

"PRIVATE ACTS OF REVOLUTION":
FEMINISM AND POSTMODERNISM IN THE
FICTIONS OF ARITHA VAN HERK

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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"Private Acts of Revolution":
Feminism and Postmodernism in the Fictions of Aritha van Herk

BY

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A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate
Studies in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Department of English
Memorial University of Newfoundland
November 1989

St. John's

Newfoundland

Abstract

The fiction of Aritha van Herk allows feminism and postmodernism to overlap. Throughout her multi-layered texts van Herk questions humanist notions of unitary consciousness, universal truth and the objective construction of the past. Her weapons are narrative strategies, intertextuality and women's reclaimed mythologies. Through these techniques, van Herk manages to engender and, at the same time, deconstruct the rational consciousness at the heart of humanist discourse.

Van Herk's subversions are both literary and societal. She works within established literary forms and simultaneously transforms and subverts the thematic and formalistic conventions of these forms. Furthermore, she questions the very power structure out of which her texts are generated. She especially critiques the social construction of gender and the marginalization of ex-centrics. The aesthetic and the political are inseparably integrated in van Herk's texts. Her textual practice is political and her politics are generated from her textual practice. Her texts are always situated in society and van Herk is always aware of her historical specificity.

All of van Herk's work, from her short fictions and essays to her three novels - Judith, The Tent Peg, and No Fixed Address - disclose her feminist postmodern poetics. Her narrative experimentation is evident, to varying

degrees, in all of her fictions. Also, her novels establish intertextuality with other texts. They question the construction of the mythologies of the past and present. Foregrounded in all of van Herk's texts is a concern with woman and her place in twentieth-century society. The treatment of women by various literary conventions and societal norms always places them as ex-centrics in van Herk's texts.

Van Herk celebrates ex-centricity and pluralism. Her texts become more revolutionary as she dramatizes the conflict between the feminist and society. The metafictional layers of her works always remind the reader of the plight of the feminist postmodern in Canadian literary and social communities.

Acknowledgements

I would especially like to thank the following:

- i) Memorial University of Newfoundland for offering a fellowship
- ii) Cathy in the English Department for printing this document
- iii) The staff of the English Department Computer Lab who taught me how to process words
- iv) Ron Wallace, my supervisor, who first encouraged me to read Aritha van Herk's No Fixed Address
- v) My sister, Helen, for letting me sneak into her office
- vi) My Mother, Bernadette, whose support is beyond words
- vii) My deceased father whose spirit energizes through memory
- viii) And especially my husband and "Apocryphal lover" Radhwan for his absence.

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Introduction

The title of this thesis brings together two of the most influential cultural movements of the twentieth century. Feminist postmodernism provides an excellent example of the unity of the aesthetic and the political. This unity is moving both postmodernism and feminism in new directions which critics are just beginning to examine.¹ This thesis explores the fictions of one feminist postmodern writer, Aritha van Herk. Van Herk's feminist postmodern textual practice is actively referred to throughout this thesis. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the nature of the alliance between feminism and postmodernism before proceeding to an analysis of the actual texts.

The tendency to separate feminism and postmodernism arises out of the dual assumption that postmodernism is basically apolitical and aesthetic and feminism political to the exclusion of aesthetics. Such suppositions need to be radically questioned. Postmodernism can no longer be approached as a purely literary movement which is divorced from its cultural environment. Likewise, feminism can no longer be interpreted as a purely political movement devoid of aesthetic implications.

The first step in defining a feminist postmodern poetics is to politicize the postmodern. The work of Edward Said,

for example, reclaims criticism in general as a political act. Said states:

My position is that texts are worldly, to some degree they are events, and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless part of the social world, human life and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted.²

Said goes on to claim that not only are texts connected to the world but the "the realities of power and authority - ...are the realities that make texts possible" (5). Since texts are generated out of the oppositional forces in the environment, they are always political.³ They are produced in the "world" and situated in it. The postmodern text, too, must be reclaimed as a political product of the environment of the late twentieth-century.

As the postmodern text is reclaimed as political, the feminist text is reclaimed as aesthetic. Toril Moi, in Sexual/ Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory, notes that the deconstruction of the oppositional relationship between politics and aesthetics should be a major objective of feminist criticism. She claims:

...feminist criticism is about deconstructing such an opposition between the political and the aesthetic: as a political approach to criticism, feminism must be aware of the politics of aesthetic categories as well as of the implied aesthetics of the political approaches to art.⁴

Thus, feminism must question the political implications of postmodernism before it aligns itself to it. As politics

and aesthetics cannot be separated, so form and content cannot be segregated. A feminist approach to literature considers textual practice as political. For the feminist critic, a text's revolutionary potential is found in both its literary and social implications.

The division between the aesthetic and the political, which in the past has critically separated feminism and postmodernism, is gradually disintegrating. Both movements are generated out of the late twentieth-century and question the cultural values of this environment. Any attempt to define a feminist postmodern poetics must credit the plurality of both feminism and postmodernism. Linda Hutcheon in A Poetics of Postmodernism notes that critics must be careful when equating feminism and postmodernism as "to co-opt the feminist project into the unresolved and contradictory postmodern one would be to simplify and undo the important political agenda of feminism".⁵ Therefore, the feminist postmodern must be critically conscious. Hutcheon's definition of a poetics, when applied to a feminist context, allows the feminist postmodern to constantly re-evaluate her political allegiances.⁶ A poetics is not a closed system but "an open, ever-changing theoretical structure by which to order both our cultural knowledge and our critical procedures" (A Poetics of Postmodernism 14). In this sense, the poetics of postmodernism describes the literature as well as the theory

and criticism of the present. A feminist postmodern poetics engenders the postmodern poetics. It, too, refers to feminist postmodern literature, theory and criticism.' In order to work toward a definition of this poetics one must note the areas where feminism and postmodernism overlap. It is beyond the scope of this introduction to discuss all of these points of commonality. Therefore, those areas which frequently surface in textual practice and are particularly applicable to van Herk's fictions are illuminated here.

The major point at which feminism and postmodernism intersect is in the questioning of the humanist notion of a rational consciousness at the heart of discourse. The speaking subject is no longer considered to be unitary and rational but is as changeable and precarious as the environment which constructs it. Postmodernism radically questions this consciousness and reconstructs it as the site of ideological conflicts. Postmodernism decenters "liberal humanism, with its claims to full subjectivity and knowing rationality, in which man is the author of his thoughts and speech" (Weedon, 173). Furthermore, no longer are universal truths taken for granted. Instead, the values of pluralism and the existence of many truths are celebrated. These truths always depend on historicity, culture and gender. Feminism aligns with postmodernism in this questioning and also engenders the challenge to liberal humanism.⁸ Thus, feminist postmodernism questions the existence of a

genderless rational consciousness and of universal truth which ignores sexual difference.

The intense theoretical questioning of liberal humanism materializes in feminist postmodern texts. First of all, the notion of unitary consciousness is questioned through the sabotage of linear narrative. Narrative experimentation deconstructs the rational subjectivity into a fragmented, contradictory narrator. Furthermore, the subjectivity is an engendered, social construction. Secondly, the concept of universal and genderless truth is further challenged by the feminist postmodern in her defiance of the concepts of originality and individual genius.⁹ The feminist postmodern places her texts in a particular discursive community through a series of intertexts. Through intertextual echoes or even direct parody, the feminist postmodern acknowledges the literary and cultural trends which she is both supporting and refuting. Often her works challenge the assumptions of male-authored texts and traditions. Thirdly, the feminist postmodern is always concerned with how the past and the present are constructed. History is usually perceived as his-story, a male fabrication. The construction of myths, past and present, is of particular interest to the feminist postmodern as she examines the social construction of knowledge, language and gender. In general, the feminist postmodern rewrites subjective consciousness as engendered, fragmented, unoriginal and

historically specific. She focuses on gender through the form and the content of her works.

As feminist postmodern fictions, van Herk's works reflect the three features outlined above. First of all, van Herk's texts question the existence of unified subjectivity through experimental narrative techniques. Her narrative ventures emphasize the fragmentation and the changeability of subjectivity and the significance of gender in the construction of identity. Often the narrative is rendered through various subjectivities which are the sites of conflicting convictions. The way the story is told is paramount in van Herk's texts as the act of telling gives way to self-reflexive and metafictional commentaries on the plight of the feminist postmodern artist. Often van Herk's female characters, who are simultaneously mythological figures, operate as metaphors for the feminist artist.

Van Herk also challenges notions of individualism and originality by establishing intertextuality between her texts and other works. Intertextuality often serves to recall traditionally male-authored forms and genres which stereotype women and place them in confined roles. These forms are summoned and then subverted. Sometimes intertextuality recalls and rewrites female mythologies and challenges male-authored history in the process.

All of van Herk's texts are concerned with various mythologies of the past and present, of literature and of

culture. She works within the mythologies of various literary forms in order to subvert the thematic and formalistic conventions of these same forms. She focuses on the mythologies of regionalism and of gender construction. These three traits - narrative experimentation, intertextuality and the reexamination of various mythologies- are consistent in all of van Herk's fictions and can be clarified through a brief look at specific texts.

Van Herk's short fiction reveals the germination of her feminist postmodern poetics. Her interest in reclaiming women's mythology, establishing intertextuality and experimenting with narrative strategies is evident even in her earliest short fiction. In the early works van Herk is less technically and thematically innovative than in her novels. Often she employs psychological realism to present relatively rational subjectivities. However, her concern with woman's place in society is evident even in the earliest stories, "The Road Out" (1977) and "A Woman of Moderate Temperament" (1977). Her later short fiction, "Progressions Toward Sainthood: There Is Nothing To Do But Die" (1986) more radically questions the role of history in interpretation and becomes metafictional and self-reflexive.

In her first novel, Judith (1978), van Herk begins her subversion of the humanist subject. She sabotages the narrative which she adhered to in her earlier short stories. Van Herk also establishes intertextuality with her regional

discursive environment as she works within and, at the same time, sabotages the form of prairie realism. This intertextuality further enables her to question regional mythologies by deconstructing some of the numerous binary pairs of prairie fiction. Van Herk also reclaims women's lost mythologies by retelling the story of Circe and Odysseus. Her protagonist serves as a mythological construct as well as a fictional character.

In The Tent Peg (1981) van Herk's poetics become significantly more complicated than in her earlier fiction. The narrative undermines the linear and pragmatic orientation of the journal form by subverting this form from within. She questions the humanist notion of a unified, rational consciousness which is often defined as the creative force behind the univocal journal form. In The Tent Peg a tenuous intertextuality is established with the journals of mythologized Canadian explorers like Alexander Mackenzie, David Thompson, Samuel Hearne and John Franklin. Van Herk attempts to rewrite these figures and the history of the North. She reclaims women's mythology as the protagonist J.L. functions as the mythological figure, Jael, as well as a fictional character. In this novel van Herk especially focuses on how mythologies of gender construction are created in twentieth-century society.

Van Herk's latest novel No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey (1986) is the most revolutionary of all her texts.

The revolutionary implications of this text are found in its sexual/ textual politics.¹⁰ The form and content of the novel extensively question and parody various societal and literary norms. Again, the subject is decentered as both the narrative and the narrator are unreliable and unfixed. There is a series of intertexts operating in No Fixed Address which identify the novel as a parody of picaresque narrative and thematic conventions. It is also a parody of the male-oriented quest stories of fellow Albertan, Robert Kroetsch. Mythology is again rewritten and reclaimed and, as in The Tent Peg, the protagonist serves as a metaphor for the feminist postmodern artist.

This brief description of the chapters to follow is presented in an attempt to clarify the nature of the feminist postmodern poetics at work in van Herk's texts. The critical approach of this thesis may, in turn, be called feminist postmodern in nature.¹¹ While van Herk's texts are presented chronologically, this study does not work from the assumption that there are continual and linear patterns of development in her fictions. This thesis moves through the various layers of van Herk's fictions, focusing on those features which characterise her feminist postmodern poetics: namely, narrative techniques, intertextuality and the questioning of mythologies. Each chapter stresses discontinuity as well as continuity and attempts to remind the reader of the discursive and cultural environment out of

which the texts are generated. Van Herk's textual politics is equated to her sabotage of literary as well as societal conventions. Her texts never remain in an intertextual echo chamber but are rooted in and critical of society.

Before turning to an analysis of van Herk's fictions, it is necessary to clarify how the term "author" is being employed in this thesis. This study does not focus on van Herk as an individual but upon her function as an author. In other words, van Herk's name is used to denote the "author function".¹² She functions as a means by which to establish relationships between texts and to set the fictions in a particular discursive environment. Autobiographical information or interviews are not referred to in order to validate readings. However, critical articles written by van Herk are cited quite extensively in order to illuminate the relationship between the critical and fictional works. The articles also establish a sense of the literary and discursive environment out of which the fictions are generated. Commentary upon the metafictional nature of the texts refers to van Herk's function as a feminist postmodern, rather than her identity as an individual author. The relationship between author and reader does not draw on an autobiographical reconstruction of van Herk. Instead, the author is portrayed as the holder of the secret and the reader as the seeker of the secret.¹³ In this thesis, the texts are not approached as reflections of the

author. Van Herk is not depicted as a real psychological entity but as a textual construct.

This thesis does not work towards an actual resolution. Like the fictions which it approaches, this study is one of process. It recognizes that temporary meaning is assigned to van Herk's fictions in order to produce readings.¹⁴ The meanings assigned here are open to revision and expansion. This study enters van Herk's fictional worlds and moves in and out of the various layers of her texts, focusing on the generation of a feminist postmodern poetics. As the length of this thesis indicates, it is often much easier to enter than it is to exit these texts. Perhaps Rosalind Coward's words serve as an appropriate introduction to what is to follow: "In the private life of the mind, nothing is certain, nothing is fixed."¹⁵

Endnotes

1. Some examples of critical works which discuss the affiliation of feminism and postmodernism are Chris Weedon, Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), Carolyn J. Allen, "Feminist Criticism and Postmodernism", Tracing Literary Theory, ed. Joseph Natoli (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987) 278- 305 and Linda Hutcheon, "Postmodernism, Poststructuralism and Feminism", Canadian Woman Studies 6:3 (Summer/ Fall, 1985) 36-39.
2. Edward Said, "Secular Criticism", The World, The Text and The Critic (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983) 4.
3. Said claims: "Were I to use one word consistently along with criticism...it would be oppositional", 29.
4. Toril Moi, Sexual/ Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (London and New York: Methuen, 1985) 86.
5. A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory and Fiction (New York and London: Routledge, 1988) xii.
6. Hutcheon does not attempt to define a feminist postmodern poetics. She focuses mainly on postmodernism.
7. This feminist postmodern poetic is distinct from a modernist feminist poetic or a realist feminist poetic, for example, as feminism attaches itself to and transforms postmodernism.
8. Linda Hutcheon notes that the poststructuralist questioning of MAN did not necessarily discover WOMAN. She claims that feminism is pushing it in that direction as it challenges the sexual identity of human subjectivity. See The Canadian Postmodern (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988) 108- 110.
9. This has also been noted by Hutcheon in The Canadian Postmodern, 108- 110.
10. Note the title of Toril Moi's text.
11. Note that feminist postmodernism refers not only to fiction but to the critical approaches to this fiction as well as other theoretical works.

12. Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?", The Foucault Reader, Ed. Paul Rainbow (1979. Rpt New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) 107. Foucault notes the function of the author as opposed to the humanist, psychological reconstruction of the authorial personage. It is in this sense that I use Aritha van Herk's proper name.

13. See Aritha van Herk, "The Art of Blackmail: Secrets and Seeing", Canadian Literature 100 (Spring, 1984) 329- 333 for a full discussion of this concept. Van Herk also offers an

Chapter I
From Apprentice to Magician: The Short Fiction

Aritha van Herk is primarily a writer of novels, not short fiction. The various sub-genres of the novel challenge her as she works within, while simultaneously subverting, the mechanics and thematics of these sub-genres. Some of the major patterns which surface later in her novels are evident, if not thoroughly developed, in her earliest short stories. For example, van Herk's interest in rewriting mythology into a twentieth-century context begins as early as "The Road Out" (1977). The subversion of "modernist realism"¹ is evident in "A Woman of Moderate Temperament" (1977), "A Minor Loss" (1977), "It's Included" (1978) and "Transitions" (1979). The intertextuality of van Herk's fictions with other Canadian postmodern texts, especially with those of fellow Albertan Robert Kroetsch,² begins as early as "It's Included". Her later story "Waiting For the Rodeo" (1984) rewrites the western landscape and creates an analogy between the protagonist and the feminist postmodern artist. This metafictional concern, as well as the desire to rewrite woman into the landscape, dominates van Herk's later fictions, most notably The Tent Peg (1981) and No Fixed Address (1986). The final selections of short fiction examined here, "Progressions Toward Sainthood: There Is Nothing To Do But Die" (1986)³ and "Calgary: this Growing Graveyard" (1987), move beyond

genre boundaries and suggest that the conventional forms of the novel and short story may no longer sufficiently contain van Herk's vision. In her latest works van Herk's movement beyond traditional forms suggests that her future fictions may indeed challenge the reader even more than those studied in this thesis.

Stylistically and thematically van Herk's short fiction can be divided chronologically into three groups. The fiction in each group parallels similar developments in her novels. The first collection consists of stories published between 1973 and 1977 and includes "A Night Alive" (1973), "The Road Out" (1977), "A Woman of Moderate Temperament" (1977) and "A Minor Loss" (1977). The second group comprises the stories published in 1978 and 1979: "It's Included" (1978) and "Transitions" (1979). These stories lead up to the publication of van Herk's first novel Judith (1978) and her second novel The Tent Peg (1981). The thematic concerns and technical innovations reflected in the first two groups of short fiction are integrated more successfully in the first two novels. The third group of short fiction revolves around van Herk's latest novel No Fixed Address (1986) and the period following its publication. "Waiting for the Rodeo" (1984), "Who Travels Too" (1984) and "Bail Skippers and Bacchantes" (1985) are either excerpts from or closely related to material in No Fixed Address. The short fiction of the period from 1986 to

1987, "Progressions Toward Sainthood" (1986) and "Calgary: this Growing Graveyard" (1987), is post-No Fixed Address. These works seem to question whether the forms of the novel or short story will suffice for van Herk in the future. The reader is prepared for the philosophical implications of these texts through participation in No Fixed Address.

This chapter offers a brief analysis of the short fiction and introduces patterns which are further developed and examined in the succeeding chapters. For example, the narrative patterns, especially in the short fiction of the first and second groups, struggle within the limitations of psychological realism as does the first novel Judith. Narrative time shifts, however, are certainly more integrated in Judith than in some of the stories. Also, the descriptive and evocative scenes, which in the best of van Herk's fiction transform the "real" to the "different"⁴, often seem awkward and contrived in the short fiction. This chapter will concentrate on some of the weaknesses of these stories. The illumination of the weaknesses of the early short fiction will serve to emphasize the strengths of the later short fiction and the novels .

"A Night Alive" (1973) introduces the reader to a young writer. The one-page story comprises a series of internal dialogues filtered through the supposedly altered consciousness of a depressed adolescent. The narrator seems to be involved in a conversation, partly with her multiple

selves and partly with the "rocking, rolling music" she is listening to.⁵ The words which are set apart in the text by quotation marks are the partial lyrics of songs which the narrator is listening to.⁶ The narrator seems to absorb the messages of the music, asking herself a series of questions which are unconnected and apocalyptic. Throughout this brief fiction, the narrator reminds the reader that her "mind is wandering away, because the world is coming down" (17).

Although this story suffers from the narrator's adolescent self-pity, it does provide some interesting insights into van Herk's experimentation with narrative techniques. The narrative is really an internal dialogue between the first-person narrator and the anonymous you -- possibly the unidentified reader. The music initiates the narrator's modernist stream of consciousness and functions as a destabilizing voice invading the narrator from outside. The repetition of "Do you think" furnishes a monotonous pattern which takes the form of self-indulgent questions which the reader is invited to consider. The reader finds herself involved almost against her will. "A Night Alive" is an early experiment with the integration of various narrative voices: the questions of the narrator, the lyrics of the albums and the silent responses of the reader to whom the cry of despair is directed. These voices mature over

the next five years and are more successfully integrated in Judith.

Through the next three stories, all published in 1977 van Herk's narrative techniques develop significantly. "The Road Out", "A Minor Loss" and "A Woman of Moderate Temperament" all employ varying degrees of third-person, psychological realist narrative. All of these fictions are also concerned with the roles of women in heterosexual relationships. Considering that Judith is published a year later in 1978, these stories reflect various patterns which will be examined in more detail in the following chapter. The most significant of these patterns focus on the rewriting of mythology, as exemplified in "The Road Out", the exploration of male/ female relationships, as illustrated in "A Minor Loss" and the elaborate descriptive evocations, as depicted in "A Woman of Moderate Temperament". Unfortunately, these patterns are largely contrived in these stories and are not very well integrated until Judith.

"The Road Out", winner of the Miss Chatelaine Sixth Annual Fiction Competition, is an exploration of the lives of girls and women in the small town. The fiction works within realist conventions and attempts to integrate rewritten mythology. The narrative opens with a conversation between the mother and Eileen which excludes the protagonist, Tabitha. The image of the train, "the

clicking of the train's wheels", ⁷ becomes a metaphor for Tabitha's desire to escape the small town and the life it offers her.⁸ The third-person narrative moves from the outside environment to inside the protagonist's mind, not unlike the narrative shifts in Judith.

