In "Sketches of a Lemon," Robert Kroetsch invokes Francis Ponge, a poet renowned for his precise phenomenological descriptions of everyday objects as a model for literary procedure:

> I went and looked at Francis Ponge's poem
>
> on blackberries. If blackberries can be

blackberries, I reasoned, by a kind of analogy,

lemons can, I would suppose, be lemons.

Such was not the case. (*CFN* 77)

French poet Ponge's poetics is grounded in a materialist faith in the world's articulatability, and it becomes the referent for Kroetsch's experimental method. The act of "looking at" Ponge's blackberry poem is not a simple homage, on the other hand, it is an attempt to borrow a compositional strategy rooted in linguistic containment and nominal certainty. Ponge's blackberries are permitted to be blackberries. The methodology assumes a degree of semantic fixity, an authoritative realism in which the object and its poetic rendering cohere. Kroetsch's lemon, however, rebuffs this configuration. The analogy collapses in the line "Such was not the case." The impossibility of reproducing the Pongean equation within the Canadian poetic context unveils a rupture between object and utterance, a gap too wide for imported method to bridge since the lemon resists to be a Canadian lemon.

This fracture exposes the unsuitability of authoritative referentiality, particularly one derived from a French context to the task of writing place in poetry in a postcolonial North American landscape. The blackberry, within Ponge's tradition, is enmeshed in a network of culturally and linguistically stabilised meanings. In contrast, the lemon, already a symbol of displacement, becomes the limit of analogy. It exceeds the descriptive regime, not by being more than language can hold, but by being situated in a framework where the very logic of containment has lost traction. Kroetsch's lines dramatise the breakdown of inherited epistemologies. Poetic representation declines to proceed through mimicry, even of successful models, because the semantic ground has shifted. The failure of analogy here is not stylistic but ontological. The lemon does not allow itself to be in the way the blackberry does, because it exists in a cultural and historical terrain that refuses closure.

This poetic and philosophical impasse parallels what Dennis Lee identifies as the dilemma of writing in Canada: "We lack the ground tone, the consensual rhythm of language that a people use to discover themselves" (*Savage Fields* 45). The lemon,

ungrounded in the Canadian lexicon of symbol and experience, renders as a figure of the lack of unassimilability. The poem's recourse to another writer's method, and the subsequent recognition of its irrelevance, performs a critique of universalised poetics. Kroetsch suggests that any poetics adequate to the Canadian situation must evolve not from imitation but from the wreckage of analogy, from the knowledge that blackberries may be granted ontological permission that lemons, in this space, are not. It does not mean that the poem fails to describe the lemon, but it reveals the limits of description as a colonial instrument, gesturing toward a poetics that begins not with certainty, but with estrangement.

The estrangement thus produced is extended through a catalogue of negation that constructs a poetics of exclusion, systematically disavowing a host of familiar fruits traditionally aestheticised in Western literature and still-life painting. Each refusal becomes an act of unmaking, whereby the poet disengages from representational codes historically used to stabilise meaning and cultivate sensory pleasure. The list of absent fruits destabilises any expectation of lyrical affirmation, invoking instead a critical outline in which poetic identity is defined not through presence but through strategic omission. This constructs an anti-iconography, in which the speaker distances the lemon from every symbol that would render it assimilable or poetically "appropriate." The repeated refusal of aestheticised tropes such as "not of a pear," "nor of a peach," "nor of the usual bunch of grapes" (*CFN* 77) divulges a deliberate dismantling of the inherited catalogue tradition, which once provided a formal foundation for poetry. In lieu of completely avoiding metaphor, Kroetsch deconstructs the metaphoric economy itself, refusing its capacity to secure referential certainty or sensory satisfaction.

The conclusion of the sketch, "Smaro, I called, now I am hungry" (*CFN* 77) abruptly converts this diversion into an existential hunger, collapsing the boundary between poetic inquiry and bodily need. Here, hunger is an aesthetic and epistemological longing or a desire for something real, grounded, nourishing, in the aftermath of so many negated forms. The enactment of writing is transformed into a mode of deprivation, not of the object but of the language to represent it. The poet's inability to locate the lemon within a stable lineage of fruit-images points to a deeper rupture in the cultural and poetic

archive. It is a disconnection from inherited grammars of abundance and beauty. In refusing these familiar tropes, the speaker is left with a craving for meaning itself. The poem thereby brings in the notion of writing as a practice of deferred consumption, where the satisfaction of representation is repeatedly postponed. It enacts a hunger for forms not yet invented, for a vocabulary adequate to place and time, untethered from the imported legacies it must continually resist.