In "The Road Out", van Herk employs modernist techniques to explore the psychology of the protagonist. Various concrete objects serve to connect and trigger memories or thoughts. The external induces a contemplative, internal state. For example, the kettle (58) and the clock (59) serve as such bridges. The sound of the water going into the kettle hypnotizes Tabitha into a rather subjective state of mind. From here she looks out the open window to the road and associates this road with the reason that her mother is ironing. "She irons because of the road Tabitha thought. It fills up at least one day" (58). The road further reminds her of Darrell, the unwanted lover. This stream of consciousness ends abruptly with the sound of Eileen's voice which brings Tabitha back to the conversation at hand. As the fiction proceeds, the reader moves in and out of Tabitha's consciousness. The clock, for example, allows Tabitha to repeatedly leave the present and move backwards in time to her childhood memories of the clock. Again, it is Eileen's voice which brings Tabitha back to the present (76). The clock documents the time that is passing and reminds Eileen that it is twenty to eleven and later

eleven o'clock. Another time change is also indicated by the clock as it "bonged out six strokes" (76) to announce Darrell's inevitable visit. Thus, the clock serves to carry the narrative progressively forward in the modernist manner of Virginia Woolf in Mrs Dalloway.⁹ It also allows the narrative to move freely through time. Objects and events in the present trigger and connect incidents of the distant and recent pasts. Such connectors are also employed in the novel, Judith.

Though it shares common narrative techniques with Judith, "The Road Out" is more modernist than postmodernist in its narrative movement. The narrative in "The Road Out" is progressive and continuous rather than disjunctive and discontinuous.¹⁰ In Judith the many selves and voices of the protagonist converge and disperse as the title character struggles to rid herself of the psychological domination of her father and her lover. In "The Road Out" Tabitha seems to have already freed herself psychologically from the lover, Darrell, and so the process of her emancipation is not illuminated. Tabitha's conflict is caused by her difficulty in communicating her feelings to her mother and her lover. Both the novel and the short story deal with female protagonists struggling with role-playing. Judith recounts the process of liberating self while "The Road Out" recounts decisions and judgements which resolve the process. Tabitha represents a more integrated character while Judith

is a conglomeration of multiple selves. Because Tabitha is coherent and rational, the story becomes more of an exploration of how one woman rejects role-playing than an investigation of the process of development and self-awareness. As modernist fiction moves toward integration and resolution, the postmodern moves toward dispersal and ambiguity. Only the ending of "The Road Out" is postmodern in nature as the narrative is pushed toward ambiguity rather than resolution. This ambiguity arises out of the reconstruction of the biblical myth of Tabitha and Peter.

The mythological reference in "The Road Out" permeates the modernist narrative by pushing the fiction beyond realism and avoiding absolute closure. Tabitha's name is employed self-consciously to evoke a character of mythological significance. The names of Judith in Judith, J.L. in The Tent Peg and Arachne in No Fixed Address are used in a similar manner.¹¹ In the Bible Tabitha is raised from the dead by Peter because she is considered a charitable and deserving woman.¹² In "The Road Out" Tabitha is rewritten as a young girl frustrated with the roles imposed upon her by the small town. This frustration is especially reflected in her relationship with Darrell. The small-town girl attempting to escape the temptations of role-playing is a theme which haunts Canadian literature written by women in the 1960's and 1970's.¹³ Here Tabitha manages to transcend the small town through her vision of

Peter. Peter is a faceless man in an orange shirt who is waiting in the city to rescue Tabitha from the death to which she is tempted to succumb by remaining in the small town. Tabitha's decision to leave the small town and not come back is portrayed as a spiritual purification which results from her flight into the "cleansing snow" (77). The last paragraph of the fiction recounts the rising of Tabitha from the dead. It is abrupt and dislocated as the mythological reference to Tabitha and Peter has not been sustained throughout the narrative. Furthermore, Tabitha has not been sufficiently transformed from protagonist to mythological figure. In Judith such a metamorphosis is again attempted and is much more successful. Judith is gradually transformed, physically and spiritually, into Circe. In The Tent Peg and No Fixed Address such metamorphoses are again orchestrated with even greater levels of success.¹⁴ In "The Road Out" transformation and integration are not successful. The mythological metamorphosis of Tabitha does push the fiction beyond the realist narrative but the ending remains awkward.

Although cumbersome, the last paragraph of "The Road Out" allows the text some ambiguity. Tabitha only rises from the dead at the bidding of Peter. This rising involves rescue through a male rather than through self. While Tabitha escapes Darrell and small-town role-playing, she does so through a male rescuer. The prince in shining

armour is only superficially transformed to the prince in an orange shirt. Van Herk later deconstructs the mythology of the male knight in No Fixed Address by referring to Thomas as Arachne's saviour.¹⁵ It is important to note that in all three of van Herk's novels the protagonists' developments and decisions entail a coming to know self rather than a rescue from self.

"A Minor Loss" is significantly less adventurous than "The Road Out". It does not attempt to integrate rewritten mythology or push the conclusion toward ambiguity. However, like "The Road Out", "A Minor Loss" does exploit the techniques of psychological realism to explore a woman's place in her marriage and society at large. On one level, the narrative recounts the pain a woman suffers after having a tooth removed. On another level, "A Minor Loss" describes Lina's loss of self through her marriage to Jamie. Unfortunately, the narrative falls prey to the humanist temptation to hail Lina as a representational, universal female figure.¹⁶ This is the greatest weakness of the fiction as it works much better without the last sentence: "And she was a woman walking very carefully, balancing herself on roof beams, arms out to prevent her fall".¹⁷ Again, the problem is one of integration as in "The Road Out". Lina is transformed from specific character to universal woman in one sentence. In "A Minor Loss" the transformation is even less successful than in "The Road

Out" which manipulates mythology to facilitate the metamorphosis. In "A Minor Loss" a gradual transformation is not attempted and Lina appears as a cardboard, universal symbol with a didactic message about the plight of modern woman. The reader is not prepared for such a metamorphosis and the narrative strains.

In van Herk's later novels she manages to explore larger issues associated with woman's place in society without making claims to universality. This is accomplished through the metafictional layering of The Tent Peg and No Fixed Address. These layers do not exist in these first stories or even in the first novel, Judith. Actually, Judith suffers from a similar limitation as "A Minor Loss". In Judith the relationship between Jim and Judith is generalized to serve as a commentary on male/ female sexual relationships - both animal and human. Thus, Jim is portrayed in quite a sexist manner. He is equated to an excitable boar and universal, homogeneous male-hood. Although the protagonist is not universalized in Judith, Jim is. Therefore, the major limitation of "A Minor Loss", the universal status of Lina, resurfaces in Judith. These weaknesses are supplanted in the later novels through the construction of a metafictional metaphor. The major character of these later texts also represents the feminist postmodern artist. As a result, The Tent Peg and No Fixed Address do not suffer from the handicaps of either universality or sexism.

One of the strengths of "A Minor Loss" is the consolidated narrative movement from outside to inside Lina. Lina's confusion and her vulnerability are especially emphasized through psychological realism. The reader sensitively contacts Lina who, lying on her back in the department store, notes :

I always thought I was the only one. But I've let it go and they have it now. When I decide to get up it will all be different, it will be like stepping through a mirror into the other side (42).

The reader is allowed a brief glimpse inside Lina's subjective consciousness and establishes a certain understanding of her vulnerability. The reader begins to empathize with Lina and grasp the significance of some of the things which she has lost: her tooth and her sense of self. If the reader was allowed to retain this intimacy "A Minor Loss" would function adequately as an experimental psychological narrative. However, as has been noted above, Lina is pushed toward the status of homogeneous universal woman and any sense of reader intimacy is lost.

Published in the same year, "A Woman of Moderate Temperament" explores many of the same concerns as "A Minor Loss" and "The Road Out". It also attempts to break some new ground. "A Woman of Moderate Temperament" attempts to move beyond realistic depiction to an evocative and elaborate illumination of the postmodern "different".¹⁸ In Judith, The Tent Peg and No Fixed Address van Herk manages

to transform the very landscapes and scenes which she is describing. One of the most enjoyable aspects of reading these novels is the provocative and seductive descriptions which abound in their pages. In "A Woman of Moderate Temperament" such evocations are attempted but fail. Descriptive language in this fiction is often awkward and, instead of evoking the mythic and the "different," it renders the narrative clumsy and contrived. One of the central tensions is generated through the interaction between the real and the "different" and it is unfortunate that the "different" is usually so ineptly depicted.

The tensions of "A Woman of Moderate Temperament" are created through the conflicting desires of the protagonist, Miriam Kenner. As the woman of moderate temperament, Miriam is a bored home-maker who searches beyond the commitment and routine of marriage for mystery and adventure. Out of this search arises the tension between what is real and what is mythic or unreal. Reality is represented through the routine of Miriam's life and the conversations which constitute her life. Len Rosen, for example, is described as a "greasy little man with quick dark eyes".¹⁹ While he is the realistic object of Miriam's revulsion, he also becomes the object of her imaginative desire. The senselessness and superficiality of their conversations are highlighted through the repetition of particulars such as age and occupation. However, the diamonds allow Len Rosen

to take on an exotic existence in Miriam's mind. It is here that the narrative labours with van Herk's awkward description of what the diamonds and Len represent to Miriam. For example, the diamonds are portrayed as "playthings of people so far removed that to her they were mystical, mythological and non-existent in the regular world" (9). To Miriam, Len represents a world that is not "regular" and offers "the movement in life that she was seeking and had never been close to" (12). Len Rosen, importer, becomes Len Rosen enchanter and later Len Rosen lover. However, to the reader Len Rosen remains as the "greasy little man" and the diamonds as diamonds clumsily depicted.

Though the description of the diamonds fails, van Herk's later evocative depictions are foreshadowed in her portrayal of Miriam's shower. This scene will later be recalled in The Tent Peg.²⁰ Though the scene in "A Woman of Moderate Temperament" opens rather clumsily with: "Inside that vortex was a completeness in itself, composed only of the jewelled liquid and her body, the two merging to a single refraction of light" (13), it does manage to soar to lucidity:

She moved for him, the audience, the voyeur, turning and glistening to show her well cut lines. She enjoyed herself, liked herself as nowhere else, her breasts, her back, her legs long and smooth and beyond themselves. Polished the water over her skin, accepted its force and herself nothing more than a beautiful particle in the vortex. Saw them

all watching, the shower curtain vanished, herself stepping in ballet under the water, admired but unreachable (13).

Descriptions of this calibre have not appeared in the earlier stories and later become one of the trademarks of van Herk's style.

The narrative of "A Woman of Moderate Temperament" is also more technically innovative than that of "A Minor Loss", "A Night Alive" and "The Road Out". Although it also manipulates third-person psychological realism, the narrative in "A Woman of Moderate Temperament" is not as continuous as in the other stories. However, there are connectors, such as the locket and the photograph, between the outside and the inside worlds of Miriam. Eight tenuously connected incidents comprise the narrative and the reader is called upon to connect these scenes. The fiction is disjunctive as the narrative commences with the photograph of the husband, moves to the night class and then back to the bedroom where Miriam and her husband are making love. From the bedroom it surges ahead to the night class and the conversation with Len Rosen, back to the bedroom, through to another conversation with Len Rosen and to the shower scene described above. The narrative concludes ambiguously in the bedroom. The intersticed prose ²¹ encourages the disjunctive narrative as there is little connection between the bedroom and the cafeteria - between the real world of Miriam Kenner and what she perceives to be

a more interesting and mysterious world as offered by Len Rosen. The discontinuity of the narrative is emphasized through the intersticed prose and allows for the ambiguity of the final scene where the reader is unsure just who Miriam is sharing her bed with. Since the incidents are not intricately connected, the last episode is not foreshadowed. The sweaty hand and the fact that it is daytime and Miriam is thinking about her husband ²² seem to suggest that the lover is Len Rosen. At the conclusion of the fiction the narrator tells of an accepting and a refusing:

She lay still, refusing to turn around;
refusing everything. But the refusal now
was nothing compared to the acceptance she
had made, nothing at all (13).

What has Miriam accepted? Her real relationship with her husband and the validity of this relationship? Her seduction by Len Rosen? The submissive role as Len Rosen's mistress? Ironically, when she is in bed with Len, the supposed enchanter, she begins to mythologize and romanticize about her husband. "A Woman of Moderate Temperament" remains open-ended. The fiction explores the tensions between the real and the imagined rather than offers resolutions to these tensions. Open-endedness and ambiguity are features of all of van Herk's novels and most of her short fictions. The desire to conclude and generalize that weakens "The Road Out" and "A Minor Loss" is replaced here with a healthy ambiguity which encourages

reader participation. As well, the tension between the real and the mythic and the regular and the illusionary continues in all of van Herk's novels. In The Tent Peg, especially, van Herk explores how sexual stereotyping is related to this very dichotomy.

The first four stories of this group demonstrate a gradual development in van Herk's techniques. While she manipulates the third-person narrative in all the fictions, there is a progression in experimentation from the internal dialogue of "A Night Alive" to the modernist psychological realism of "The Road Out" and "A Minor Loss". She further experiments with disjunctive narrative and intersticed prose in "A Woman of Moderate Temperament". Van Herk's integration of narrative time shifts, her juxtaposition of the mythic and the real and her transformations from specific to universal are not always smooth. By No Fixed Address she has polished her techniques but her first novel shares some of the shortcomings of these early stories.

While the first four stories manipulate third-person narrative, the second group, consisting of "It's Included" and "Transitions", manipulate the first-person intimate narrative. Van Herk continues to work within the boundaries of realist fiction in "Transitions" but in "It's Included" she pushes these boundaries beyond their limits. While "Transitions" remains stylistically conservative, "It's

Included" begins the adventurous play which is central to The Tent Peg and No Fixed Address.

"It's Included", though published in the same year as "Transitions"²³, is more innovative. It continues the experiment with intersticed prose initiated in "A Woman of Moderate Temperament". The use of first-person disjunctive narration allows for a series of plots and sub-plots. The narrator, Marijke, recollects five separate incidents which are tenuously connected. Each particular incident laments deaths of one kind or another. The thematic references to death serve to connect an otherwise discontinuous narrative.

The first section of "It's Included" centres on a conversation between Marijke and her friend concerning her friend's untimely funeral arrangements. Throughout the conversation Marijke goes in and out of herself, not unlike Tabitha in "The Road Out" or Lina in "A Minor Loss". Objects such as the rocking chair serve to connect the conversation to Marijke's wandering thoughts. For example, leaning back on the rocking chair, Marijke recalls making love with Johnnie and then moves back into the present conversation with her friend. To further complicate the narrative, Marijke recollects her reception of funeral cards and digresses even further back to various childhood memories of death. The first section never returns to the conversation which opens the narrative.

Each section of "It's Included", like the first, is independent and each experiments with digressive narrative techniques. The second section recounts various details of the narrator's visit to the "old country". The third segment is a memory, or supposed memory, of the first house Marijke's family lived in near a graveyard. The narrative digresses to incorporate various voices from the narrator's childhood. The fourth incident recalls a visit to Marijke's brother's house and a journey through the mountains which ends at a grave the narrator doesn't want to look at. Though the narrative concentrates on the grave, it also implicates another death - the death of the connection between Marijke and her brother:

I stared at the backs of my brother's denim legs: how could he be my brother, related to me, blood, blood, blood, it's in the blood.²⁴

All the individual sections include other stories which focus on various kinds of death; namely the death of family history, traditions and connections. The image of the graveyard appears in three of the four narratives, loosely connecting this experiment in retrospective, psychological narrative. The reader feels a certain intimacy with the narrator as she colloquially recounts and comments on her assorted memories. A chatty, conversational tone is maintained throughout with claims such as "I don't know how I know about the graveyard. I don't remember it. Someone must have told me. Oh I know exactly how it is" (22). The

narrator encourages the reader to participate in a conversation with her. This intimate relationship is comfortable for the modernist reader as long as the narrative remains on the level of modernist realism. The relaxed intimacy permits the fiction to shock the modernist reader in the sixth episode.

In the final section realism is abandoned. The intimacy which has been established between reader and narrator is challenged. The reader can no longer identify with the narrator²⁵ but is still invited to participate in the narrator's actions. The retrospective past tense changes to present continuous, encouraging the reader to walk with Marijke and Gunter Mortis through the gardens, to the hotel and to the train. In the other four sections the reader merely listens to the memories of the narrator and reassembles their order. Here, the reader participates in the making of the narrator's memories.

This incident also highlights the intertexts of "It's Included". It tenuously summons a scene in Robert Kroetsch's The Studhorse Man (1970). In a particular scene from that novel, Hazard LePage makes love to P. Cockburn in the provincial museum of the Legislative building.²⁶ Also, in No Fixed Address Arachne makes love to a German tourist under a table in a museum.²⁷ In "It's Included" the place is the bathroom and the name of the tourist is Gunter Mortis "as in 'rigor' Mortis" (23). As the personification and the

embodiment of death, Gunter is certainly a postmodern creation. Complete with German accent and camera, his blonde hair and blue eyes mock the traditional interpretations of death as the black-robed stranger. Marijke makes love to death himself and afterwards is anointed by the stranger who rubs her face with his hands (24). The reader who ventures to draw the narrative toward some sort of resolution will be frustrated. Gunter Mortis' affirmation "it's included" (24) remains ambiguous. Is this a metaphysical comment that death is included in life and love-making in particular? Or is it a metafictional comment that this disjunctive, fantastic segment is included with the other five sections to comprise the fiction "It's Included"?

The final section of "It's Included" propels the fiction beyond realist conventions generally adhered to in the four stories examined thus far. While "It's Included" partially operates as retrospective narrative, the disjunctive conclusion pushes beyond retrospective and realistic depiction. In Judith such movement beyond realist boundaries also occurs. However, the fantastic, as represented by Gunter Mortis, does not resurface to the same degree until "Waiting For the Rodeo" (1984).

"Transitions", though published at the same time as "It's Included", works within the boundaries of the first-person confessional memoir without attempting to break out

into the realm of the fantastic. The adult narrator looks back upon a series of childhood memories revolving around her older sister. A fair amount of narrative commentary is provided and an intimate, chatty relationship is established with the reader, not unlike that of the first four sections of "It's Included". The first-person narrator uses colloquial language and conditionals such as "let me say that", "I suppose" and "Did I say?".²⁸ In "Transitions" the tenses vary. The conversation between reader and narrator is rendered in the present tense and the narrator switches from present to past tense to describe past incidents. The use of present tense gives the narrator's memories a sense of immediacy and allows the reader to participate more actively in the telling of the stories. For example, the young narrator's enchantment with her older sister is effectively delineated in the present tense. It is interesting to note that this scene is significantly more successful than similar descriptive scenes in "A Woman of Moderate Temperament":

Entranced, I open my hands and touch her warm skin. It is as if I am touching some magical source of heat that thaws my fingers immediately. Her skin is like warm water, perfectly still and smooth, unshrinking. My fingers gradually relax until I can even feel the shape of her ribs (94).

Such a description allows Hannike to take on almost mythic proportions in the eyes of the young narrator.

In "It's Included" van Herk reconstructs the figure of death and in "Transitions" she begins deconstructing - an activity which is to dominate her later works. The mythology of the mysterious, spiritual relationship between sisters is deconstructed as the narrator informs the reader "We are not close; let me say that. We never were" (38). The myth of the eldest child wilfully sacrificing for the younger children is also deconstructed as Hannike is presented as an unwilling mother-figure. For example, in her sleep she mumbles "I don't want to take care of them. I hate them" (96).

Although the narrative of "Transitions" appears to focus on the narrator's memories of Hannike, it actually concentrates on two women - Hannike and the narrator. Van Herk avoids the temptation which she succumbs to in "A Minor Loss" to make Hannike and the narrator representational, universal figures. The two remain as specific characters whose relationship deconstructs the belief that there is some sort of spiritual connection between sisters. The final paragraphs characterize the two women in comparison to each other. Hannike goes through yet another transition which the narrator has not yet experienced - childbirth. The difference between them remains specific rather than universal:

But then, I do not see her often. Only often enough to remind her of my strangeness, and that I am a disinterested aunt. Hannike and I live in the same city,

but we are far away from each other. She has four children now. I have none (96).

It is evident from "It's Included" and "Transitions" that van Herk's interest in de-mythologizing various traditional concepts is developing. In "It's Included" the metaphysical figure of death becomes her object. In "Transitions" the traditional concept of spiritual connection between sisters is deconstructed. She is also beginning to push realist narrative conventions beyond their boundaries as exemplified in the disjunctive narrative of "It's Included" and the subtle shifts in tense in "Transitions". Judith, published approximately at this time, further pushes beyond these confines. Van Herk becomes more adventurous with narrative techniques as she sabotages univocal, linear narrative and allows new voices to be heard. Over the next few years, van Herk focuses on the novel form as she concentrates on The Tent Peg and No Fixed Address. In The Tent Peg she thoroughly complicates humanist notions of unitary discourse by repeating narrative incidents and juxtaposing the journals of various fictional constructs. She devises a new mythology for the north as a mythic, female space and deconstructs traditional roles assigned to men and women. After the publication of The Tent Peg van Herk's fiction continuously becomes more innovative. Her fictions begin to concern themselves not only with the rejection of traditional roles and the

deconstruction of established mythology but with the creation of new roles for women. She rewrites history to her-story. Her work also becomes more conscious of linguistic play as hermeneutical and metafictional concerns permeate her fictions.

The third tenuously constructed chronological group of van Herk's short fiction is characterized by her preoccupation with her latest novel, No Fixed Address, and her later movement way from the forms of the novel and short story. In 1985 two excerpts from No Fixed Address were published separately as "Who Travels Too" and "Bail Skippers and Bacchantes".²⁹ As there is little change from these versions to those included in the novel, these two fictions will not be discussed here.³⁰ Though it is an independent fiction³¹, "Waiting for the Rodeo" (1984) also has much in common with No Fixed Address. Tip, like Arachne, becomes a metaphor for the feminist postmodern artist.

Before the presentation of "Waiting for the Rodeo" to the Humanities Association of Canada in Calgary, van Herk describes her story and especially the role of the picaresque:

The last time she interfered I was trying to write a realistic story about Calgary, a story that would set straight the image attributed to this city by carpet baggers like Barry Callaghan, who maintained, you will remember, that there is nothing here but pimps, prostitutes, and parking lots. Whether or not this portrait is realistic, this is my story of Calgary; still you might recognize the laughing face of the rogue.

This is a story of repentance and conversion, where picara becomes priestess. The devil get his due.³²

Both the picaro and the transformation of the Calgary landscape are central to "Waiting for the Rodeo". Earlier in the same article, van Herk directly makes a correlation between the picaro and the feminist postmodern artist :

Like the picaro, the modern artist is both isolated from and imprisoned within society. She longs for an excuse to behave badly, to indulge her libido. She watches the capers of the less restrained members of Canadian literature with envy (16).

This association is further developed in "Waiting for the Rodeo" and No Fixed Address.

Tip, the protagonist in "Waiting for the Rodeo", is another version of the new picara³³ and Calgary is a reinvented city. Like Arachne, the picara of No Fixed Address, she moves from place to place and in and out of various jobs, situations and love affairs. "Waiting for the Rodeo" serves as a short collection of Tip's adventures as well as an imaginative rewriting of the city of Calgary. This re-fashioning of Calgary surfaces again in "Calgary: this Growing Graveyard". In "Waiting for the Rodeo" Calgary, the city which has "become completely conventional and should be avoided"³⁴, is transformed into a mythic and carnivalistic land of magicians and balloonists. It is not only a dry and dusty prairie town but a city of Brass Rings, magical demonstrations, seances, pointed-breasted cowgirls,

cowboys who like to rub bellies when they dance and neurotic dogs who chase balloons rather than letter carriers! Realistic depiction is abandoned as Calgary is transformed from the real to the "different". This is the new Calgary as Tip is the new picara.

Tip, as artist, is the magician's apprentice who becomes the magician. The metafictional element in this fiction is brilliantly crafted and, like The Tent Peg and No Fixed Address, the telling of the story becomes a metaphor for the feminist artist and her position in society. It is indeed the metafictional component which allows this story to become one of van Herk's most enjoyable and successful works. As the feminist postmodern, ip's goal is "to live in every Canadian city substantially enough to flaunt its markings in public" (196). She is the writer of fictions which are both regional and national. It is significant that Tip continuously rids herself of old baggage and sorts through her belongings, discarding what she does not want and keeping what she wants. Sorting through the old clothes is analogous to the process of writing as the writer decides what to use and what not to use - a matter of selection. A ground rule, of course, is "to evade plot" (197).

As the postmodern ex-centric, the feminist writer manipulates conventional genres and forms and subverts them from within. Like Tip, she begins as the magician's apprentice. She learns the rules of the trade and how the

magic is performed; the art behind the deception. The transformation from apprentice to magician is associated with the evolution of the feminist writer. She changes from a subverter of established forms and techniques to a teller of new stories and mythologies. The apprentice becomes the artist by carefully exploiting the techniques of old stories to tell new and different stories. In Tip's words:

It was the old rule. If you guessed how he did it, the apprentice got to saw the magician in half; the apprentice became the magician (204).

What happens, however, when the apprentice becomes the magician? Van Herk's critics, who are often masters of conventional misreading³⁵, answer this question. The old magicians don't like to see the apprentice take over. A battle ensues where interpretation is confused and history rewritten. Again, Tip explains:

When apprentice becomes magician history hesitates. It's a rare occasion; most apprentices never dare to try (204).

In other words, the feminist postmodern writer works from within, subverting and finally rejecting the literary form in which she is working. This is evident in Judith, The Tent Peg, and No Fixed Address. The act of revolution raises a pertinent question, especially in relation to Aritha van Herk's fiction. When one rejects conventional form and invents her-story, as van Herk does in No Fixed Address, where does one go from there? Are the forms of the

short story and the novel sufficient for further invention and creation or can these forms only sustain only so much subversion? Van Herk's fictions after No Fixed Address give some indication of the answer.

In a review of Michael Ondaatje's In The Skin of the Lion van Herk writes of the power of Ondaatje's prose:

The usual novelistic elements are irrelevant; Ondaatje has moved beyond the limitations of the novel and into the world of words, where what is contained within the book is a powerful mosaic that addresses the questions of language and art without submitting to the bondage of genre expectation.³⁶

Though van Herk's prose has not yet attained the same intensity as Ondaatje's voluptuous "world of words", her insights into his work can be applied to her own fiction, especially her fiction since No Fixed Address.

Both "Progressions Toward Sainthood" and "Calgary: this Growing Graveyard" move beyond the limitations of the novel and short story and defy "the bondage of genre expectation". Both are innovative rather than subversive, give voices to ex-centrics and new dimensions to old landscapes. Both concern themselves with the "world of words", with questions of knowing and interpreting and with philosophical musings on the hermeneutic experience.

"Progressions Toward Sainthood" is a dialogue between Louis Riel and Jeanne d'Arc (Joan of Arc) which transcends the short story form. The question as to the hermeneutical

relationship between history and fiction is examined through the conversation between Louis Riel and Joan of Arc. The two meet to await the verdict to be made upon Riel at the Riel Conference, where this fiction was first submitted in November, 1985. Because Riel and Joan of Arc comment directly upon this conference, the text is self-reflexive. Therefore, "Progressions Toward Sainthood" becomes a comment upon itself and its own attempt at reinterpreting history.

The text, as well as being generally self-reflexive, is also metafictional. The six prerequisites to Sainthood, as vocalized by Joan of Arc, can be applied to the process by which society canonizes writers. This procedure imposes cultural images of the mythology of the great artist upon the postmodern ex-centric. First of all, an artist must "conduct herself with humility" to sustain the societal mythology of the self-deprecating artist.³⁷ Secondly, the artist must not allow her feelings to take over but "must listen to a counsellor" (50) to conserve the mythology of the objective and studious artist who represents the universal, as learned from great mentors. Thirdly, the artist must be patient and fourthly, the artist must be truthful or, in other words, generate realist, representational texts. Fifth, the artist must be charitable and able to love. She must possess the spiritual, god-like nature equated with the Romantic poets. Finally, the artist must not be vain and must not praise her

own work. Thus defined, the artist's progress toward canonization is not a simple one. The postmodern artist, of course, refutes such mythology. In Robert Kroetsch's words the artist "in the long run, given the choice of being God or Coyote, will, most mornings, choose to be Coyote".³⁸ Van Herk echoes Kroetsch's sentiments in "It's Lonely, But Is It Really the Top?". In this article she vocalizes her frustration with the mythology of the artist-as-saint:

A writer is supposed to be noble, to grit her teeth, to suffer in silence. A writer is expected to lift her wearied forehead to the sky and vow that she will continue, she will write even if nobody in Canada ever reads her. A noble sentiment indeed, but one that I am heartily sick of.³⁹

Besides exploring metafictional and self-reflexive issues, "Progressions Toward Sainthood" raises some intriguing hermeneutical questions as to the differentiation between history and fiction. Historical personages speak for themselves and as themselves to comment on how they have been interpreted throughout history. Both Riel and Joan of Arc are ex-centrics, marginalized by their respective societies. As ex-centrics they comment upon how misinterpretation occurs and how mythologies are created. They propagate a particular postmodern aesthetic which claims that the hermeneutic experience is both linguistic and historical.

An important part of this postmodern aesthetic is the affirmation of the continuity between fact and fiction and

the historicity of the interpreter. Joan of Arc and Louis Riel both agree that they prefer the "fictional" accounts of their lives to the "historical" documents. Joan of Arc likes George Bernard Shaw's work and Riel, Rudy Wiebe's.⁴⁰ They claim that these texts capture their respective visions better than historical chronicles. The speakers blur the distinction between fact and fiction and conclude that they "prefer imagination to history" (50). They also note that interpretation is influenced by the interpreter's own historical place as they both recognize that opinions about them have varied throughout time. For example, Riel reminds the Canadian reader of his progression from lunatic to saint (50). Their conversation highlights a postmodern distrust of historical interpretation as a form of objective truth. This suspicion, vocalized here by Joan of Arc and Louis Riel, is characteristic of the postmodern theory of the hermeneutic act.⁴¹

Joan of Arc and Louis Riel also offer some important insights into the linguistic nature of the hermeneutic experience and how misinterpretation occurs through language. They claim that language is not to be trusted as "words often do the opposite of what they are meant to do" (49). The written word often imprisons rather than conveys vision. Visionaries are misunderstood as they do not conform to the rules articulated by the written word; they do not express themselves through accepted channels. The

mistrust of language and the transformational power of words to simultaneously transmit multiple meaning is also an important aspect of the postmodern aesthetic.⁴² This kind of philosophical inquiry into the nature of the postmodern hermeneutic continues in "Calgary: this Growing Graveyard".

Reinterpretation and reinvention seems to be the direction in which van Herk's fiction is moving. "Calgary: this Growing Graveyard" also defies the labels of any specific genre. It blurs the idiolect of tourist brochures, radio programs, settler's guides and technical maps to redraw the map of Calgary. The Calgary here is not unlike the city depicted in "Waiting For the Rodeo" - a city waiting to be reinvented. Van Herk divides Calgary into four quadrants and one by one she concentrates on these quadrants, transforming the physical landscape of the city into the postmodern "different". While her transmutation draws from the physical it soars to the metaphysical. In quadrant one, for example, the airport and the graveyards lead to reflections on how home is defined and places named. In quadrant two the industrial landscape arouses political questions as to the Americanization of Canada. In quadrant three the concept of citizenship allows the narrator to trace the historical settlement patterns and the legends of the city. The city comes alive and is rendered as a living entity which encapsulates a mentality of rationalism :

Who dares to confess to feeling, to anger,
to rage, to joy. Not here. Stay calm, keep
moving, don't look up.⁴³

Finally, in quadrant four, the outskirts of Calgary are photographically defined and questions emerge as to how perspectives are credited. The physical city gives rise to philosophical contemplations as old meets new in architecture and structure. The place where past meets present seems to preoccupy van Herk here as it does in all of her fictions. At this junction van Herk attempts to rewrite the past and transform the future. To van Herk Calgary embodies the spirit of a past and a present colliding. It is an evocative place, spiritual in nature: "mud rooms front with marble foyers of postmodern buildings, log houses hewn into modern pretence, a visceral cry against glass (11).

Van Herk both re-writes Calgary as the ex-centric Canadian city and retells the stories of Louis Riel and Joan of Arc as ex-centric visionaries. Both of these fictions question the validity of what has been told and what has been written. Hermeneutic questions dominate as van Herk offers alternate interpretations and examines the role of her own texts in the reinterpretation of history.

This brief overview of the short fiction illuminates some of the patterns and developments in van Herk's fictions. The manifestation of these patterns in van Herk's novels will be analyzed in more detail in the following

chapters. The thematic and technical evolution within the three chronological groups just examined corresponds to similar constructions in the novels. In the first group of stories van Herk manipulates the modernist realist narrative and explores the integration of myth and reality. The second group experiments with first-person narrative and prepares the reader for the novels Judith and The Tent Peg. These two novels experiment with narrative strategies and rewrite and deconstruct mythologies of landscape and sexual stereotyping. The final chronological group focuses on the picaresque form, as does No Fixed Address, and then moves beyond this form to raise philosophical and metaphysical questions as to the nature of the postmodern aesthetic. History, the ex-centric in history, and hermeneutic philosophy dominate as the texts become metafictional and self-reflexive.

While this chapter has concentrated on several of the limitations of the short fiction, the following chapters focus on how van Herk has surmounted some of these limitations in her novels. By noticing weaknesses in the early fiction, the reader will, it is hoped, appreciate the more innovative, feminist postmodern poetics evident in van Herk's novels.

Endnotes

1. This term is used by George Bowering in "The Painted Window: Notes on Post-Realist Fiction", The Mask in Place: Essays on Fiction in North America (Winnipeg : Turnstone Press, 1982) 113 -127. Bowering claims that modernist realism assumes that time is chronological, place is concrete and character identifiable. He states: "Modernist realism made most of its case upon an assumption that the relationship between character and setting was of paramount importance in the telling of the meaning" (117).
2. The intertextuality of van Herk's works with Robert Kroetsch's will be discussed throughout this thesis, especially in reference to the relationship between No Fixed Address (1986) and Kroetsch's The Studhorse Man (1970) and Badlands (1975). In this chapter a brief reference is made to how "It's Included" recalls a particular scene in The Studhorse Man.
3. This fiction will be referred to as "Progressions Toward Sainthood" throughout this and subsequent chapters.
4. Here I am using the terms "real" and "different" to imply the representational real and the postmodern different as defined by postmodern theorists such as Linda Hutcheon. For example, in the preface to The Canadian Postmodern (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988) Hutcheon claims that "The postmodern 'different' is starting to replace the humanist 'universal' as a prime cultural value" (ix). The term "realist narrative" is also used throughout this chapter to refer to narrative techniques, namely psychological and modernist realism, which are usually equated with realist fiction. Also, refer to Bowering "The Painted Window: Notes on Post-Realist Fiction", 124.
5. Aritha van Herk, "A Night Alive", Alive 27 (1973) 17.
6. "I can't get no satisfaction" refers directly to the Rolling Stones tune by the same name from the album Through the Past Darkly, London Records, 1965.
7. Aritha van Herk, "The Road Out", Miss Chatelaine 14:1 (February 3, 1977) 58.
8. For a provocative discussion on the ambiguity of the image of the train in prairie literature, with special emphasis on George Ryga's work, see George Boire's, "Wheels on Fire : The Train of Thought in George Ryga's 'The Ecstasy of Rita Joe' ", Canadian Literature 113-114 (Summer, 1987) 62-74. Boire identifies the train as symbol of freedom,

imprisonment, escape and industrialism. Here in "The Road Out" the train can be interpreted as representative of both the narrator's feeling of entrapment and her desire to escape the small town.

9. In Mrs Dalloway (1925) Virginia Woolf connects the thoughts of various characters and moves from inside character's minds to the outside environment through the bonging of Big Ben.

10. For an excellent discussion of the difference between the modernist and postmodernist manipulation of narrative time see George Bowering, "The Painted Window: Notes on Post- Realist Fiction", 117-121.

11. In Judith Judith's name establishes intertextuality with the prairie tradition. Also the myth of Ulysses and Circe is recalled. In The Tent Peg J.L. evokes the myth of Jael and Deborah while in No Fixed Address Arachne summons the story of Arachne and Athena.

12. See New Testament, Acts 9 , 36-40 .

13. The fictions of Alice Munro and Margaret Laurence, especially, explore this theme.

14. In The Tent Peg J.L. is gradually transformed to Jael and in No Fixed Address Arachne is changed from picara to legend.

15. No Fixed Address, 62, 103.

16. Lina is hailed as representative of all women. For an excellent discussion of the notion of the universal woman see Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time", The Kristeva Reader (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). Kristeva equates the universalist approach to the "first stage" of feminism which concentrates on gaining a place for women in the existing order. She claims: "Universalist in its approach, this current feminism globalizes the problems of women of different milieux, ages, civilizations or simply of varying psychic structures, under the label "Universal Woman" (194).

17. Aritha van Herk, "A Minor Loss", Gasoline Rainbow (March, 1977) 43.

18. The postmodern "different", as employed by Linda Hutcheon and cited above, denotes a movement away from realistic and representational description. It allows the ordinary to become extraordinary and the real to become unreal.

19. "A Woman of Moderate Temperament", Getting Here, ed. Rudy Wiebe (Edmonton: Newest, 1977) 5.

20. Two incidents in The Tent Peg will remind the reader of this scene. The episode where Cap and J.L. shower together (193) and the scene where Mackenzie worships J.L.'s body as if it is a statue (211-213).

21. Intersticed prose is simply fiction which is divided into short sections separated by white spaces. The separation of the text into segments emphasizes discontinuity of narrative time and the fragmentation of the narrator's perspective.

22. Miriam and her husband always make love in the dark.

23. "It's Included" was originally published in Gasoline Rainbow 2 (1978) 19-24 and was later published as "Fear of Death Will not Disturb Me" in Aurora: New Canadian Writing, ed. Morris Wolfe (Toronto: Doubleday, 1979) 110-120.

"Transitions" was originally published in Miss Chatelaine 15: 6 (August, 1978) 38, 93-94, 96 and was later published as "Never Sisters" in West of Fiction, ed. Aritha van Herk, Leah Flater and Rudy Wiebe (Edmonton: Newest Press, 1983) 169-176.

24. Aritha van Herk, "It's Included", Gasoline Rainbow 2: (1978) 22.

25. Bowering in "The Painted Window: Notes on Post-Realist Fiction" claims that the modernist reader is "expected to be identifying with the character, or at least empathizing", 117.

26. Robert Kroetsch, The Studhorse Man (1970; Toronto: General Publishing Co. Ltd., 1982) 31-32.

27. No Fixed Address, 50-52.

28. Aritha van Herk, "Transitions", Miss Chatelaine 15:6 (August, 1978) 38, 93.

29. "Who Travels Too" was published in Room of One's Own 7: 1 and 2 (1985) 82-29 and "Bail Skippers and Bacchants" was published in Canadian Fiction Magazine 53 (1985) 89-97.

30. "Bail Skippers and Bacchants" is identical to pages 241-253 of No Fixed Address and "Who Travels Too" is the skeleton of pages 154-162 of the same novel; with the names Chris and Ian changed to Thena and Thomas.

31. "Waiting for the Rodeo" was originally presented to the Humanities Association of Canada, Calgary Branch after van Herk delivered "Picaros and Priestesses: Repentent Rogues" which was later published in Newsletter of Humanities Association of Canada 13:1 (Fall, 1984) 14-18. "Waiting for the Rodeo" was published both in Canadian Fiction 50-51 (1984) 196-205 and later in Alberta Bound: Thirty Stories by Alberta Writers, ed Fred Stenson (Edmonton: Newest Press, 1986) 315- 330.

32. Aritha van Herk, "Picaros and Priestesses: Repentent Rogues", Newsletter of Humanities Association of Canada 13: 1 (Fall, 1984) 18.

33. I use the term picara rather than picaro purposefully to imply the writing of a new picara figure. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter IV which examines No Fixed Address. However, it may be useful to point out here that the invention of a new picara is distinct from the traditional picara figures of the picaresque form. It seems more appropriate to invent a new picara than allow the female picara to inhabit only male roles. This role-reversal is described by van Herk in "Picaros and Priestesses", as quoted above, as the picaro's body is transformed from female to male . Both Tip and Arachne, however, are more than female picaros, they are the new picaras. They not only take on male roles but redefine the space occupied by the female picara. As new picaras they represent the feminist artist who does not betray her female body but celebrates it. Thus, here, as well as in the analysis of No Fixed Address, the term picara is used.

34. Aritha van Herk, "Waiting for the Rodeo", Canadian Fiction Magazine 50-51 (1984) 196.

35. Reviews of van Herk's works will be integrated to varying degrees into the texts of the following chapters.

36. Aritha van Herk, Rev. of In the Skin of the Lion, by Michael Ondaatje, Malahat Review 80 (Fall, 1987) 135.

37. Aritha van Herk, "Progressions Toward Sainthood: There is Nothing There Is Nothing To Do But Die", Border Crossings 3 (1986) 50.

38. Robert Kroetsch and Dianne Bessai, "Death is a Happy Ending: A Dialogue in thirteen parts", Figures in a Ground: Canadian Essays on Modern Literature, eds. Dianne Bessai and David Jackel (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978) 209.

39. Aritha van Herk, "It's Lonely But Is It Really The Top?", Interface 4:3 (April, 1981) 62.

40. George Bernard Shaw, Saint Joan: A Chronicle Play in Six Scenes and an Epilogue (London: Constable and Company, 1924). Rudy Wiebe, The Scorched- Wood People (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977).

41. For a postmodern perspective on the relationship between history and fiction see Hayden White, The Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1978). Also for a classic discussion of the role of historicism in interpretation see Hans Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975).

42. For a thorough discussion of the instability of language and the multiple meanings of words see Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, trans Alan Bass (1967; Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1978).

43. Aritha van Herk, "Calgary: this Growing Graveyard", Newest Review 13:4 (December, 1987) 9.

Chapter II
Judith: Spying on the Prairie

Since Judith won the Seals Books First Novel Award in 1978, critics have been arguing over why it received such acclamation. Various interpretations claim Judith as a realist feminist tract which falls short of its objectives.¹ Such biases also continue to be reflected in readings of The Tent Peg and No Fixed Address.²

Reviewers with a realist bias often seem to equate feminist politics and realistic representation. They interpret the protagonist as an exemplary feminist. However, when the novel falls short of providing exemplary characters, it is hailed as a failure. For example, Gail van Varsevald is disappointed with van Herk's feminism when she discovers that the protagonist, Judith, is not a representational, exemplary heroine. She notes:

Judith is rather obsessed with her father, and in a feminist novel, one would hope she would out-grow such an obsession. It is not clear to me that she does.³

Although Miriam Waddington does not propagate such a prescriptive approach, she is not pleased with the protagonist either. She identifies the feminist politics of the text as separate from the feminist poetics and reinforces the old dichotomy between the political and the aesthetic. Therefore, she is not pleased with the feminism of Judith. She claims:

The only "new" freedom for woman that emerges from this book is that sexual freedom of the creature-existence that men have always been ready to grant to women they are not married to; a liberty that has nothing to do with being human or free.⁴

The message from these two reviewers is clear. The feminist postmodern novel is still being read with a realist bias. Reviewers are still crediting representation and resolution rather than transformation and multiplicity.⁵ The political and aesthetic are separated in an attempt to define the feminist postmodern text. Judith causes much confusion when approached with the bias of a "realistic reader".⁶ Transformation and multiplicity are essential to the feminist poetics of this text. Judith transforms the realist novel while it simultaneously works within its thematic and narrative conventions. The female protagonist is a conglomeration of multiple and ambiguous selves rather than a rational and representational heroine. The feminism of Judith is found as much in the text's literary implications as in its political applications.