Kroetsch's contemplation on the orange in "Sketches of a Lemon" functions to comment on the metapoetic mechanics of representation itself. When Kroetsch notes that "an orange / looks like an orange" (*CFN* 78), he deals with the closed circuit of conventional signification. It is a condition where form and content appear to coincide without tension. The orange, in its self-similarity, embodies a poetics that avoids rupture, one that rehearses rather than interrogates inherited tropes. In contrast, the lemon's refusal to resolve into a stable signifier becomes a metapoetic gesture. The poem no longer depicts, but exposes the problem of depiction. It turns upon its own structure, asking what it means to write when the subject does not yield to recognisable form. Kroetsch, therefore, performs a self-conscious breakdown of poetic method, where writing is a struggle not to represent the world faithfully, but to disclose the inadequacies of the very forms inherited to do so. The poem, in its metapoetic core, foregrounds the necessity of failing resemblance as a condition for original expression.

Kroetsch simultaneously exposes the constructed and procedural nature of poetic composition through the metaphor of the breadboard. The breadboard, a flat and passive surface, suggests the static page, a space onto which the poetic subject is placed. The lemon is reinscribed as the mobile signifier, neither fixed nor autonomous, responding to the movement of Smaro's hand, an analogue for the poet's intervention. What emerges is a metapoetic allegory of writing, where the system of composing is framed not as spontaneous revelation but as an incessant procedure between surface, object, and intention. The physicality of the scene insists upon the material conditions of poetic production. Instead of invoking inspiration as ethereal or internal, Kroetsch externalises it into a tactile encounter where writing is laborious, contingent, and mediated through tools and gestures. The lemon's oscillation suggests that meaning, like the fruit, is not linear

but recursive that rolls back and forth across a defiant surface. Here, poetic motion arises not from freedom but from constraint, and it is within these limits that the poem begins to articulate its shape.

Besides, the rolling lemon is a figure for translation, not only linguistic, but cultural and formal. The imported fruit, placed on a utilitarian breadboard, undergoes a spatial and symbolic transformation, its course governed by an external rhythm that domesticates and reorients it. This movement reifies the poet's attempt to adapt foreign literary traditions to local realities. The breadboard does not erase the lemon's origin, but insists to handle it differently, rolled with care across a new terrain. What results is not a static image but a kinetic diagram, a composition that acknowledges the foreignness of its materials while engaging in their active recontextualisation. The poem stages a subtle alchemy pertaining to the transformation of imported tropes into lived gestures, of abstract tradition into sensory immediacy. Kroetsch's evocation of "mechanical principles" (*CFN* 77) implies that this is not a mystical process but one that can be mapped, learned, and repeated with variation. The poem, then, is not a representation of experience but a site of experimental movement, where the imported is reworked through embodied repetition until it begins to trace new forms of meaning.

The reworking on the imported ends on the intimate impulse to "kiss a lemon" where the foreign is neither rejected nor passively consumed, but sensually and irreversibly internalized. This denotes a poetic operation that signals the poet's conscious desire to engage with the imported, here symbolised by the lemon, not as inert inheritance but as something to be re-signified. Kroetsch writes:

> I had a very strong desire
>
> to kiss a lemon.
>
> No one was watching.
>
> I kissed a lemon. (*CFN* 78)

The "kiss" serves as a metaphor for poetic transformation, where tradition is not merely replicated but physically and emotionally altered through contact with local sensibility. In