This chapter attempts to illuminate the feminist postmodern poetics of Judith as inseparable from its politics. It endeavours to apply the three characteristics of feminist postmodernism, as outlined in the Introduction to the thesis above, to this particular text. In Judith van Herk works within the psychological realist narrative but also transforms this narrative into a multivocal discourse.

She establishes intertextuality with the tradition of prairie realism and subverts the literary mythologies of this form by working within it. She also rewrites the mythology of Circe and Odysseus⁷ to allow the twentieth-century woman a place in the world previously denied her. Therefore, this chapter focuses on intertextuality, narrative disruption and the rewriting of societal and literary mythologies. Also, some attention is paid to the limitations which Judith shares with the early short fiction.

In order to fully appreciate the feminist postmodern poetics of Judith, it is necessary to place the novel in the discursive environment out of which it is generated and to note its subversive relationships to other texts produced out of a similar environment. The literary implications of Judith are profound as it establishes itself in a new tradition of prairie fiction which is attempting to rewrite woman into the landscape and the literature.⁸ This rewriting diverges from the work of W.O. Mitchell, Robert Stead, Frederick Philip Grove and Sinclair Ross. All of these men, who reinforce various prairie mythologies, have now been canonized. When reading Judith, reviewers isolate it from its roots in the prairie tradition and miss many of its subversive literary implications.⁹ Intertextuality with regional traditions and with the growing tradition of Canadian women's writing has often been misunderstood or

completely ignored. For example, one reviewer not sympathetic to, or perhaps not aware of, the postmodern concern with intertextuality mistakes intertextuality with lack of originality and imitation. R.P. Bilan claims:

Although the book [Judith] is imitative in conception - the influence of Surfacing and Bear is obvious at times, and her handling of the ending seems indebted to Robert Kroetsch's Badlands- van Herk manages to give her own distinctive twist to some familiar patterns.¹⁰

Here, Bilan misreads van Herk's postmodern interest in establishing intertextuality with Marian Engel, Margaret Atwood and fellow Albertan, Robert Kroetsch. From a postmodern perspective this intertextuality adds to the novel's radical potential to question authority. Fortunately, postmodern critics credit intertextuality as an instrument of subversion to established traditions and as a means of making connections with other postmodern texts.¹¹

Although Bilan misunderstands the objectives of intertextuality, the connection he makes between Judith and both Surfacing and Bear is an interesting one. By purposefully recalling the texts of Marian Engel and Margaret Atwood, van Herk makes a literary statement that Canadian literature written by women shares some common concerns.¹² Her connections to Robert Kroetsch are best portrayed in the chapter which examines No Fixed Address.¹³ However, van Herk's creative refutation of some of

Kroetsch's critical assumptions is evident in Judith and is discussed later in this chapter.

Judith has even more in common with the prairie realist tradition. In Judith feminism reshapes the physical and mental prairie as the "realist regional" is "refigured" into the "postmodern different".¹⁴ Judith works within the form of the "realist regional" and simultaneously pushes this form toward the "postmodern different". Van Herk expands the boundaries of the realist novel and attempts to deconstruct the premises upon which these boundaries are constructed. In this sense, Judith is both post-realist and postmodern as van Herk works within a realist tradition to break new ground. As she rethinks the "realist regional", she invents a novel which paradoxically transcends and remains captive to the limitations of the form.

It is this simultaneous adherence to and subversion of the conventions of the realist novel which lends Judith its dynamics. As a postmodern feminist writer, van Herk is moving away from the realist, representational mode of portrayal of the real lives of women.¹⁵ She is constructing a new and different prairie where many of the established traditions of prairie fiction are challenged. The prairie world of van Herk is a female world, unlike the flat land and straight lines in the "kingdom of the male virgin".¹⁶ Woman on the prairie is given new status in Judith. The masculinity of prairie life, as traditionally portrayed in

regional mythologies, is deconstructed. In an article entitled "Desire in Fiction - De-siring Realism" van Herk refers to many of the regional myths created about the prairie. She claims that the "tyranny of the real" negates desire and traps writers and critics alike in the myths of their regions.¹⁷ Her advice as a prairie woman writer is:

De-sire romanticism that masquerades as myth. The myth of the frontier, the mountain man, the noble and ignoble savage, the pioneer, the depression, the hard-working immigrant, the flatness of the prairie. I have no desire to destroy established myths, but I do not feel that we should hide behind them because we are afraid of our uncharted myths. The old ones are safer, have already been acknowledged as essential to our western sensibility, but it is important to discover the new (35).

It is in this context that Judith must be placed: working within the established prairie tradition and mythology and also fashioning a new prairie, a new tradition and a new mythology .

In Judith van Herk deliberately recalls Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese (1925) in an attempt to subvert and support some of the content of that novel. Like van Herk, Martha Ostenso also worked within the prairie realist tradition while undercutting its assumptions. Ostenso's innovative approaches are revealed through her portrayal of a strong female protagonist as well as her challenge to the narrative of the realist novel.¹⁸ The protagonist of Wild Geese, Judith, is recalled by the title character of Judith.

Ostenso's Judith has much in common with van Herk's Judith, who also shares her name with Sinclair Ross's Judith, the white-faced mistress in As For Me and My House. Actually, the difference in the fates of the Judiths of Ross and van Herk demonstrates how van Herk rewrites female character. While Ross's Judith dies in childbirth after being deserted by Philip Bentley, van Herk's Judith suffers no such victimized fate. Yet, it is with Wild Geese that van Herk's novel has the most affinity. A comparison of the treatment of various prairie mythologies in both will illuminate the feminist poetics of van Herk's writing.

Although it diverges significantly from prairie realist models in its integration of romantic tensions and the presentation of the character of Judith, Ostenso's Wild Geese remains loyal to this tradition's treatment of the prairie landscape. In Judith the flat indifferent prairie is rewritten. In "Women Writers and the Prairie: Spies in an Indifferent Landscape" van Herk comments on Ostenso's achievements and limitations. She notes:

But Ostenso and McClung were early spies.
They alone could not shift the image bondage
that was already in place. The black, steel
lines ignored them, or tried to.¹⁹

In Judith these "black, steel lines" are transformed into curved horizons and a seductive, sensual landscape. Van Herk deconstructs the mythology of the flat prairie, the

portrayal of the prairie woman and various binary constructions of prairie literature.²⁰

Various critical works have recognized the mythologies surrounding the prairie landscape. In "The Prairie: A State of Mind" Henry Kreisel defines the mythology of prairie, as he writes of "the two polarities of the state of mind produced by the sheer physical fact of prairie".²¹ Kreisel continues to describe the reaction to the prairie landscape as a duplicitous one. The prairie is perceived as liberating because it allows one freedom and space and is also seen as imprisoning as this space is so vast and empty that it confines. Kreisel claims that the human in this space is both a "dwarf" and a "giant" as the prairie both frees and imprisons (623). Laurence Ricou in Vertical Man/Horizontal World further claims that prairie writers, Ostenso included, give prominence to landscape and "man" is portrayed as a vertical intrusion upon this horizontal landscape. Ricou opens his book with the claim that:

Man on the prairie, as portrayed in Canadian fiction, is defined by two things: exposure and an awareness of the surrounding emptiness. The basic image of a single human figure amidst the vast flatness of the landscape serves to unify and describe Canadian prairie fiction.²²

Caleb Gare in Ostenso's Wild Geese is the embodiment of this representational man on the prairie. From the beginning of the narrative Caleb is presented as a vertical man examining a flat, harsh land which belongs to him and

yet enslaves him. The prairie in Wild Geese is harsh and masterful and its spirit is reflected in Caleb Gare. In the following passage Lind Archer vocalizes Caleb's symbolic role:

...she was overwhelmed by her helplessness against the intangible thing that held them there, slaves to the land. It extended further back than Caleb, this power, although it worked through him.²³

Although Caleb believes himself to be the master of the land, he becomes the servant of the vengeful prairie. The following description sufficiently depicts Ostenso's version of the prairie as portrayed in Wild Geese:

...here was the prairie, sparse as an empty platter - no, there was a solitary figure of a man upon it, like a meagre offering of the earth to heaven. Here was the little wood trails and prairie trails that a few men had made on lonely journeyings, and here the crossings where they had met to exchange a word or two. The sky above it all was blue and tremendous, a vast country for proud birds ever on the wing seeking, seeking. And a little delicate wind that was like a woman, Jude thought to herself, but could in a moment become a male giant violating the earth (112-113).

This passage aptly delineates the mythology of the prairie as identified by Kreisel and Ricou. It is a horizontal and ambiguous space that simultaneously offers freedom and threatens imprisonment. It is interesting to note that the protagonist of Wild Geese, Judith, sees the prairie not only as an expansive, empty space but as a place that can attack and threaten at any time. It is a "male giant" waiting to

invade her female space. Indeed at the closing of the narrative the giant does attack. Caleb Gare is literally consumed by this vengeful land which he has tried to master:

He bent down and pulled at the reeds in an effort to jerk his feet free. But the strength in the earth was irresistible. His arms were those of a feeble puppet fanning at the air. He stood upright again and strained with all his might. But the insidious force in the earth drew him in deeper (236).

Caleb Gare, once giant on the landscape, has become a "feeble puppet" - a variation on the dwarf!

Unlike Caleb, Judith is not violated by the "male giant" as she fears she might be. Her affiliation with the prairie provides an alternative to Caleb's relationship of enslavement. Judith recognizes the power of the land to free and soothe. She is seduced by the power of the undomesticated prairie outside the farm and Caleb's domain. In this undomesticated environment she enters the landscape. The process is described in the scene below:

Not knowing fully what she was doing, Judith took off all her clothing and lay flat on the damp ground with the waxy feeling of new, sunless vegetation under her. She needed to escape, to fly from something - she knew not what (53).²⁴

By establishing differing relationships between Judith and the land and Caleb and the land, Ostenso identifies the ambiguity of the prairie and suggests that the relationship of man to prairie and woman to prairie differ significantly. Van Herk recognizes the potential in Ostenso's Judith and

claims that "Judith Gare in Ostenso's Wild Geese does not oppose the earth but binds herself to it" ("Women Writers and the Prairie", 124). While Caleb is mastered and defeated by the prairie, Judith is allowed to escape. On one hand, Ostenso's portrayal of prairie landscape is quite conventional as she does give prominence to the landscape and to the ambiguous reactions of those who confront it. On the other hand, she attempts to write a place for woman in this landscape and establishes the relationship between woman and prairie as a positive and liberating one.

The ambiguity prevalent in most prairie fiction is also reflected in Judith. In Wild Geese the prairie offers freedom to the female character and death to the male character. In Judith the landscape is simultaneously presented as a vast, empty space and a sensuous transformational power. In Judith the indifferent prairie appears only briefly. Generally, van Herk's treatment of prairie landscape radically deconstructs traditional notions of prairie. She begins her deconstruction of the mythologies of prairie by virtually ignoring the physical landscape. However, like Ostenso she establishes a relationship between woman and land. In Judith it is mostly the air and the wind which is described rather than the expansive prairie. The isolated farmyard is portrayed as the domesticated home in the wilderness. There are no vertical intrusions upon the landscape. When there are

intrusions they come in the shape of evergreen trees which line the driveway with "branches bare against the bright sky".²⁵ Thus, van Herk's landscape is not the expansive prairie of Ostenso or even Sinclair Ross but the yard. Her prairie is the enclosed space between the house and the barn. This space is bare, silent and cold. The confined space provides an entry point for woman as does the undomesticated prairie of Ostenso.

When people do appear on van Herk's desolate landscape they are not vertical intrusions, as recognized by Laurence Ricou and verified in Wild Geese, but insignificant splashes of colour. They interrupt the silence of the land with their insignificance and smallness. For example, as Jim leaves Judith's house he is compared to a spider against the snow (108). It is ironic that this supposedly insignificant spider-figure has the ability to scar the snow banks with the machine he is driving. Later, Mina is referred to as "a dark splotch against the glittering snow" (144) as she drives away. Humans more often are "dwarfs" than "giants" in this space.²⁶

As well as being depicted as vast and empty, the landscape in Judith is also described as a sensuous entity. Therefore, its very nature is rendered as ambiguous. This prairie is not the straight horizon of W.O. Mitchell, Sinclair Ross or even Martha Ostenso. It is not the indifferent prairie of "man and his straight line" (van

Herk, "Women Writers and the Prairie", 122). Judith partially reinforces the mythology of the flat prairie by working within the "realist regional" which created this mythology in the first place. However, it also subverts this mythology by feminizing this indifferent landscape. In Judith van Herk goes significantly further than Ostenso who suggests that woman's relationship to the land may be different than man's. Van Herk writes not of man and land but of woman and land. She allows her protagonist to enter the landscape in a way Ostenso's Judith does not. In "Women Writers and the Prairie" van Herk describes the process of entering:

They [male writers] are afraid to enter the landscape. They describe it instead. To get inside a landscape, one needs to give up vantage, give up the advantage of scene or vision and enter it. To know the prairie, one has to stop looking at prairie and dive (122).

In Judith the protagonist makes this dive. The straight lines become curved and ice and snow become sensually seductive. As Judith looks out her window, it is not a landscape she describes but the feeling she gets from being part of this landscape:

The curve of the horizon hummed with it, everywhere the luminescence of the snow. It had run itself over everything like a soothing touch, rounding and softening the most angular objects. She stood quietly, feeling it soften her too (62).

The curved horizon, the snow and the coming of winter are sensuous and soothing not intimidating and indifferent. Ostenso's landscape is not feminized to this degree.

Van Herk's landscape is not something outside self that threatens to violate. Instead it is sensitive and seductive and cannot be ignored. At first Judith tries to ignore it: "Afraid of the snow's chill invitation, she plodded from house to barn and barn to house, trying to ignore its icy sensuality" (144). However, she cannot remain separate from the landscape but finds herself falling prey to its seduction:

And she moved between the house and the barn more easily, finding a sudden exhilaration in the cold; thought of excuses to run to the house and back, her feet ringing on the frozen ground, the snow beneath them a song. The cold invaded her, seduced her (145).

This is not a death or a conquering by a vengeful land as is the case of Caleb Gare in Wild Geese. Nor is it a desire to escape as is the case of Judith in Wild Geese. This is entering the land; a sensitive identification with, rather than enslavement to, the prairie. Even when Judith is later castrating the pigs, seemingly an act of vengeance against nature, "she still smelled like snow" (165). Judith has "dived" into the landscape. She is not standing outside describing the land. She even shares its smell.

Although this kind of identification with the landscape does not often occur in Wild Geese, it has become more

prevalent in recent fiction written by Canadian women.²⁷ In The Tent Peg the sensuous act of entering the landscape is described through J.L's relationship with the mythic north. In No Fixed Address van Herk again returns to the west to complete its transformation into the "postmodern different".²⁸ The feminization of landscape is one way in which van Herk subverts the mythology out of which she is writing. Judith and later No Fixed Address put into practice van Herk's critical claim that:

The male west has to be earth-quaked a little, those black steel lines and the looming giant toppled. Not destroyed, oh no, but infiltrated ("Woman Writers and the Prairie", 129).

Infiltration is successful in Judith and it continues in The Tent Peg and No Fixed Address. However, simultaneously working within and subverting a tradition gives rise to ambiguity. This ambiguity is reflected in the presentation of the prairie landscape and woman's place in that landscape. In Judith, as has been noted here, there are differing versions of prairie. The landscape is both an indifferent space where people appear as insignificant splashes of colour and a seductive, enclosed space between the house and the barn. This duplicity is generated out of van Herk's position as a feminist postmodern who is holding onto the regional mythology of the indifferent prairie and simultaneously feminizing the landscape. However, her

deconstruction of the masculinity of prairie farm life is substantially more complete.

The second mythology which van Herk attempts to sabotage in Judith is that of the masculinity of the prairie man in motion. This mythology is defined in Robert Kroetsch's often quoted "An Erotics of Space".²⁹ Here Kroetsch identifies a common theme in prairie literature - placing women captive inside in a condition of stasis while men are allowed to move freely outside. Kroetsch claims:

The basic grammatical pair in the story-line (the energy line) of prairie fiction is house: horse. To be on a horse is to move; motion into distance. To be in a house is to be fixed: a centring unto stasis. Horse is masculine. House is feminine. On: in. Motion: stasis. A woman ain't supposed to move. Pleasure: duty. The most obvious resolution of the dialectic, however temporary, is the horse-house. Not the barn (though a version of resolution³⁰ does take place here) but whore's house.

In Judith the barn does indeed not only become the "resolution", in Kroetsch's terms, but a replacement of the "whore's house". In No Fixed Address the car replaces the "whore's house" as woman travels out of the house and even beyond male destinations. In Judith and in Wild Geese the barn is the site of notable deconstruction.

In Wild Geese it is significant that Judith passionately tries to kill Caleb in the barn. Even before this scene, Judith's work is never confined to the house. She works both outside and inside. Yet, Amelia, Judith's mother, is

house-bound. She never goes further than the garden. Unfortunately, Judith's work outside does not offer her freedom, motion or pleasure. It is done out of obligation to her father. The barn is the place, outside the house, where Judith attempts to free herself from enslavement. The barn also becomes the place of Judith's imprisonment as the axe, the instrument of outrage, further enslaves her.³¹ This imprisonment is completed when Judith is denied motion and confined to inside the house as punishment. For Ostenson the barn as place of release and freedom becomes the barn as place of imprisonment. In the barn woman is punished for releasing her desire.

The quest for motion and pleasure is more successful in Judith. The barn not only becomes a place of one's own but the very womb of femaleness. The heat of the barn is contrasted to the cold air outside and the coldness of the house. Inside the barn is a womb-like, female haven, while inside the house is cold and indifferent. The house is no longer the place one comes inside for protection from the cold. Judith goes to the barn instead.

Van Herk's manipulation of the outside: inside grammatical pair challenges the myth of prairie as masculine space. The inside of the house does not have traditional connotations in Judith.³² In Judith the house is unused and generally unlivd in. Judith never seems to linger in the house but "she plunged through the house, gray with the

dimness of a snow morning: her oblong, unused living room, the scattered kitchen " (61). The bedroom is the only room with which Judith identifies. The rest of the house is different from her memories of her mother's house - the haven offered by woman as portrayed in prairie literature.³³ This house is Judith's and no one else's. Van Herk clarifies:

When she thought of the brightness of her mother's house, that house where everything carried a sheen, polished and polished again, this house was small and gray, this room the only one that held a snatch of her breath in it. But at least it was hers. Hers to leave unpolished and without definition. Except for this bedroom, where the smell of her sleep hung faint and musky in the air (95).

Judith's house is hers, not her family's, her husband's or her neighbour's and it has any definition which she wishes to give it. As Judith manages to free herself from her past, she also manages to give her house a definition of its own. The house, like the barn, is transformed by Judith and represents Judith's multiple selves.

The inside of Judith's house, besides differing radically from the traditional literary version of the prairie household, serves as the meeting place of another grammatical pair often emphasized in prairie fiction: the country and the city.³⁴ In Judith the house and the protagonist become sites of tension between the binaries of city and country. A resolution or synthesis is not

attempted and the two manage to co-exist creatively in the space van Herk creates. In van Herk's texts dichotomies are not opposite poles to choose between but a creative tension which reinvents a new space; in this case the house. In an article entitled "Stranded Bestride in Canada" van Herk recognizes the relationship between city (metropolitan) and country (indigenous) as a creative force in Canadian literature, in general. She claims:

This is the essence of the Canadian writer. We can write both for the indigenous and the metropolitan, but we will never need to choose one or the other, to our greater strength.³⁵

Inside van Herk's deconstructed version of the prairie farm house the metropolitan and indigenous meet to create a woman's house. In this sense, the house not only represents the selves of the protagonist, Judith, but the position of the Canadian writer as defined by van Herk in the critical passage quoted above.

Inside Judith's house there are farm journals which are published in the city and the sounds of the magpie and the coyote can be heard coming from outside.³⁶ It is a small grey farm house which is filled with the furniture from Judith's apartment in the city. The furniture of her past is described as "upholstery tinged with left over urban formality" (109). Metropolitan and indigenous meet but do not necessarily clash. Both make up Judith's house as both are part of Judith herself and the mentality of the Canadian

writer. Thus, the house becomes symbolic of Judith's personal development and the celebration of her womanhood. As Judith unpacks her boxes, the house becomes a mixture of the past and present. It, like the barn, becomes a haven as it grows warmer:

Now she carried the warmth from the barn with her into the house and it caught there and seemed to grow a little every day, like the pigs did, eating and sleeping and playing in the barn (160).

This is not the house in which Amelia in Wild Geese and Mrs. Bentley in As For Me and My House are held captive. Nor is the barn the same barn where Judith in Wild Geese is held prisoner because of her desire to be free.

The traditional version of the prairie house as place of woman's captivity becomes prairie house as place of female creativity. In van Herk's house multiple selves meet and past and present, city and country, mingle. While the house is transformed by Judith, the barn transforms Judith. In Judith the barn is much more developed as a site of deconstruction than in Wild Geese. It challenges Kroetsch's version of the binary construction of prairie fiction.³⁷ The barn becomes not the place of "resolution", in Kroetsch's terms, but an exclusive female space which celebrates motion and pleasure and excludes males. Judith creates a real home for herself in the barn. The house as haven becomes the barn as haven. For example, when Mina

visits Judith's barn the first time, Judith identifies her relationship to the barn:

And opening the door, she [Judith] was conscious of a swift sense of proprietorship. This was her barn and these were her pigs. She was as proud as some women are of their houses, of the nests they create around their men and family (88).

The barn becomes house and the house becomes a meeting place of selves. The grammatical pairs of prairie realist fiction are deconstructed.

It is important to note that the barn and the house are not disconnected places but the two are both created by, owned by, and connected by Judith. The imprint of the protagonist's footsteps in the snow connects the house and the barn. Judith moves freely from inside to outside and, in the process of gaining motion, enters the landscape itself. She is allowed the motion which is normally reserved for the male domain.³⁸ This motion is more thoroughly manipulated by Arachne, the protagonist in the later novel No Fixed Address. Here it enables Judith both to transform and become transformed by her environment. The following scene particularly illuminates the sensuous nature of the relationship Judith has with the prairie. It also connects the worlds Judith has created in the house and the barn. Judith is empowered as she creates and defines her world:

As she scuffed down the hill to the barn, the wind bellowed her open coat, pressed her shirt against her naked breasts, the cloth

slippery ice on her nipples. Turning at the barn door to look at the house squatting at the top of the hill, she saw her path dark in the snow, a thin, steady chain linking the house to the barn. And the chain created by her and leading to her forged that strong connection (65-66).

It is indeed what Judith creates in the barn that allows this novel to make its greatest challenge to the literary tradition of prairie realism. Van Herk works within the "realist regional" tradition to deconstruct its mythologies of land as indifferent, woman in stasis and city versus country. However, with the creation of the barn as a female haven, she transcends the boundaries of the realist novel. Through the barn and the pigs, Judith goes beyond the deconstruction of the grammatical pairs of prairie literature and creates a space for woman to enter.

I.S. MacLaren, in his biocritical essay on Aritha van Herk, recognizes both the realistic and mythic dimensions of Judith and claims the novel as an experiment in "magic realism" (xiii). While the label of magic realism may not be fully appropriate here, some of MacLaren's insights are quite useful.³⁹ MacLaren notes van Herk's retelling of the story of Circe and Odysseus as the major factor which moves the novel beyond realism:

In terms of both the "real" and the fantastic, Judith makes a very good first effort to deal from the outside with the unitary narrative of male discourse. In terms of the "real", van Herk simply sets the story of Circe in rural Alberta and retells it,... (xv).

By doing so van Herk breaks down the divisions between the real and the mythic and pushes the novel toward the "postmodern different". The mythology of Circe and Odysseus and the regional myths about women on the prairie are both deconstructed and reconstructed. Innovations in narrative strategies and the creation of the world of the pigs work together to stretch the boundaries of realist conventions. Unfortunately MacLaren's essay doesn't deal in detail with how the pigs' perspectives also push the novel beyond the realist form. He concentrates on the retelling of the Circe story instead. However, it is important to note that the juxtaposition of the real and the mythic and the crediting of the pigs' narrative perspective create the major tensions in the novel. Therefore, both narrative techniques and the rewriting of mythology work together to subvert the form and technique of the "realist regional".

The first page of Judith sets up the relationship between the real and the mythic. In the first paragraph the barn is described in realistic detail with special attention paid to "pig shit and wet greasy straw" (1). The detailed imagery of a woman shovelling "pig shit" is immediately counterbalanced in the second paragraph by the cobwebs and the breathing of the pigs. The following description gives a mysterious tone to the otherwise realistic opening:

Left over from the summer, cobwebs glimmered faintly in the low-ceilinged corners. The edges of the windows and the walls were blurred and indistinct; Judith squinted

against the fine-particled haze. And underneath she felt the subterranean current of their breathing, the hot lift and fall of their shadowy ritual. She could hardly avoid it, sticky and resilient it caught at her the instant she dared to hesitate (1).

From here the pigs cast their mythic and ritualistic spell over Judith and reader alike. They also invert the traditional mythology of Circe. In mythology Circe turns Odysseus' crew into pigs but spares Odysseus when he makes love to her.⁴⁰ However, in Judith the lover, Jim, is not spared this fate.⁴¹ The pigs here, in contrast to the Circe myth, are not the object of Judith's anger. Judith gives them the names of historical females, granting them a status previously denied them. Also, unlike the Circe myth, these pigs are female. They also transform Judith (Circe) as she transforms them⁴². Thus, the myth of Circe, who changes men to swine, is rewritten. The pigs are empowered with female identities and hypnotic powers. What in Homer's Odyssey is written as a relationship of opposition between the sexes,⁴³ in Judith is rewritten to stress the positive and transformational power of relationships between females. The emphasis is not on the male characters or even heterosexual relationships, but on the celebration of the rituals of female-hood. These rituals, which take place in the barn, are described simultaneously as mundane routines and mysterious celebrations.

Judith's relationship with the pigs illuminates her transformation from farmer to "sorceress" (147). Judith gradually changes into the Circe figure. This transformation is instigated and presided over by the pigs which become representative of Judith's release from her past. At first her relationship to the pigs is distant and even angry. The pigs are a commitment acquired largely out of the guilt she feels after rejecting her father's offer to run his farm. The pigs are a trap: "They pinned her down, leaving no way out" (17). However, as the narrative progresses the barn is established as a female haven and the pigs emphasize Judith's need to find self. Van Herk establishes an other-worldly relationship between Judith and the pigs which is recounted through the pigs' sensations. The pigs gradually seduce Judith to participate in the ritual of their world. Their perception of the farm and their relationship with Judith is described through their own eyes. The reader is first introduced to the pigs' collective perspective of the barn as a female space:

Inside the barn the landscape diminished into background. Here everything was greater than reality, boundaries undefined. It was their gray-blue aura, an insular warren; they made it so, the palpable illumination of the cave-like barn was their own (14).

As they create their own space, they seduce Judith into this space and oversee her transformation. They remember the

Judith who bought them in realistic detail; her physical appearance as well as her smell:

... they remembered her distinctly; her voice, her motions, her faintly grassy smell. Remembered her standing in the aisle of the barn in a chop-colored coat, her hair long and burnished under the naked 60-watt lightbulbs (15-16).

The reader is allowed to enter the barn when Judith is not there and watch the pigs prepare for her arrival. They are patient as they await the return of the woman they plan to seduce:

After the strangeness of the new place disappeared and when she was not there, they grunted and moaned with pleasure. Rubbing their itchy backs against the rough new wood, rooting deep into the thickness of crackling straw; she could not apprehend the sense of herself that they snuffed up, that they overlook and claimed. They reserved their wariness for her presence, waiting for her voice and her laughter, waiting for her tightness to slip and for her to reveal herself and let their common female scents mingle (16-17).

The pigs are aware that this seduction will not be easy as Judith is resisting them. Following from the scene quoted above, the pigs note Judith's obstinacy:

Her smell was the same as they remembered but there was an edge of bitterness to it, a tinge of anxiety. And she was not exhilarated but fierce and distant, as rigid and brittle as if she were hedging herself against them, as if she were afraid now that she had chosen them (17).

However, the pigs are patient and their seduction is gentle and gradual. They understand Judith's "smell of anger" (31)

and "with the stubbornness of piggy patience, [are] determined to outwait her" (32). Gradually the pigs come forward, extending an invitation to Judith as Mina later does. First they eat when she is in the barn (33) and later they silently approach and surround her - elevating her to the status of Circe:

Expectant, they pressed forward against their fences, eyes glowing under the naked lightbulbs. Transformed and spellbinding they surrounded her like priestesses of her creed. They had been waiting for her (48).

Their seduction has been successful and now a relationship of interdependence begins. There is a physical, as well as spiritual, connection between them. It is as if the pigs' bodies and Judith's body are somehow mysteriously connected: "there was a subtle excitement in her quick movements that transmitted itself to them and pleased them" (49). Once this bond has developed, Judith breaks the barriers of silence and speaks to the pigs (49).

A major breakthrough in the relationship between the pigs and Judith occurs when the first sow gives birth. In chapter five, when Judith finds the sow birthing, the incident is described by juxtaposing realistic detail and the newborn piglet's perspective. The piglet is depicted by the third-person omniscient narrator in realistic detail as a:

...tiny creature with bent ears and half-open eyes who staggered around his mother's legs uttering thin, desperate squeaks. A drying shred of placenta clung to his neck

and the broken umbilical cord tangled bloody with his wobbling legs (68).

This kind of graphic detail makes the birthing process a concrete and "real" experience.⁴⁴ The otherwise realistic portrayal is lent a mysterious tone as the incident is further recounted from the newborn's perspective. Omniscient narration gives up its panoramic view of the scene to zoom in on the piglet's sensations. The first sound the piglet hears is Judith's laughter "ringing in the endless space" (68). His perceptions of the world are described through his sensations of sound, sight, smell and touch. He hears the laughter, sees the brightness, smells a musty scent and feels "the sensation of air on his skin" (68). The piglet's sensual experience pushes the description of the birthing ritual beyond the limits of unitary narrative. Judith is thoroughly seduced by this celebration of female-hood and the pigs approve of her transformation:

They swung their heads to follow her movement to the end of the row. She had words, a voice! Her laughter echoed in their bristly, perked-up ears like a remembrance of things past. She had returned, the woman who took them, who had chosen them so carefully. She had roused herself out of that sour-smelling, silent human who had kept them for a month. They rustled with joy and satisfaction at her, Judith (72-73).

Now that Judith has been seduced she can celebrate the birthing process. The female haven is thoroughly established. The juxtaposition of both the realism and the

mystery of the birthing process continues. Judith is depicted ripping open placentas, clipping teeth and bringing piglets to life in realistic detail (75-77). The atmosphere in the barn is simultaneously rendered as uncanny as the incidents are described through the pigs' sensations. They watch her as she presides over their rituals and allow her to occupy their space. They watch and protect their female haven.

Various scenes where the birthing processes of the sows are celebrated push the "realist regional" toward the "postmodern different". One especially memorable scene is the birthing of Circe and Venus. Again the act is described in realistic detail with the "sow grinding her teeth together in pain" (144). However, Judith is simultaneously elevated to the status of apparition and mystical healer as she assists in the process:

She fed them then in the early morning,
still singing, and when the door closed
behind her the thin, high sound of her voice
floated back to them, ghostly and content
over those frozen dunes of drifts (145).

Judith's metamorphosis is noted through the sensations of the pigs as she is seduced by their ritualistic celebration of female-hood. It is also portrayed through the physical changes in Judith's body as she is rewritten from secretary to farmer to the new Circe.

The change in Judith's body is noticed by both herself and the pigs. The pigs originally notice when her long hair

and city clothes are replaced by short hair and jeans (30-31). Thus begins the transformation to farmer. As Judith becomes more at ease with the pigs, her body relaxes and the awkwardness with which she moves around the barn is replaced with a natural ease. The ritual which Judith celebrates with the pigs is largely a physical one and soon her body responds:

...they could see it was becoming her systematic and deliberate liturgy, an ordering of her time and body. She was as contingent on them as they were on her (121).

Through these rituals her body is transformed from the pudgy secretary to "sorceress". The pear-shaped Judith, perfumed and waiting for her lover, disintegrates as the new Circe emerges. This Judith enjoys her body for its own sake and she smells her own smell rather than that of perfume and make-up:

She felt her body hard and clean and thin under her clothes, felt it chaste and voluptuous, ridding herself of her intemperate indulgence and submission, unlike Judith climbing stairs in a losing battle against her thickening waistline, food and alcohol, tasting stale tobacco on her thick and furry tongue every morning....

Layer by layer she shed the accumulation of those years, the thickness between herself and her surface growing smaller and smaller each day until she could feel through her skin the push of bones, their angular frailty. And she lost her stiffness, the jerky awareness that had carved her movements for so long, fluid and shapely she slid around the pigs, moved between them like a sorceress (146-147).

This passage amply accounts the transformation from secretary to farmer to mythological figure. Judith's body is purified through her relationship with the pigs. The new body is representative of the new Judith who no longer tries to fill her father's or her lover's demands. Instead she learns to concentrate on her own demands in a world which she has created and which in turn has transformed her. The pigs, once a duty, are now an intimate connection between Judith and her femaleness and the independence that comes with knowing self.

As noted above, the rewriting of the Circe myth and the mysterious nature of the relationship between Judith and the pigs stretches the limits of the realist novel and allows the barn to take on an existence out of the ordinary. The pigs are presented as sensitive and intelligent beings rather than as dumb creatures. The privileging of the pigs' perspectives further challenges the univocal narrative often equated with the realist novel. In Judith various voices, both human and inhuman, are credited. The "voices" of the pigs, as have been described, serve as a major force in the destabilization of the form of the "realist regional" novel within which van Herk has chosen to work. They are not, however, the only voices which push the novel beyond univocal narrative.

The multiple voices of Judith further contribute to the sabotage of realist narrative in a way similar to the voices

of the pigs. The process by which Judith comes to know herself and changes from secretary to farmer is recounted through a series of shifts in tense. The narrative moves from the present to the recent past to the distant past. The narrative shifts not only delineate discontinuity in time but also recognize the different voices of the protagonist. A subjectivity, which is unstable and in the process of developing, is created as the multiple voices of Judith interact. Judith's process of gaining self-awareness is disclosed through her internal voices. Thus, narrative technique also serves to push Judith beyond the boundaries of the realist novel.

Reingard M. Nischik in an article entitled "Narrative Technique in Aritha van Herk's Novels" notes that in Judith there is a single point of view, a modified neutral omniscient point of view, but three time levels.⁴⁵ He claims:

In Judith a by and large single point of view and several time stages combine to draw a well-rounded picture of the development of the title figure, with a special prominence given to the past (108).

Nischik concentrates in technical detail on how the reader is called on to participate in the integration of these time frames. However, he virtually ignores how the generation of different voices destabilizes the presentation of the protagonist and pushes the novel toward ambiguity. Judith is more than a "well-rounded picture". She is a

conglomeration of conflicting desires; some of which are partially resolved and others which are not. By allowing a mere two paragraphs to account for the pigs' perspectives, Nischik moves toward the temptation of univocal interpretation. He does not emphasize the heteroglossia of the novel.⁴⁶ The voices of Judith are not unitary but are generated from three different selves which are loosely and precariously integrated in the construction of the protagonist.

There are at least three narrative time levels in Judith- the distant past, the more recent pasts and the present. As well, the perspectives within these time frames vary. The point of view for the present time is third-person omniscient with emphasis on Judith's perspective. The distant past, though also recounted through third-person narrative, uses the voice and the language of a young child. Usually the names of "Judy girl" and "Daddy" signify a shift into past time. Child-like dialogue takes over to describe the farming experience from a child's perspective. This perspective is then juxtaposed with that of the adult Judith. The two accounts of the birthing process, as quoted below, demonstrate the differing perspectives and voices of the young and the adult Judith. For example, compare:

"Judy, what's the matter?"
Almost reeling, she held tightly to the
fence. She could hardly see over it, her
chin resting on the top board. "They come
out of her bum!" (69-70)

to :

She took a small step forward and the sow raised her head with a defensive whoof. "It's okay", she said, coaxing softly. "It's only me, I won't hurt him. You know me, I'm Judith". The sow rumbled in her throat and laid back her head, jerking her body against a further contraction. (68-69)

The difference in the voices of the young Judith and the adult Judith is obvious. The older Judith is experienced and competent while the younger Judith is innocent and hysterical. By placing the two incidents side by side in the narrative, van Herk keeps retrospective narrative commentary to a minimum. Instead, she calls on the reader to differentiate between the voices when the narrative time shifts from the present to the past.

It is important to note that the child and the adult are not two different people but one. The adult Judith still possesses the voice of the child which occasionally surfaces. Often the emergence of this voice complicates Judith's adult interpretation of the situation. For example, in the scenes quoted above the collected adult voice of the second passage is not Judith's automatic response to the situation. At first, when Judith enters the barn, the voice of the terrified child permeates her internal dialogue:

God, Judith thought, gripping the fence with both hands, what will I do, what will I do? I better call the vet right out. She bit

her lip, fighting back tears, damn, damn, damn (67).

Thus, the adult Judith does not undergo a neat development from child to secretary to farmer. She remains all these things at once. Near the closing of the narrative, when her city-lover finally locates her by letter, Judith's reaction is reminiscent of her hysterical outbursts as a child:

In the yard she slammed out of the half-ton and ran to the barn, flinging herself through the door like an animal into a cave, crying bitter and unrestrainedly as she stood there in the aisle, hanging onto the fence with one hand and knuckling at her face with the other (180-181).

The simultaneous co-existence of the child within the adult allows Judith many voices and further disrupts linear narrative.

When Judith looks back into the recent past and judges herself as the city-secretary, another of her voices is featured. Here retrospective commentary is abundant. Usually something in the present triggers Judith's memories of her relationship with her nameless lover. In the following passage Judith's greeting of good morning to the pigs reminds her of her mornings with her lover. She recalls her discomfort with the intimacy they shared:

And even with her hands still huddled in her pockets and shivering with revulsion for their wrinkled snouts and bristling hides, she must have loved them passionately for giving her a reason to be alone in the morning - to utter her first words to them.

Rolling away from his stirring limbs, the weight of his arm across her back demanding, she hid her face in the fabric of the pillow

to edge out his wakened and eager voice...
the rub of his hair against her chafed and
muted skin - he was unbearable.

"Judith?"

"Mmm?"

"Are you awake?"

"No".

Silence. "Then why are you talking to me?"

"I'm not".

But already his arms around her, pinning
her from behind and shaping his body to
hers, knees drawn up and fetal, surrounding
her like a shell (110).

The time shifts from present to recent past as Judith
surmises that it is nicer to say good morning to the pigs
than to wake up next to her lover. The reader directly
experiences how Judith is kept captive in a relationship
with a demanding and possessive lover. Again, it is
important to note that this Judith is not separate from Judy
or the present Judith but contained in both.

The three names of the protagonist represent different
aspects of her selves. She is named "Judy-girl" by her
father. Jim also refers to her as Judy, claiming that she
seems like "a serious little kid" (151). Thus, the name
Judy evokes the presence of the past in the present. On the
other hand, the city-lover calls the protagonist Judith in
denial of her past. Judy, however, is not distinct from
Judith but contained in Judi(th). The voice of Judy, the
farm-girl, is also present within the voice of Judith the
sophisticated secretary. The connection between lies
largely in the relationships which the protagonist has with

the two men who name her and dominate her - her father and her lover.

Both the father and the lover remain fairly shadowy figures. The father plays the role of prairie patriarch and the lover remains nameless as well as faceless. Judith's relationships with the two are rather ambiguous and she names them respectively as "Daddy" and "He". Attention is focused not on the male characters but on Judith and her memories and judgements of her relationships to them. The father, the lover, and the country farm-boy, Norman, are merely functional characters. They exist only because of their role in the development of the protagonist. The narrative foregrounds Judith's development, not that of the male characters. In the later The Tent Peg, the development of both the female and male characters is portrayed. This novel transcends some of the limitations which Judith remains trapped in. In Judith the sketchy portrayals of the male characters can be accounted for by the psychological realist narrative which privileges Judith's perspective. Judith sees the men, especially her lover and her father, as one entity which dominates her life and pushes her toward decisions and choices. What the reader receives is not an omniscient, objective portrayal of characters, but the subjective movement of Judith's thought processes and memory patterns. The limits here are not sexist limits,⁴⁷ per se, but the restrictions of the narrative form of psychological

realism. These constraints are transcended in the more innovative approaches to narrative found in The Tent Peg and No Fixed Address.

Judith's relationship to her father is an ambiguous one.⁴⁸ She has great love and respect for him as well as many fond memories of him. She buys her farm out of the guilt she feels for not having granted him his final wish that she take over his farm. Her father's control over her life dominates every thing Judith does, even her choice of lovers who are really father-figures. Judith's obsession with her father/lover is portrayed in the following passage: "It all pivoted back to her father, guilt and desire; thick and bent as he was, it was really him she wanted" (117). The connection between the father and the lover is accentuated throughout the novel. Both appear as shadowy entities pushing Judith toward choices. Even after his death, the father dominates Judith's life. His will haunts her and forces her to make choices:

For it was his plan, after all, his design and somewhere he must be watching her pain. To my only Daughter, Judith, I bequeath all my wordly goods, for her to use in remembrance of me (141).

The lover also makes similar decisions for Judith. When he buys the car, she feels that she has no choice but to accept it. It is as if the decision had already been made for her. Judith plays the part of his mistress for whom he buys sexual favours:

Staring at him, the depths of his steely gray eyes, she suddenly knew he was right and something turned over inside her. So smoothly, so effortlessly, he had amalgamated them, her and the car, the car and the woman (40).