kissing the lemon, the poet breaks the distance imposed by origin and cultural authority, asserting a new relationship rooted in individual and spatial immediacy. The act is both transgressive and generative, and collapses the symbolic weight of the lemon's foreignness into a singular Canadian moment of irreverent intimacy. This crossing, a movement from reception to reinvention, where the poet preserves the object's inherited meaning to reshape it through desire, thereby generating a discourse that is neither wholly derivative nor fully autonomous, but dynamically emergent. This aspect is echoed when Kroetsch writes in his article "Disunity as Unity: A Canadian Strategy," "We have always moved into borrowed forms in order to break them open from the inside" (49). This assertion articulates a distinctly Canadian aesthetic strategy of internalized subversion which is a poetics of inhabiting inherited structures with the intent not to preserve, but to rupture and reconstitute them. This movement is not one of passive assimilation but of critical infiltration, where writing takes the quality of undermining the ideological fixity of received forms. In the Canadian context, these borrowed forms, be they sonnets, elegies, or colonial narrative templates, arrive laden with the epistemic weight of empire, often incongruous with the geographic, linguistic, and cultural specificities of the settler condition. To "break them open" is thus to act out a transformative poiesis, a disruption from within that resists mere replication and instead produces formal dissonance, irony, and fragmentation as tools of reinvention. This tactic exposes the instability of form as a colonial instrument and recasts it as a pliable space of articulation. Through this interior reworking, Canadian literature operates as a locus for epistemological resistance, where the borrowed text is not preserved in its original coherence but is made to transform under the pressure of the local and the lived.

In sketch nine, the poetic voice collapses into a redefinition of form that defies categorical precision. The lemon, initially misheard or refracted through "salmon" and "oven," is finally declared to be "shaped / exactly like an hour" (*CFN* 79). This moment is not one of resolution, but of radical refiguration, where materiality yields to temporality. The lemon ceases to be a stable object of description and is transformed into a figure of temporal continuity. Instead of defining the lemon through inherited criteria, it is manifested through lived experience, an object understood through its resonance in

time rather than its contour in space. In this light, the imported form is no longer treated as a fixed external shape to be imitated, but it is internally retemporalised.

Further, conceived as a temporal container, the hour is transformed into an emblem of poetic labour, marked by rhythm, dynamic progression, and continual change. Here, the struggle is not with identity, but with continuity. The poem is a time-bound, recursive act in which identity is not fixed in form but dispersed through the shifting intervals of writing and perception. Hence, the issue is more about maintaining an ongoing dialogue with the past while responding to the pressures of the present. Continuity requires engagement with inherited forms and histories, even as they are revised, making the event of writing a continuous process as opposed to a fixed declaration of self.

Thus, writing as "becoming" and its engagement with inherited textual forms result in the "lemon cure" layering ingredients that carry cultural resonances such as cinnamon, honey, cloves, rum, each from distinct culinary traditions, poured together with a half slice of lemon into hot water:

The lemon cure.

In each glass

mix: 1 stick cinnamon

1 teaspoon honey

2 cloves

2 jiggers rum

1/2 slice lemon

hot water to taste

Repeat as necessary. (*CFN* 79)

The merging of assorted elements here indicates a poetic technique in which diverse formal and cultural elements are mixed to heal or revivify language. The direction, "Repeat as necessary" acknowledges that transformation is not final but ongoing, a circulatory process of mixing, tasting, assessing, and then remixing. Kroetsch does more than suggest a drink by outlining a metaphor for writing itself. It is a craft of combining imported discourses and local sensibilities, letting each ingredient season the whole.

This recipe is a fitting emblem of Canadian poetry's multicultural dynamic. It is an ongoing hybridisation that avoids purity by embracing the tension and vitality of mixtures and sequences. It resonates with the metapoetic practice of self-reflection, for every ingredient has its moment, and every repetition is a check on effect, form, or tone. In Canada, "a poem is not a map of realities but a transformation of them" (Atwood *Negotiating with the Dead* 8). At this juncture, Canadian poetics is at work, drawing from global traditions yet committed to transform them through repeated engagement within their immediate cultural and geographical context. The drink's heat, spice, sweetness, and citrus create a living blend, just as Canadian poets stir inherited techniques, languages, and heritages to produce work that is not derivative or exoticizing, but rooted in cultural coexistence and open-ended creative process.