It is important to note that in both cases Judith allows herself to be dominated by her father and her lover. While she struggles to free herself from her father's control, she submits to the lover. She substitutes one for the other:

She wished for him [the lover] to take it out of her hands, to sweep her into a plan of his own so that she could abandon hers like the madness it was and so block out the shape of her father's face, stern in death as it had never been in life (141).

She submits to the father's will when she escapes the lover and buys a farm. However, escape does not mean freedom and the lover continues to hunt Judith's life. The threat that he might find her permeates the novel as Judith continuously checks the mail to see if her escape has been successful. This fear of being found is ambiguous. At times Judith longs for the city-lover to find and consume her. In the passage below Judith sexually desires the lover as an alternative to masturbation:

Under the cool slip of the sheet, she ran her hands in circles over breasts, her belly, her hips, down to her thighs and up again, parting herself, opening to the intrusion of her own fingers. Their narrowness was insubstantial and unsatisfying....

She longed for the solidity of his body to roll over against and take inside her. She ached with that lost fulfilment, hand still caressing her open thighs, repeating and repeating, the inflexible rhythm of her own

dry pleasure emphasizing her lonely dissatisfaction (97-98).

However, her desire for her city-lover is more than sexual. It also represents a desire to give up the world she has created and return to his world where he trades security for submissiveness:

...How can I keep on with this, I won't, I will sell this damn place tomorrow, I'll get a job again, I can't, I can't, I must be crazy, shit and blood and snow when I could be typing letters in my soft clothes and with clean hands (171).

Although Judith originally buys the farm to please the dead father and escape the demanding lover, she does create her own world on the farm. She begins to see herself as independent and strong. Her relationship with the pigs allows her to celebrate her femaleness without needing to identify it through the roles of obedient daughter or submissive lover. Judith manages to escape the father and lover to a certain extent, though both men dominate her past and her present memories. However, her escape is ambiguous and concentrates more on process than resolution. An alternative heterosexual relationship is suggested through the other male character in the novel - Jim.

Judith's relationship with Jim, like her other relationships, is ambiguous. Unfortunately, the ambiguity here moves toward sexism. Jim becomes the object of Judith's tent peg,⁴⁹ though he is significantly less receptive than is Mackenzie in The Tent Peg. His opinions

on the nature of heterosexual relationships develop as he moves beyond the care-free ladies man to a sensitivity the other male characters in the novel do not possess. The name Jim also recalls the name of Judith's father, James. It is also interesting to note that, like the father, Jim shortens Judith's name to Judy. The connection between the father and Jim causes a certain amount of ambiguity as it places Jim into the same collective as both the nameless lover and the father as "Jim, James, her father or her non-existent, never-existed, implausible lover" (174). Despite this, Jim is not merely a functional and static character like the father and the lover.

The ambiguity with which Jim is presented can again be related to the narrative strategies which are adhered to in the novel. Jim, like the other male characters, is presented as he exists in Judith's perspective. He is not depicted as a separate entity. Although his character is rendered through third-person narration, Judith's judgements permeate the presentation of Jim. Judith is simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by him. Thus, he is presented at once as a manipulative pursuer, a nervous, sensitive virgin and an adventurous companion. For example, when Jim visits Judith's house, she is aware of her vulnerability and his ability to sense it:

And he sensed it, oh yes, he sensed her small, unopened wish like the pursuer he was, and slowing himself to it instantly,

put his elbows on the table and leaned toward her (105).

However, later at the bar he shares in Judith's triumph over the chauvinistic insults of the farmers and gains the status of her adventurous and understanding companion as together they "drove home silently along the serene, deserted road, the laughter between them like a glowing presence" (137). Jim also plays the part of the nervous virgin who is afraid to get too close to Judith. Judith confides to Mina:

"I'd like to get him into bed, but he's so scared of me he won't come near me. That's my punishment, I guess. He always leaves really fast as if he's afraid that I'm going to suggest something immoral." (155)

Such is the rendering of Jim. He is certainly not faceless or nameless but as ambiguous as Judith perceives him to be. Judith is attracted to Jim but does not want to succumb to this attraction. She suppresses her attraction to Jim's masculinity out of fear that this attraction will consume or diminish her. She "wanted suddenly to touch him and had to stop herself, shrinking before his magnetism" (107). Not until she is confident in herself does she succumb to her desire. This occurs during the controversial scene where Judith castrates the young boars.

The scene describing the castration of the piglets has caused a great deal of controversy.⁵⁰ It serves the multiple purposes of illuminating Judith's freedom from her past, juxtaposing the real and the mythic, complicating the

narrative through heteroglossia and transforming Judith from victim to Circe. Since it portrays a number of the issues discussed thus far in this chapter, it is worth examining in more detail.

In the episode describing the castration of the male pigs Judith's transformation is completed. She appears simultaneously as the mythic Circe, protecting the female haven she has created, and the practical farmer castrating the pigs out of necessity.⁵¹ The rewritten Circe is at once mythological construct and "the savage witch of pragmatism" (166). Furthermore, the details of this scene are both realistic and beyond realism. The castration is realistically depicted and varying perspectives of both the pigs and Judith are credited. Intricate details are given. For example, the testicles gain the status of still life:

If you bit into one of them, she thought, they would be crunchy, they would have the grainy texture of apples. He sliced quickly but clumsily, hacking at the glistening fruit hidden in the scrotum, drawing lines of blood while the pig squirmed (165).

At the same time the pigs' sensations of terror are related, pushing beyond the realist, linear narrative and realistic depiction:

Breathless, he did not struggle, even knowing what was going to happen. There were whirling shapes, the movement of the two human bodies on the periphery of his vision, the smell of her skin and clothes; even with the scent of blood on her hands, she still smelled like snow (165).

After the physical act of castration is over, Judith has been transformed to the status of Circe. The pigs are entranced by her as they stand "subdued and listening, slaves to a master, Circe's human's" (170). Their masculinity has been sacrificed to maintain the female haven in the barn. The creative relationship between females, which seduced and transformed Judith, can now continue.

The perspectives of the pigs are not the only ones credited in this scene. Judith's multiple voices also surface. As she castrates the pigs, the narrative time shifts back to the recent past when Judith learned of her parents' deaths. Again the reader meets the lover who is eager to console Judith in her moments of vulnerability (169). From her memories, Judith begins to understand how the farm has transformed her. In this sense, the scene is climactic, following in the convention of the realist or even the modernist novel.⁵² The epiphany seems to occur as Judith frees herself from her father and her lover. Therefore, the castration serves a dual purpose. First, it describes a woman's revenge for the self-mutilation of her body in compliance with the male standards of the feminine:

Perhaps it was atonement for the acts of barbarity she had committed on herself for him: plucking her sleek eyebrows, rolling her straight hair into curls, thrusting golden posts through the holes in her ears (166).

Secondly, the castration allows her to partake of a world traditionally denied to women. Judith avoids castrating the pigs because she is unsure if she should trespass on this male terrain which her father did not allow her to see. Thus, the act of the castration itself is not significant because the pigs are being emasculated, but because Judith is performing a role normally reserved for men. The castration becomes representative of the worlds which are denied to women by fathers and lovers who attempt to protect them from that which they do not want them to see. When Judith enters that world which has been denied her she understands how her father has dominated her life and limited her:

And so it was that she could love him,
 father/ god perfect always, unfailing,
 showing her only birth and death and never
 the sordid in-between, the soiled and
 rumpled edges of what the others were so
 eager, so pleased, to show her. Within that
 discrepancy she came to hate him and then to
 idolize him, and then full circle to her
 childishness, trying to please him (167).

When the castration is complete Judith feels triumphant not only because of the vengeance she has reaped, but because of the orchestration of an event until now denied her:

And now she had seen the core, the axis
 always unexplained and mysterious, more than
 a fusion of beginning and end, but the stuff
 that days and weeks and months are made of,
 the continual, hard resistant core (169)

The scenes following the castration counteract the supposed climactic effect and epiphany of this episode and

make a final attempt to subvert the structure of the realist novel. The reader who feels that a neat resolution is at hand is sharply disappointed. Although Judith has come to understand how her life has been dominated by men, she is still uncertain and insecure about the role she is now playing in the uncharted world of the female pig-farmer. The scene which follows the castration questions Judith's realizations as outlined above. Here, Judith's voices return to question her objectives:

It's ridiculous, pigs and pigs and pigs.
 Shovelling shit and carrying feed and water
 and bloody births and castrating pigs and
 pigs and pigs for the rest of your life and
 then what will happen? He's dead anyway and
 Jim running away like that, it's wrong, it's
 all wrong. It's too late (171).

The sense of freedom which Judith has gained from her supposed epiphany is frightening. She has trespassed all the boundaries which assign her gender identity. She can no longer define herself in terms of her father or her lover and, in an effort to reclaim the familiar world, she puts on her old clothes of her victim days. This action, itself, is ambiguous. Does she put on the clothes to reclaim her old self - to reject the freedom she has gained? Or does she put on the clothes for herself - to celebrate her ability to wear them not for others, as a costume and a display, but for herself? Whatever the reason, the clothes are transformed by Judith's body. They no longer imprison her body as her body accentuates them:

But she found herself suddenly certain and assured, swishing around the kitchen in the trailing skirt. Muscles, she thought, I have muscles. She moved slowly and with reverence, more self-aware then ever (173).

It is significant that Jim returns to the house when Judith is wearing these clothes to admit that he is afraid of Judith (174). His admission temporarily allows the reader to believe that he has gained some kind of awareness as to the roles men expect women to play. Again, the reader's expectations are played with. When Jim finds Judith in the clothes of her past, he regresses to chauvinistic consolation. Earlier, as the nervous virgin, he was afraid to touch Judith. Now he is "touching her everywhere" (175) and telling her "Judy, shhh, listen, little girl, don't be so afraid all the time, you're safe now, my little Judy, shhh" (175). The reader who has anxiously watched Jim's progression is not ready for this regression. Judith, however, corrects Jim's misunderstandings by refusing to play child for him as she has played for her father and city-lover. When she makes love to Jim it is on her own terms. It is in atonement for all those years of making love to a father-figure:

There was something about denying her childishness that made it better than it had ever been, the length of him inside her shucking away all those years like so much chaff,... (175)

Jim is not a father-figure but a lover. Yet, although a considerable amount of narrative time has been spent on

developing Jim and Judith's relationship, Jim is written out of the narrative when he and Judith make love. Jim's consciousness-raising seems to be deserted as the scene switches disjunctively to a humorous account of the mating of a sow and a boar. Jim, despite his often positive development in the novel, is denigrated to the position of the discarded sow: "His necessity dispensed with, she wanted no more of him" (178). Judith's rather sexist treatment of Jim defies a "happily ever after" ending but also pushes the novel's feminism towards sexism.⁵³ Unfortunately, as noted above, this is what the reviewers and critics concentrate on when reading Judith. Little or no attention is paid to the more successful accomplishments of the novel's postmodern feminist poetics as discussed in this chapter.

Fortunately, the novel is somewhat redeemed from its sexist implications and again pushed toward a healthy ambiguity at the conclusion. The last few pages see the return of the nameless lover and Judith's decision to stay with the pigs. This decision is ambiguous. In relation to the lover it is positive as Judith decides not to return to him and the roles he has waiting for her. Her decision to give herself up to the animal world of the pigs raises some central questions as to her place in the community:

And she opened herself for them, stretched herself wide and unending, her arms out, her head tall, her legs long.
 "Pigs", she said, "you win" (181).

This submergence into the world of the pigs signifies Judith's rejection of convention. It is an entrance into the world created by her which is free of the expectations of others. For the feminist postmodern this is the uncharted world, free of assigned gender roles, where one can create new beginnings. As such, it is also a lonely world. The process toward the freeing of self is a long and often isolating experience. This tension between the individual self, especially the feminist self, and society is explored in all of van Herk's novels. In Judith the protagonist's only real connection to the community is with Mina, who is really more of an ex-centric to the community than a member.⁵⁴ In The Tent Peg J.L.'s relationship to the community is also precarious as she serves as a mediator between the wilderness and the community and faces the tension as to whether to commit herself to one or the other. She tenuously chooses to be part of the community and to attempt to work within, retelling stories and challenging stereotypes. In No Fixed Address Arachne, as the new picara, is both an outcast from the community and a member of its social structure. She rejects what the community offers and attempts to establish a new order, almost anarchic in character, in the mythic north. In Judith such questioning also occurs but the resolutions here are even less clear. Is Judith rejecting the community as represented by Mina by joining the world of the pigs? Or is

she celebrating her reclaimed self through the pigs? She does after all take a mailbox. This signifies that a certain status has been allowed her in the community. In Judith van Herk does not provide any resolutions but merely highlights the conflict between self and community. In the later novels the plight of the protagonist in the community becomes a metaphor for the position of the postmodern feminist artist who works within, yet subverts the norms generated from communities.

The readers looking for neatly packaged answers at the end of Judith will be sharply disappointed as they will be in all of Aritha van Herk's novels. As a first novel, Judith develops the patterns which are established in the earliest short stories and continue in the later novels. Judith is a novel of process not resolution. It explores the process of entering and redefining the landscape, the process of deconstructing the grammatical pairs of prairie fiction, the process of complicating the unitary discourse of realist fictional narrative, the process of pushing beyond the limitations of realism into the realm of the mythic, the process of discovering selves and the worlds denied to woman, the process of accepting conventions and traditions both literary, political and sexual and then ignoring the rules of these conventions by subverting them from the inside. These concerns, as discussed in this

chapter, continue in the next two novels and will be further examined in the following chapters.

The process of reading Judith reveals van Herk as indeed a prairie "spy"⁵⁵ entering, manipulating and transforming prairie fiction through her feminism and postmodernism. Her subversion begins as early as "The Road Out" and continues in Judith. However, in Judith, as in the early short stories, van Herk is basically still working within the conventions of the psychological realist narrative. In The Tent Peg narrative strategies become more innovative. Varied voices and perspectives are juxtaposed as van Herk feminizes the north. In No Fixed Address, the "realist regional" is fully transformed to the "postmodern different" through the creation of Arachne as metaphor for the feminist postmodern artist. The metamorphosis begins in Judith. Although the juxtaposition of the realist novel and the postmodern novel is not always smooth, this chapter has attempted to illuminate some of the positive achievements of the feminist postmodernist poetics of Judith. The reviewers have already amply noted its weaknesses.

Endnotes

1. Many of the reviews of Judith interpret the novel as a realist and a feminist failure. Some examples are R.P. Bilan's review in U of T Quarterly 48 (Summer, 1979) 315-316 ; Lorraine McMullen's review in Journal of Canadian Fiction 28-29 (1980) 25- 256; Gail Varseveld's review in Branching Out 6:2 (1984) 43- 44 and Miriam Waddington's review in Canadian Literature 84 (Spring, 1980) 101-105. These interpretations of Judith as a realist failure are refuted in this chapter.
2. Reference will be made to the critical reception of these texts in the following chapters.
3. Gail van Varsevald, "Worship Thy Father", Rev. of Judith, by Aritha van Herk, Branching Out 6: 2 (1979) 44.
4. Miriam Waddington, "The New Woman", Rev. of Judith, by Aritha van Herk and Abra, by Joan Barfoot, Canadian Literature 84 (Spring, 1980) 102.
5. Craig Owens in "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism", The Anti- Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983) 57- 82, claims that the feminist critique of patriarchy intersects with the postmodern critique of representation. He notes that feminism radically questions the assumptions behind representation.
6. I.A. MacLaren, "A Charting of the van Herk Papers", The Aritha van Herk Papers: First Accession, eds. Apollonia Steele and Jean F Tener (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1987) xxxv. MacLaren uses this term to refer to the reader who reads with a realist bias, who looks for realistic representation in the text.
7. The tale of Circe and Odysseus is told in Homer, The Odyssey, Book X, trans. E.V. Rieu (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1946) 155- 170. It is also referred to in Ovid's Metamorphosis, Book XIV, trans. A.D. Melville, ed. E.J. Kenney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 332- 334.
8. This new tradition includes female prairie writers such as Margaret Laurence, Sharon Pollock, Edna Alford, Sharon Riis and Betty Lambert. A predecessor to these writers, Martha Ostenso, will be focused on here.
9. I have not discovered one piece of critical work which approaches Judith as a prairie novel or discusses its regional implications.

10. R.P. Bilan, "Letters in Canada 1978", University of Toronto Quarterly 48 (Summer, 1979) 315.

11. See, for example Linda Hutcheon, The Canadian Postmodern. Hutcheon recognizes the importance of intertextuality, especially when employed by feminist writers. She claims: "Two of the major 'universals' contested by postmodernism and feminism are the notions of authority (in its various forms) and originality. One of the most common means of contesting used by writers of both persuasions is intertextuality in general, and parody in particular.... If anything intertextuality and parody signal a kind of textual collectivity, as well as a textual history: they deliberately recall other texts" (108-109).

12. One of the common concerns shared by Margaret Atwood's Surfacing and Marian Engel's Bear is the protagonist's relationship to the wilderness. Though the Tent Peg deals more effectively with this, the relationship of woman to the landscape is also explored in Judith. However, the intertextuality here is related more to the prairie novel than wilderness literature. Wilderness literature will be examined in more detail in Chapter III.

13. Intertextuality between No Fixed Address and Robert Kroetsch's Badlands and Studhorse Man is explored in Chapter IV.

14. These terms are used by Linda Hutcheon in The Canadian Postmodern, 19. She claims that the "realist regional" is re-fashioned into the ex-centric "postmodern different" in the works of Robert Kroetsch, Aritha van Herk and Jack Hodgins.

15. Van Herk writes of Bear, by Marian Engel: "Bear shows us a world that is possible rather than probable, and that awareness of something beyond strict actuality must shake us out of the turgid realism that we so often see reflected in the Canadian novel" (Aritha van Herk and Diana Palting, "Marian Engel: Beyond Kitchen Sink Realism", Branching Out 5: 2) 12. This observation can be applied to Judith and all of van Herk's novels as they try to offer possible rather than probable worlds.

16. See Aritha van Herk, "A Gentle Circumcision", Trace: Prairie Writers on Writing, Ed. Birk Sproxtton (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1986) 259 for a fuller description of the west as masculine space.

17. Aritha van Herk, "Desire in Fiction: De-siring Realism", Dandelion 8:2 (Fall/ Winter 1981- 1982) 33.

18. In Wild Geese the chorus of Lind Archer and Mark Jordan creates a tension between the realist form and the romantic mode. The portrayal of the prairie landscape, however, is fairly representative of the norms in prairie realism. It is this aspect of Wild Geese which will be focused on here.

19. Aritha van Herk, "Women Writers and the Prairie: Spies in an Indifferent Landscape", Kunapipi 6:2 (1984) 124- 125. This article will be referred to as "Woman Writers and the Prairie" throughout this chapter.

20. These binary constructions will be discussed later in this chapter with particular reference to Robert Kroetsch's "The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction: An Erotics of Space", and Henry Kreisel's "The Prairie: A State of Mind".

21. Henry Kreisel, "The Prairie: A State of Mind", Canadian Anthology, eds. Carl Klinck and Reginald Walters (1968; Toronto: Gage Educational Publishing Limited, 1984) 621.

22. Laurence Ricou, Vertical Man/ Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973) ix.

23. Martha Ostenso, Wild Geese (1925; New Canadian Library edition, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1988) 38.

24. Robert Kroetsch recalls this particular scene in What the Crow Said (Don Mills, Ontario: General Publishing Co. Limited, 1978) 7- 13. Kroetsch opens his text with the seduction of Vera Lang by a swarm of bees. Vera's bizarre seduction in the open prairie reminds the reader of Judith's more conventional celebration of the prairie in Wild Geese.

25. Aritha van Herk, Judith (1978; New Canadian Library Edition, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart- Bantam Limited, 1987) 20.

26. The terms giant and dwarf refer to Kreisel's article as cited above.

27. Surfacing by Margaret Atwood and Bear by Marian Engel are good examples of the protagonist entering the landscape and becoming part of rather than a describer of nature.

28. See Linda Hutcheon, The Canadian Postmodern, ix.

29. The full title of this essay is "The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction: An Erotics of Space". It is, however, widely referred to as "An Erotics of Space".

30. Robert Kroetsch, "The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction: An Erotics of Space", Crossing Frontiers, ed. Dick Harrison (Calgary: University of Alberta Press, 1979) 76.

31. Caleb keeps the axe in place in the wall of the barn as evidence to use against Judith should she try to escape. The axe becomes a further bond to Caleb.

32. For an excellent discussion of the significance of the house in prairie fiction see Susan Jackel, "The House On The Prairies", Canadian Literature 42 (Autumn, 1969) 46- 55. Jackel notes: "The unanimity with which prairie writers interpret this symbol is one element of the 'regionalism' of their fiction.... To them the house stands first for material security and later for cultural security" (55). She also claims that the house can also be associated with the "unknown future" (55). In Judith the house takes on different connotations as a symbol of individual development. Van Herk's treatment of the house attempts to move away from traditional interpretations which Jackel credits.

33. Sinclair Ross' As For Me and My House provides a good example of the house as offering.

34. This dichotomy is prevalent in a great deal of prairie fiction, especially the work of Frederick Philip Grove, W.O.Mitchell and later Margaret Laurence. For an interesting analysis of the importance of this dichotomy in Albertan fiction, in particular, see David Carpenter, "Alberta in Fiction: the Emergence of a Provincial Consciousness", Journal of Canadian Studies 10:4 (November, 1975) 12-23.

35. Aritha van Herk, "Stranded Bestride in Canada", World Literature Written in English 24:1 (Summer, 1984) 14.

36. The indigenous of the prairie is well represented by the magpie and the coyote.

37. See "An Erotics of Space" as referred to above.

38. Again refer to Robert Kroetsch's "An Erotics of Space", as cited above, for further details.

39. It is enough to note that the novel works within realist conventions but also pushes beyond these conventions largely because of Judith's relationship to the pigs. It is not necessary to assign a label such as magic realist, which is already overworked, to the novel.

40. See either Homer's The Odyssey or Ovid's Metamorphosis as cited above.

41. Jim is equated to an excitable boar at the end of Judith. Jim will be discussed in more detail toward the end of this chapter.

42. Judith's transformation (namely the castration) of the pigs will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

43. In Book X of The Odyssey Odysseus is afraid to accept Circe's offer to sleep with her because he believes she will "make a coward and a weakling out of me when you have me stripped", 164. After Circe promises him she will not do such a thing, he sleeps with her. In exchange for his sexual favours, Circe turns the pigs back into men.

44. The term "real" is being used here to differentiate from the transformed "postmodern different". It refers to the representation of actual incidents and experiences.

45. Reingard Nischik, "Narrative Technique in Aritha van Herk's Novels", Gaining Ground: European Critics on Canadian Literature, eds. Robert Kroetsch and Reingard Nischik (Edmonton: Newest Press, 1985) 109.

46. The term "heteroglossia" is Mikhail Bakhtin's from "Discourse in the Novel", The Dialogic Imagination, by Bakhtin, ed. Michael Holquist, Trans by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Texas: The University of Texas Press, 1981). Heteroglossia refers to the multi-voiced discourse which challenges the centripetal forces of unitary language.

47. The question as to whether Judith is sexist or not is approached by Viga Boland, "All About Books", Rev. of Judith by Aritha van Herk, Canadian Author and Bookman 54 (May, 1979) 34-35 and I.A. Maclaren, "A Charting of the van Herk Papers" xv-xx. It will be discussed in more detail near the conclusion of this chapter.

48. Recall Gail van Varsevald's treatment of Judith's relationship to her father as quoted on the first page of this chapter. Certainly such a reading presupposes a rather unambiguous relationship and does not account for the protagonist who is in the process of exploring her multiple selves.

49. I am using the term "tent peg" as it is used in The Tent Peg to refer to the feminist process of consciousness-raising.

50. Various reviews comment upon the anti-male sentiment in this scene. See, for example, Urjo Kareda "The \$50,000 Question", Saturday Night, April 1981, 94- 96. George Dretzky in "The New Woman's Novel", The Fiddlehead 120 (Winter, 1979) claims: "Judith faces up to the harsh realities of life in a scene in which she makes barrows of the male piglets (that is, she castrates them) so that they cry symbol, symbol, symbol all the way home. In the end we come to the inescapable conclusion that Judith is a very confused person, but one thing is certain: she is some kind of mean lady" (144).

51. Male pigs have to be castrated so their meat can be eaten.

52. The realist and modernist novels usually offer a climax and an epiphany as part of their structures. The castration scene seems to conform to these conventions.

53. This scene is also a reversal of the Circe myth. Odysseus makes love to Circe after she promises not to turn him into a pig. Here Judith makes no such promise but actually transforms Jim to boar after they sleep together.

54. Mina does not perceive herself as belonging to the community but as a role-player acting the part of a farmer's wife with "dower rights on the home quarter" (90). Actually, Judith's relationship with Mina is not unlike Arachne's with Thana, another of van Herk's ex-centrics in No Fixed Address.

55. This reference and the title of my chapter refer to van Herk's article cited above "Women Writers and the Prairie: Spies in an Indifferent Landscape".

Chapter III
The Tent Peg: Circumcising the North

The Tent Peg is Aritha van Herk's most ambitious sabotage of established mythologies. The novel moves beyond both the modernist realism of the early short stories and the third-person narration of Judith to sabotage the documentary journal form. The Tent Peg creates a collage of journal entries which repeat narrative incidents and juxtapose perspectives. By subverting the journal, van Herk contests the validity of univocal documentation. She also indirectly challenges the history and myths which have been created and reinforced through documentary journalism. In Judith van Herk subverts the "realist regional" and the mythologies it perpetuates. In The Tent Peg she focuses on the journal form and the mythologies of the Canadian North. Van Herk attempts to feminize the North as she does the west, the "kingdom of the male virgin" (van Herk, "A Gentle Circumcision", 257).¹

Van Herk challenges the standard mythologies of the North by recalling the names of Northern explorers. She loosely connects some of the personal characteristics of the historical figures of Canadian frontier history to the fictional constructs in her text. By using the names of actual historical personages for her fictional creations, she sets up a tenuous intertextual frame of reference. The explorers, after whom van Herk names her male characters,

generally composed journals to describe their Northern exploration experiences. In The Tent Peg van Herk transforms the North as depicted in these journals. She reclaims it as a feminine space, unlike the harsh landscapes of the journals of the explorers. In The Tent Peg the North, traditionally depicted as cruel, vast and indifferent, becomes evocative, silent, and feminine. This rewriting of the Northern landscape is foreshadowed in the feminization of the prairie in Judith. However, in The Tent Peg the subversion is more thorough than in Judith. By writing J.L. into the frontier experience, van Herk provides a voice for woman in the Northern exploration process. Also, by placing her text in the tradition of women's wilderness literature, van Herk celebrates an "essential femaleness" through the landscape.² J.L. serves as a mediator between this feminine North and the community of male characters.

As in Judith and the early short fiction, traditional gender roles are rejected in The Tent Peg. Van Herk examines the roles which men project onto women as well as the roles which society demands men play. The Tent Peg illuminates how both men and women unearth the idiosyncrasies of the myths which are created around each of them. Van Herk avoids moving toward sexism by exploring the consciousness of male and female characters. The Tent Peg notes how gender roles are socially constructed. However,

at the same time, van Herk celebrates an "essential femaleness" which is ahistorical and beyond patriarchal systems. Thus from a feminist postmodern perspective, The Tent Peg is possibly the most ambiguous of all of van Herk's texts. It rejects the rational consciousness of humanist discourse through its narrative sabotage, but celebrates an "essential feminine" which presupposes a fixed and unchanging essence at the heart of sexuality. Therefore, it rejects but also implicitly accepts liberal humanism.³ Its feminist position remains plural and ambiguous.

As this brief introduction indicates, The Tent Peg attempts to grapple with a large number of objectives. It sabotages the narrative of unitary discourse, establishes various intertexts, rewrites the Northern landscape and deconstructs gender roles. As in her other novels, van Herk also reclaims women's neglected mythology in The Tent Peg. She rewrites the mythology of Jael and Deborah and creates a metafictional sub-text where both serve as metaphors for the feminist postmodern artist. Thus, The Tent Peg is multi-layered. It becomes a series of voices, real and mythic, interacting and in search of a listener.

In order to understand the extent of van Herk's subversion in The Tent Peg it is necessary to examine the literary form and the historical mythologies which the novel is sabotaging. The Tent Peg questions the objectivity of the journal form by juxtaposing a number of perspectives of

similar incidents. Van Herk challenges the notion that the journal form serves as an individualistic and accurate account of experience. The usually univocal journal becomes multivocal. Separate voices distort and record experiences and narrative incidents are repeated throughout the text. In this sense, the experimental form of The Tent Peg challenges the notion that an objective history exists. Furthermore, the names of the male characters in the text recall the actual historical figures of Canadian exploration history, specifically: Alexander Mackenzie, David Thompson, Samuel Hearne, John Franklin and Henry Hudson. Van Herk's fictional counterparts to these historical personages allow her to create a tenuous intertextuality with the journals of these explorers. It is interesting to compare the actual historical journals and personages of the explorers with van Herk's fictional constructions, if only to show how her characters differ from those mythologized figures of the North. The characters have quite differing relationships to each other and to the Northern landscape than did the actual historical personages. As van Herk's postmodern play focuses on rewriting the North, it is useful to look in more detail at the mythologies which surround the great Northern explorers such as Henry Hudson, John Franklin, Samuel Hearne, David Thompson, and Alexander Mackenzie.

The tragic tale of Henry Hudson, who was sent adrift by angry crew members, is partially retold by van Herk. In a

text on the Hudson Bay Company Peter Newman describes Hudson's place in the Canadian imagination. He claims:

The history book image of Hudson is the Collier portrait of him surrounded by icebergs, his bearded countenance downcast, his hand on the tiller of his tiny shallop, his haunted eyes gazing into the blank distance overwhelmed by the self-pity of knowing he is facing certain death on the unknown coast of a merciless sea.⁴

Self-pity is the essential word to concentrate on here. Van Herk builds upon this popular image to construct her Hudson as the embodiment of the colonial reaction to the landscape. He exemplifies what Marcia Kline in Beyond the Land Itself recognizes as "a profound fear of the natural world".⁵ Van Herk's Hudson, sporting all the symptoms of the colonial mentality, feels fear and anger in the face of the terrifying North:

And these mountains. Bare, gray, no trees, no grass. They surround you, they press you down, they laugh at you like teeth. It's almost June and they are still snow-covered. I'm sure nobody knows where we are.⁶

Furthermore, van Herk's Hudson portrays another central characteristic of the colonial mentality, namely the desire to transplant the English environment onto the Canadian one. The opposition between nature and civilization is paramount in his reaction to the Yukon:

The mountains. They'd never believe it back home. They're so rugged a man could never get anywhere alone, he'd die before he had a chance. No civilization, nothing (TTP, 103).

It is not possible to make a direct comparison between van Herk's fictional Hudson and the historical personage of Henry Hudson as the latter did not leave documents and journals behind him. Therefore, connections remain tenuous. However, it is actually Hudson's mysterious end, as a sacrifice to the Canadian wilderness, which gives him a lasting place in Canadian mythology. In The Tent Peg van Herk's Hudson is not granted mythological status through sacrifice, but is allowed a limited redemption. This partial redemption is permitted by his changing attitude toward himself and the wilderness. For example, when the gold mine is found Hudson is elated. He praises the wilderness, claiming "It's damn hard work but it's real, you can find stuff here" (TTP,204). Although he is saved from the horrid historical fate of Henry Hudson, Hudson's redemption is not complete in The Tent Peg. He only praises the land when it yields what he wants from it. His relationship to the wilderness remains egocentric as he only recognizes the land's worth by the symbolic "laying" through staking.⁷

Van Herk's fictional counterparts to John Franklin and Samuel Hearne do not connect concretely to what is known of the historical personages. Both were northern explorers of substantively differing personalities. The historical journals of Franklin are direct and narrative-oriented. Hearne, though he also concentrates on narration rather than

description, betrays a certain romantic and artistic sensibility.⁸ He paints the North as a way of documenting it. Van Herk's Franklin and Hearne both possess poetic sensibilities. Franklin is a poet who claims "Geology is a way to seek out the wilderness" (TTP, 80). Hearne is an obsessed photographer who sees the North in terms of colours: "orange", "gray-green", "gray-blue", "gray-white" (TTP, 52). A brief look at the actual historical journals of Hearne and Franklin clarifies the nature of their relationship to van Herk's fictional creations.

John Franklin and Samuel Hearne share a poetic sensibility with their fictional namesakes. They both adhered to the pragmatic, narrative orientation of journal writing and attempted to banish from their journals the sense of mystery and wonder which the North instilled in them. However, at times their awe surfaces in their texts. In The Tent Peg van Herk accentuates the poetic receptiveness of her fictional constructions. The poetic sensibilities of the historical explorers haunt the sub-texts of their journals. This is depicted in their descriptions of Aurora Borealis, the Northern lights. There has long been a legend that the lights can be heard as well as seen. A comparison of the two explorers' accounts reveals a poetic eye lurking behind the factual observations expected from a documentary journal:

The Aurora Borealis was brilliantly
displayed on both the nights we remained

here...once I perceived a stream of light to illumine the under surface of some clouds as it passed along. There was no perceptible noise.⁹

The fact that Franklin listens specifically for the noise of the lights and his intricate descriptions of the clouds both betray his poetic eye. Samuel Hearne's account is even more descriptive and imaginative:

I can positively affirm, that in the still nights I have frequently heard them [the Northern lights] make a rustling and crackling noise, like the waving of a large flag in a fresh gale of wind.¹⁰

Both Franklin and Hearne report differing accounts as to whether or not the lights make noise. This variation illuminates the subjectivity of the explorers' experiences. Certainly The Tent Peg focuses on subjectivity. This is examined later in this chapter through an analysis of narrative repetition. Here, it is useful to note that the reader is constantly challenged to compare van Herk's fictional creations to what she knows of the historical personages after whom they are named. Such comparisons allow van Herk to replace the pragmatic accounts of the North with more sensitive and human accounts. This kind of rewriting is especially evident in the portrayal of the two major male figures in The Tent Peg - Mackenzie and Thompson, who recall the explorers Alexander Mackenzie and David Thompson.

Historically, Alexander Mackenzie and David Thompson covered similar ground in their explorations. In The Tent Peg van Herk's Mackenzie and Thompson are allowed to exist at the same time and are compared to each other. David Thompson followed in Mackenzie's footsteps but unlike Mackenzie he actually described what he saw. His journals are descriptive rather than narrative in nature. Mackenzie, on the other hand, is factual and precise in his journals and delights in making lists. His journals concentrate on activity and narrative action and virtually ignore the landscape. Gaile MacGregor mentions Mackenzie directly when she writes of the "avoidance pattern" as a reaction to the Canadian wilderness. She claims:

For the reader of these journals, therefore, the land itself, which ostensibly provided the reasons for their explorations remains surprisingly indistinct.¹¹

Van Herk does not allow her Mackenzie or Thompson to avoid the wilderness.

In The Tent Peg Thompson is not unlike what is known of the historical Thompson who glorified the land and became fascinated by its spirit and its people.¹² It is interesting to compare the following two passages: the first from Thompson's Travels in Western North America 1784-1812:

Imagination can hardly form an idea of the working of this immense body of water under such a compression, raging and hissing, as if alive.¹³

and the second from an entry made by Thompson in The Tent Peg:

But after another hundred yards I do hear it, a long, faraway roar that grows larger as we walk, louder and stronger until it overtakes and conceals the sounds of the forest.

And then, without warning, we are standing at the edge of a narrow gorge that is creased hundreds of feet deep into the rock. Over it roars a mountain stream that, in its fall, unleashes itself to brilliant life (TTP, 197).

In both David Thompson's actual journal and Thompson's fictional entry in The Tent Peg the waterfall- the epitome of the North American sublime- is described. Both passages are sensitive to the sight and sound of the falls and concentrate especially on its life and vitality. Another of Thompson's entries in The Tent Peg further describes his sensitivity to the Northern landscape:

The Yukon is a magic place. I know it, Mackenzie knows it. It's a place where reality is inverted. Where you have to take the strangeness for granted (TTP, 126).

Both van Herk's fictional Thompson and the historical personage after whom he is named share a sense of awe in the face of the majestic North. They both sensitively identify with its strangeness.

Van Herk's Mackenzie recalls Alexander Mackenzie. Historically, Mackenzie's stature is intimidating. He is depicted as physically enormous, a man of intense stamina, self-control and ambition.¹⁴ His journals, as previously

stated, are narrative-oriented to the point of boredom. His avoidance of landscape is exemplified in his factual analysis of immense natural beauties. The following description of Vermilion Falls depicts this narrative tendency:

...at three on the afternoon on the 17th we arrived at the falls. The river at this place is about 400 yards broad, and the fall about 20 feet high: the first carrying place is 800 paces in length, and the last, which is about a mile onwards is something more than two thirds of that distance.¹³

In the preface to his journal, when he writes of "penetrating across the continent of America" (Journals, 57), Mackenzie reflects the mentality which Annette Kolodny documents.¹⁴

It is this historical personage whom Van Herk's fictional Mackenzie seems to counteract. Van Herk's Mackenzie is a stooped, quiet and undemanding character. However, like the historical personage, he is also an ambitious, hard worker with incredible stamina. His endurance for work does not arise out of a noble pursuit of knowledge. Van Herk's Mackenzie pushes himself beyond the limits of physical endurance to avoid asking why his wife, Janice, left him. Mackenzie works hard not to discover a new frontier, as the masculine myth would have it, but to avoid facing self and personal failure. He is unlike the historical Mackenzie, the super-human, mythological figure who haunts Canadian consciousness.

Van Herk's Mackenzie also has a significantly different relationship to the land than did the historical Mackenzie. As noted above, in his journals Mackenzie avoids descriptions of landscape. In The Tent Peg van Herk foregrounds Mackenzie's relationship to the wilderness as he identifies with the North and finds in it a metaphor for his inner self. It is a place which he becomes part of; which he internalizes. As he enters the North, he claims:

Nothing but tundra and lakes, lakes and tundra. Once you're out there, in amongst the moss and the occasional outcrop, you melt right down into the barrens. Not a dot of anyone anywhere. And I like it that way (TTP, 10).

Furthermore, van Herk accentuates the ambiguity with which Mackenzie faces the North. In one entry, where he describes the setting up of the camp, he notes the "shrill, keen of the wind" (TTP, 42). A few paragraphs later in the same entry he disregards his complaint: "Now it feels as if we are here, that chill wind doesn't matter a damn, the summer has started" (TTP, 43).

Van Herk also focuses on the fictional relationship between Mackenzie and Thompson.¹⁷ In Alexander Mackenzie's journal there is little mention of the people who travelled with him. In The Tent Peg there is a strong and sensitive relationship between Thompson, a crew member, and Mackenzie, his boss. Thompson's sense of wonder and awe at the Northern landscape is shared by Mackenzie. The following is

Mackenzie's only direct recognition of the value of Thompson's friendship:

...but I wish I was sharing with Thompson. He too will be lying awake this first night, staring up into the darkness, hearing the mountain shift. And both of us lying like this, flat on our backs, we would talk softly, let the insufficient words fall between us. He is really too old to be my son, but he feels something like family to me. These last three summers together we've been excited by the same things, driven by the same urge. Yet he doesn't dig or pry, doesn't investigate my life (TTP, 61).

Van Herk allows her two characters to share in a boyish celebration of the North. The historical journals of Thompson and Mackenzie offer two differing accounts of Vermilion Falls.¹⁸ In The Tent Peg van Herk creates a similar falls and permits her Thompson and Mackenzie to share it with each other. Their reaction rewrites the images of the serious, fur-clad explorers of the history books, who trod through the North with frozen exteriors, exchanging only words of necessity. In The Tent Peg Mackenzie and Thompson partake of a joyous celebration of the falls:

And suddenly we were wild, madmen, rolling boulders down in some aberrant bowling game that scores nothing but mist and spray and dull thunder, that cannot tear the sheet of water the gash in the rock holds in front of itself (TTP, 197).

It is this spirit of joyous affirmation which van Herk attempts to capture in The Tent Peg. Her characters

celebrate the North, unlike the majority of historical explorers who merely documented it.

Although the intertextual relationship which is established with the journals of the Northern explorers is more general than specific, the reader is encouraged to compare van Herk's celebration and feminization of the North to the explorers' fear and distrust of it. Van Herk allows her characters to feel the spirit of the North and to redefine it through their confessional and subjective journal entries. Through first-person narration, the journal as documentary form becomes the journal as descriptive and confessional form. In The Tent Peg journal entries are made by thirteen different characters. This juxtaposition of various entries sabotages the univocal narrative of the journal form and allows the text to become multi-voiced. Heterogeneity and heteroglossia prevail in The Tent Peg as van Herk pluralizes the reactions to the North by creating very different male characters with differing perspectives. The presentation of their journal entries juxtaposes their perspectives and emphasize subjectivity in interpretation. Also, van Herk concentrates on the role which sexual difference plays in interpretation and further sabotages the documentary journal form.

In a conversation with Thompson, J.L. makes a postmodern, hermeneutical claim. The following quotation

can serve as a summary of the philosophical implications of the form and content of this novel:

"Knowing won't make any difference at all, because you can only know something the first second you realize you know it, and after that the knowing is only a memory of knowing. Things change" (158).

How we know and what we believe we know is challenged in The Tent Peg. The novel continuously challenges the reader to reexamine assumptions about the interpretation and the acceptance of traditional philosophies.

The Tent Peg immediately questions the metaphysics of knowing by opening with J.L.'s and Mackenzie's accounts of the same incident. Both describe the first helicopter trip out on the tundra. Neither account contradicts the other, though J.L.'s report is significantly shorter than Mackenzie's. The reader notes J.L.'s first impressions of Mackenzie and Mackenzie's impressions of J.L.. What the characters focus on in their narratives reveals their biases. J.L. describes the tundra and Mackenzie's eccentricity while Mackenzie describes the tundra and J.L.'s eccentricity. For example, J.L. comments on Mackenzie's reception in the hotel lobby: "...I follow his green jockey shorts through the startled faces in the lobby and up the stairs to the room" (9). Meanwhile, Mackenzie virtually ignores his own eccentricity and prefers instead to comment upon J.L.: "And he does seem odd, something that I can't quite put my finger on in his silence" (14). Both accounts

are consistent in their description of the episode where Mackenzie falls into the water. This recurrence of narrative incident provides a repetitious pattern which continues throughout the novel.

Another similar example of the repetition of narrative incident is those entries which describe Mackenzie's discovery of J.L.'s womanhood. Both J.L. and Mackenzie recount the episode in the bathroom where Mackenzie's awakening takes place. Again, differing vantage points are privileged. Mackenzie notices the way J.L. looks at his penis:

The toilet flushes and he comes out of the cubicle and stands beside me and stares at my cock singing piss against the enamel. Now, there's one thing. It's bad manners to stare (20).