The refrain in sketch eleven, "see, what did I tell you" (*CFN* 80) highlights the poem's own structure. The repetition serves as a mode of anticipation, where the poet, marks the space between expectation and actual experience Displacing the offer of narrative progress or symbolic resolution, the poem deliberately lingers in this loop, turning repetition into the central act of meaning-making. This choice reflects a broader characteristic of Canadian poetry, which often favours moments of pause, inquiry, and uncertainty over closure. By doing so, Kroetsch falls in line with a Canadian tradition that values form as a site of inquiry and presence, demanding that poetry remains attuned to the interaction of sound, ritual, and the unknown. The repetition emerges as the poem's architecture, framing silence and expectation as generative zones within language. In his essay "The Moment of the Long Poem," Robert Kroetsch writes, "In love-making and in writing a long poem, delay is what matters" (61). The elements of surprise and expectation engendered by this delay state that deferral is an imperative structural and

affective device within poetic composition, wherein the postponement of resolution sustains reader's engagement and deepens textual intensity. It is a deliberate strategy that holds meaning in suspension, compelling the reader to remain within the course of signification where anticipation itself becomes a mode of engagement. This sustained deferment transforms absence into presence, allowing silence, pause, and repetition to function as active components of the poem's structure. By making its own operations of becoming visible, the metapoem transforms delay and expectation into inventive forces that question the stability of the authority of poetic voice.

Challenging the illusion of the authorial control is obvious in the line "The tree itself is elsewhere" (*CFN* 79). It reveals the inherent displacement of the lemon as its origin is rooted in a distant geography and its presence in the poem is marked by absence and dislocation. This simple line comes to function as a metapoetic reflection on the condition of writing within a transplanted tradition, where the objects of representation are already estranged from their natural contexts within the representational act. The lemon, as an imported form, cannot be fully understood within the Canadian landscape; its symbolic and material roots lie beyond the scene of the poem. In this way, the lemon embodies the larger dilemma of poetic inheritance, and the effort to make meaning out of borrowed forms whose histories are foreign to the local ground. The poem thus reflects on its own limitations, questioning the authenticity of its images while simultaneously transforming them. By acknowledging that "the tree itself is elsewhere," the poet signals a refusal of unearned authority and instead embraces a poetics of distance, one that writes through absence and re-contextualisation. The metapoetic elements lie in this self-aware tension where representation is not denied but reimagined through a consciousness of origin, loss, and creative adaptation.

Conclusion: Metapoetry as Survival Strategy

In Canadian literature, survival emerges not only as a thematic concern but as a foundational logic that underpins its formal and aesthetic negotiations. It is not a mode of survival in the elemental sense alone, for instance, of landscape, climate, or isolation-but survival as a textual and cultural act. It is the capacity to persist within, and against, traditions that do not fully accommodate Canadian experience. Literary expression in

Canada often stages this persistence as a dialogic exchange with displacement, fragmentation, and foreign inheritance. The poet engages with aesthetic forms that are inherited yet contextually out of place, necessitating ongoing reconfiguration. In such a literary ecology, survival is not the backdrop of writing, it becomes the condition of writing itself, and hence, Margaret Atwood writes in *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, "What you are writing may save you-if only you can write it honestly" (212).

In the Canadian literary fabric, writing about survival inevitably transforms into writing about the act of writing. The inherited poetic form is questioned not from a position of distance but from within the labour of articulation. Canadian poetry frequently turns its gaze inward, reflecting on its own making as it tries to enunciate new geographies, plural histories, and hybrid temporalities. This self-reflexivity is not an ornamentation but a method. The poet inscribes linguistic and formal failure as part of the survival process. It is a rhetorical move that affirms fragility of representation and the provisionality of meaning. Consequently, metatext crystallizes as intrinsic to Canadian poetic discourse, surfacing not as a theoretical addendum but as an existential necessity. The poem, in such a context, is not a stable container of insight but an unsettled space of recursive motion, attempting to reconcile language with lived multiplicity.

In the 21st century, this metapoetic impulse lines up with the realities of a transnational Canada where identities are increasingly deterritorialized, and writing must respond to diverse cultural logics. The contemporary Canadian poet writes within overlapping circuits of memory, migration, and media, where survival entails both cultural retention and formal experimentation. The poem is a record of simultaneity, presence and absence, local articulation and global inheritance. As Linda Hutcheon notes in *The Canadian Postmodern*, "We are always negotiating our relationship to the past and to traditions not entirely our own" (18). This negotiation manifests in poems that are as much about composition as about content, works that foreground their own textures, ruptures, and contingencies as a mirror of contemporary Canadian life. Metapoetry, then, is not a retreat into abstraction, but a political and aesthetic mode of remaining alert to histories, structures, and to the continuous production of meaning in uncertain terrain.

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