J.L. recounts the same incident from her own perspective: "He has a nice cock too, I can see, shapely, not long, a neat circumcision" (37). Zeke also gives his account of the aftermath when Mackenzie and J.L. storm out of the bathroom.¹⁹ It is interesting to note that J.L.'s entry, which is placed right after Mackenzie's account of the incident, does not refer to Mackenzie's discovery at all. Rather, it is a flashback to J.L.'s original decision to work as a cook. Mackenzie's and Zeke's accounts are placed side by side but other entries intrude before J.L.'s perspective is credited. J.L.'s account of Mackenzie's discovery does not occur until eighteen pages later, after Mackenzie's

second entry (30). While the actual content of J.L.'s, Mackenzie's and Zeke's entries does not differ significantly, a major incident is undermined here as the accounts of it are dispersed throughout the narrative. Therefore, from the beginning of the novel the reader is discouraged from looking for climactic and neatly placed accounts.

An excellent example of how van Herk avoids climax by disrupting narrative continuity is found in her treatment of the sexual encounter between Mackenzie and J.L.²⁰ This scene could function as a climax to a linear novel as the relationship between J.L. and Mackenzie has been explored progressively throughout the novel. However, here it is first recounted through the eyes of Milton, taking away the advantage of a first-hand account. Milton vocalizes the reader's sentiments when he claims:

But I expect more, I expect he will do something else to her. He doesn't, he only goes on turning her between his hands, turning her this way and that as if he is discovering in her shape something new for himself (212).

The next entry, which is Mackenzie's account, is vague and introverted:

And then she holds me, we hold each other in a great groaning circle of a kiss that wheels and tumbles and transfixes us, that leaves us empty and replete and completely overtaken (213).

J.L.'s interpretation of the incident is metaphysical and philosophical rather than concrete:

The feel of his rough hands in my skin,
turning my body between his palms so gently
as to wake me from the longest sleep, a song
of praise unlike any other, a promise of
hope, an invitation to the perfect years of
peace (214).

The reader gets a well-rounded perspective of what has occurred and the entries are not contradictory. The reader is not allowed a detailed, physical description of the sexual act. Here, the "real" action is expressed in terms of the poetic "different". The voyeur, as well as the participants, oversee this transformation.

Other examples of narrative repetition further reveal that reiteration not only disrupts narrative continuity and credits various perspectives, but also encourages the reader to participate in the text. The rendering of the joke which is played on Jerome provides such an example. The first reference to the joke is in J.L.'s entry as J.L. informs the reader "I almost chuckle out loud. I've got an idea" (139). The incident is further unfolded through the accounts of Thompson (140-141), Jerome (142-143), Mackenzie (144-146) and Hearne (147). The reader learns a little more from each entry. Thompson's entry informs the reader that the joke will be a collective effort as he claims "she [J.L.] is setting up everyone in the camp" (140). Jerome's entry recounts the actual playing out of the joke from Jerome's

perspective. Mackenzie and Hearne describe the aftermath. Both focus on Jerome's anger and Hearne reassures the reader that Jerome's face "would make a hilarious photo-essay" (147). Here the narrative continuously unfolds through various accounts which, when taken together, relate a complete incident. Each entry serves as a partial account and captures the reader's attention. Suspense is satisfied when the entries are read together. Thus, in The Tent Peg narrative continuity co-exists with narrative disruption. Continuity encourages the reader to participate, while disruption warns the reader not to expect a progressive, cumulative effect which leads to climax and resolution.

Narrative recapitulation in The Tent Peg does not always disclose differing perspectives. However, when perspectives are contrasted sexual difference in interpretation is usually stressed. Entries crediting J.L.'s perspective are sometimes opposed to those of one of the male characters, particularly Jerome. The narrative focuses on the varying roles which the characters play, depending upon their gender. Such difference is especially reinforced through the entries describing Jerome's physical attack on J.L.. The incident is recounted from Jerome's, J.L.'s and Mackenzie's perspectives. The attempted rape is ironically rendered in a way similar to the joke which J.L. plays on Jerome, as described above. Like the joke, the attempted rape unfolds through the continuous narrative of a

number of entries. Jerome initiates the action and lets the reader know something is about to happen. He claims: "The little bitch needs to be taught a lesson and I guess I'm the only one with balls enough to do it" (218). J.L. accounts the actual incident, including her vulnerability and fear:

When I'm almost out and half lying on top of the sleeping bag, he fumbles at his pants. In a wild moment of lucidity I almost laugh at his ineptness" (219).

Mackenzie recounts the aftermath of the attempted rape and his role as comforter: "I hold her in my arms and rock her, hold her and tell her over and over and over again, I'm sorry, I'm sorry" (222). Thus, the structure of this incident is similar to that of the joke which is initiated by J.L. In both cases the reader participates. The actual acting out of J.L.'s joke is accounted by Jerome, as victim, and the acting of Jerome's "joke" is described by J.L., as victim. The aftermaths of both incidents are depicted by Mackenzie. The similar structures of the two occurrences serve to emphasize sexual difference. J.L. seeks her revenge on Jerome through play; a joke which does not harm anyone. Jerome seeks his revenge on J.L. through sexual violence, which he believes will reestablish his position of power. The joke is paralleled to the sexual attack to emphasize the differences in male and female reactions to feelings of powerlessness and anger. Jerome's attack stresses J.L.'s vulnerability in the face of man's

aggression- verbal and physical. Man is presented as aggressor and woman as defender against this aggression.

The role which sexual difference plays in various narrative perspectives serves as an entry point into a major tension in The Tent Peg between the real and the mythic. As in Judith, this tension dominates the content of the novel. However, in Judith van Herk concentrates more on the psychological development of her protagonist while in The Tent Peg she focuses on how J.L. as character is transformed into the mythological Jael. The psychological development of J.L. is not disregarded though more attention is paid to J.L. as mythological figure. J.L. functions as a means by which sexual difference is celebrated and the social construction of gender roles examined. By highlighting the evolution of the male characters as well as the transformation of J.L., the novel scrutinizes how both masculine and feminine gender constructions are generated. The male characters come to a very human comprehension of the nature of heterosexual relationships and J.L., mediator of the feminine, serves as their guide. The feminine, Northern wilderness functions as an essential factor guiding the growth of all the characters in The Tent Peg. This wilderness also plays an important role in the establishment of sexual difference.

The Tent Peg not only establishes intertextuality with the historical journals of Northern explorers, but also

places itself firmly in the tradition of women's wilderness literature. In The Tent Peg the wilderness is identified as a silent and feminine space. In the introduction to her book Private and Fictional Words, Coral Ann Howells notes that for Canadian women writers the wilderness serves as a symbolic space where their characters explore sexual difference.²¹ It is often a space where the protagonist escapes to; a place of refuge where the protagonist longs for a "rehabilitation of the feminine" (Howells, 18). Howells refers to Marian Engel's Bear and Margaret Atwood's Surfacing to explicate her theory of women's wilderness literature and claims that in both novels "self-transformation occurs within myths and legends of landscape" (Howells, 30). In "Desire in Fiction: De-siring Realism" van Herk also refers directly to Marian Engel's Bear. She uses the example of the character Lou in this novel to show how both this character's personal growth as well as her "marvellously fantastic" transformation are illuminated (36). These insights into Bear as well as Howells's brief theoretical commentary on wilderness literature can be applied to van Herk's work, especially The Tent Peg. Like Lou, J.L. serves the multiple functions of mythological figure and fictional character.²² For J.L. the wilderness becomes a symbol of a feminized inner space where the feminine is rehabilitated and celebrated. Certainly sexual difference is celebrated in The Tent Peg. This

celebration of sexual difference allows J.L. to obtain mythic status. Yet, she also retains her position as a character who develops and changes as the novel progresses. She achieves the status of mythological figure and simultaneously retains her position as a psychologically developed fictional construct. While J.L. is originally presented as an androgynous figure whose sexual identity is mistaken by Mackenzie, she is later transformed into a sensuous goddess who evokes the wilderness and shares its spirit. Van Herk, like Engel and Atwood, uses the wilderness to celebrate the feminine. She resurrects the feminine and rewrites it into the landscape of the North. She offers a world "that is possible rather than probable" (Aritha van Herk and Diana Palting, "Marian Engel: Kitchen Sink Realism", 12).²³

As wilderness literature, The Tent Peg also confronts another issue of concern to this tradition - the question of self and community. Heather Murray explores the relationship between self and community in "Women in the Wilderness". She redefines the old dichotomy of nature versus culture and replaces it with a continuum of wilderness/ pseudo-wilderness/ city.²⁴ Murray claims that in novels such as Bear and Surfacing, or even in Ethel Wilson's The Swamp Angel, the "pseudo-wilderness" is the site of a tenuous community and it looks both to the city and to the wilderness (Murray, 76). Woman is not attached exclusively

to either nature or culture as in the traditional dichotomy. She is mediator between the city and the wilderness. She is positioned in the "pseudo-wilderness" which "functions as a site for women and women's fiction" (Murray, 77). This process, which Murray illustrates through the example of Maggie Lloyd in The Swamp Angel, is also evident in The Tent Peg. Here J.L. serves as a mediator between the wilderness and the outside worlds from which the men come.²⁵ The "pseudo-wilderness" in The Tent Peg is the community formed by the male characters, of which J.L. is the centre. As mediator between wilderness and city, J.L. struggles with the silence of the wilderness and the language of the male myths which define her. Her function as mediator is at least a dual one. She serves as a mediator between the men and the wilderness as well as a mediator between the men and their lives outside the camp. J.L. connects the men to the wilderness and helps them to understand their own lives. The reader witnesses the transformations of both J.L. and the male characters as the wilderness communicates through J.L. and changes all of them.

As a "real" character and simultaneous mediator between the wilderness, city and the men, J.L. is unsure of her status. J.L. undergoes a personal transformation which, like Judith's, is both physical and spiritual. For example, at the beginning of the text J.L. is a woman masquerading as a boy. She is an androgynous figure with short hair. The

men later project the roles of priestess and prophetess onto her. Finally she transforms herself by putting on her "gypsy skirt" (225) and playing the role of a gypsy dancer. J.L.'s dance is a celebration of the feminine which is embodied in the mysterious Northern wilderness. J.L. allows herself to celebrate the mythological status which has been credited to her as she claims:

For a moment I can pretend I am Deborah
celebrating myself, victory, peace regained
(226).

J.L.'s spiritual metamorphosis is significantly more complicated than her physical transformation. As a character she is transformed from a sexist to a feminist.²⁶ Again, her change is quite similar to those changes which Judith undergoes as she progresses toward a feminist awareness. However, as has been noted in the previous chapter, Judith progresses more toward sexism than feminism. The Tent Peg does not suffer from the same limitations. Instead it actively explores the differences between sexism and feminism through the character of J.L.

At the beginning of the text J.L. does not want to be part of the male community, let alone its mediator. She goes to the North to escape role-playing. As a graduate student in the city, she has had numerous failed relationships with men. She hopes to escape this kind of life by fleeing to the North:

We all hide here, see each other every day,
stick up for each other in seminars, screw

each other after class, graduate students a
la -. It makes me sick (24).

She sees all the men of her past as a collective and
homogeneous male-hood:

I have sometimes thought that I should make
a list of all the men who have made love to
me, who have labored over me in some
predestined effort to arouse beyond all
others. Although I could make a list of
details, I could never range their faces
side by side. There is no clear face, only
shapes of faces that transform themselves to
shadows when I peer more closely (149).

Van Herk characterises J.L.'s sexism by permitting her to
turn men into headless lovers as men have so often done to
women. When the camp is first established, the men there
seem the same as all the other men J.L. has known. J.L.
refers to the men as a collective "they". Van Herk directly
quotes the passage below in "Women Writers and the Prairie:
Spies in an Indifferent Landscape" as an example of how
women writers can "mythologize the same men who have muse-
mythologized women" (127):

And yet when I look at their faces down
either side of this rough table, I see the
same faces I have always seen, the same men
I have always known. Bearded or clean-
shaven, angular or smooth, they are after
all only men (57).

If the novel was to remain at this level it would fall prey
to the same limitations as Judith and the early short story
"A Minor Loss". It would move toward sexism and
universality rather than ambiguity. In the "Women Writers
and the Prairie: Spies in an Indifferent Landscape" van Herk

also notes that by reversing this kind of mythology, as J.L. does here, "It never turns out the way it is supposed to" (128). Certainly J.L.'s observations in this particular scene are overtly sexist rather than productively feminist. However, the novel progresses beyond this and the men take on unique characteristics. In other words, they become psychologically developed characters rather than just functional stereotypes. The male characters are given their own voices as they speak through their individual journal entries.

As time passes J.L. begins to see the men in her "pseudo-wilderness" community as distinct entities. Gradually the men appear as individuals to J.L.. They do not remain as an integrated male-hood. In one of her entries J.L. goes through the entire cast of characters, pointing out their strengths and weaknesses. She claims:

They're finally coming clear to me. At first they were just a mass, a clot of men, all of them watching me, pulling at me, indistinguishable. But now they're separating into themselves, distinct male people (136).

Recognizing the men as "distinct male people" allows for heterogeneity. J.L. further progresses to an understanding that men, like women, are victims of the socialization patterns of their cultures. Men and women both try to live up to roles which society demands they play. When J.L. helps Mackenzie to understand why Janice left him, she

recognizes that he too is a victim. She claims: "All that socialization, all that pressure. Not your fault" (202).

J.L.'s understanding that both men and women are victims of the societal construction of gender roles elevates her from sexist to feminist. J.L. begins to realize that in order to institute change she has to work within the community rather than isolate herself from it. Her position as mediator elevates her to mythological status. As mediator she plays a dual role. She is an intermediary between the male characters and the wilderness and an arbitrator between the male characters and their lives outside the camp. It is this dual position which transforms J.L., the character, into Jael, the mythic presence.

J.L.'s relationship to the feminine North is not unambiguous. For example, her first reaction to the Northern wilderness is an enigmatic one. Initially she describes the tundra as "expressionless white" with a "fatal design" (7). However, in the same entry J.L. is also captivated by the silence of the North. It is this silence which allows her to enter the landscape as Judith entered the prairie in Judith. J.L. documents:

I stand beside the wing, feel in the sky and the land and the ice a coating of silence, thick and gelid. There is no sound here, no sight, no smell, nothing. Numb, I stamp, to feel the ice shudder imperceptibly under my booted foot (8).

The North here is silent but alive. As has been noted above, it is the quest for silence which has drawn J.L. to the wilderness in the first place. Significantly, this silence will also draw Arachne of No Fixed Address to the North as well. In a confessional entry J.L. identifies what she is looking for in this Northern space:

...all I wanted to find was silence, a relief from the cacophony of sound, of confession that surrounded, that always impinged on me. I didn't want their secrets, my ear not receptacle enough for ordinary words, let alone confession. I do not practice absolution. Indeed, I have my own fear and my own doubt and my own confession to make, if there were anyone to listen (57).

This passage identifies two of the major aspects of J.L.'s role as mediator. First of all, what J.L. finds is not refuge or silence. As listener to the men J.L. comes to know herself as well as the wilderness. Secondly, Rosalind Coward's claim that "we [women] must understand the messages of others but we cannot expect to be understood ourselves"²⁷ seems to appropriately describe J.L.'s position as listener. J.L. tries to understand the male characters as individuals but they never really come to understand her as a person. To them, except for Mackenzie perhaps, she remains a generic female.

The male characters establish J.L. as a mythological construct largely because of her role as mediator between the "pseudo-wilderness" and the wilderness. Through the

manipulation of three powerful symbols, van Herk allows J.L. to undergo this transformation. The bear, the moss and the rock-slide serve to represent the spirit of the wilderness and J.L's connection with it. J.L speaks to the bear and learns from her. She also collects the moss and later shares it with the men. She celebrates the landslide as the North speaks to her, excluding the men. All of these symbols possess a feminine spirit which is shared with J.L .

The appearance of the bear in The Tent Peg is no surprise.²⁸ In "Affairs with Bears" Annis Pratt claims the bear as a spiritual entity through which women writers celebrate female eroticism. Pratt claims:

Young girls and bears, like young girls and horses, occur throughout women's archetypal history as mutually empowering forces; they experience an exchange of being which is both protective and transformational. As long as the girls emulate their goddess and remain outside the boundaries of culture they will be able to enjoy natural freedom.²⁹

The bear in The Tent Peg does transform J.L. and indeed possesses a mysterious feminine spirit outside "culture". However, J.L's relationship to the bear is not thoroughly developed and at times the incidents involving the bear are awkwardly described by van Herk.

The bear first appears as an immense and incredible being, reaching up to the sky to tear down the helicopter (95). The bear, as embodiment of the female wilderness, retaliates against her invaders who are coming in to "lay"

her. The next appearance of the bear comprises one of the weakest, yet most ambiguous, entries in the novel as J.L. accounts a rather insipid conversation with the she-creature:

I knew her. She came to me in the she-bear. She came to me and she reared herself up big and beautiful and wild and strong and she said, "Wait. Don't let them drive you away".
 I clench my fists. "I'm tired, I'm so tired".
 "Just stay", she says.
 But one wants to murder me and one wants to fuck me and one wants to take pictures of me, and what are the others going to want? I thought it would be different out here".
 "You thought you'd leave all that behind? There isn't a place in the world without it. You can try to escape but it's better to face it head on".
 "I'm ready to give up, lay them all one after the other, let them do what they like with me".
 "That won't help".
 "Who cares? What am I, some kind of sacrifice?"
 "We all are", she says, "We all are already".
 And then she's gone with the two squealing cubs tumbling behind her. Leaving with me her smell, her invocation, the power of her long, curved claws (111).

This bear, while supposedly mythic and archetypal, speaks in a rather colloquial tongue as she offers J.L. encouragement. However, her advice that "we" are all sacrifices of one kind or another suggests another layer to the text.

I.S. MacLaren has offered a reading of this scene in his biocritical essay on van Herk. MacLaren concludes that the "we" refers not to women in particular, but to humankind

in general (xxv). For MacLaren the sacrifice is the Christian sacrifice of self to God (xxv). However, there are two reasons why it is more justified to ascertain that the bear is representative of women and speaks specifically as a feminine spirit. First, the bear is a common archetype found in Canadian fiction written by women, as noted above. By applying Pratt's theory, one can read the bear as a feminine force which empowers and encourages J.L. who has no one else to listen to her fears. The bear is outside the community and represents the "natural freedom"³⁰ of the North. Secondly, the bear is directly connected to Deborah, the embodiment of the feminine spirit and metaphor for the feminist artist.³¹ The third-person pronoun "she", which is used to introduce the bear, is also used to introduce Deborah in a scene which directly follows the one quoted above:

The first time I saw her she was singing. She had on an orange shirt, I remember that flagrant color. She held a tribal drum between her knees and she was singing with only her fingers on the drum to accompany her. It was very strange and very beautiful (111).

The first line of the previous entry "She came to me in the she-bear" (111) can be read as "Deborah came to me in the she-bear". Thus, Deborah who is depicted as a mysterious, feminine spirit throughout the novel is equated to the bear. Although Deborah will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, it is interesting to note that "she" refers to

Deborah, the bear and the wilderness. All possess and are representative of the "essential feminine". Therefore, it is possible to assume, contrary to MacLaren, that the bear is female and represents the feminine spirit of the North. Within this context the bear's advice can be interpreted.

What do "we" [women] sacrifice ourselves for?

Tradition? The "we" here can be read as woman and more particularly as the feminist artist who works within a tradition and attempts to subvert it at the same time. J.L. works within the "pseudo-wilderness" community of men, playing the traditional role of cook and confidante. She must work inside the community to lodge her tent peg of awareness in the men's skulls.³² Women, in general, must work within the community to change sexual stereotyping and raise the consciousness of the men. Deborah, as artist, plays her part of performer who must put up with admiring males in order to re-sing women's songs and celebrate the feminine. The woman writer must work within literary conventions in order to accomplish a "re-educating of the literary imagination".³³ Sacrifice must be made by women who are mediators in the "pseudo-wilderness".³⁴ Read in this way, the weak conversation between J.L. and the bear can be interpreted more productively as metafictional commentary. This reading can also explain the final appearance of the bear near the conclusion of the text. After J.L. has participated in the staking of the gold mines, the bear

appears as a "ragged omen" (209). It is as if the bear's warning has materialized and she reappears to reinforce her message. J.L. has sacrificed her relationship to the wilderness as free, feminine space in order to become part of the men's social community. As mediator of this community she is caught in the middle of the wilderness and the "pseudo-wilderness" community. She has to sacrifice one for the other. The metafictional implications of this position will be discussed more thoroughly towards the conclusion of this chapter.

The moss is another physical manifestation of the spirit of the North which is shared with J.L.. Throughout the text various male characters note that J.L. is collecting something which to them is invisible. Ivan first arouses the reader's curiosity:

Sometimes if it's nice she vanishes for an afternoon. Like she needs to be alone. Once, flying out to pick up the early crew, I saw her far up the valley toward the base of the mountain. She was stooped over, looking at the ground. Then she straightened up and put something in a little bag. Queer. Must have been collecting rocks (93).

A few entries later Thompson also wonders about J.L.'s strange behaviour:

I can't understand what she does out there. We're working away on the scintillometer grid and I see her orange rain suit moving up the cirque. She walks along light and easy, and when she gets to the point where the mountain starts to slope upward more steeply she stops, gets down on her knees

and starts digging in the ground. After a moment she gets up and walks a few paces, then kneels again. Interesting. What is she doing out there, digging around? Maybe she's bushed already (100).

J.L., of course, is collecting the moss which the men never notice. The smell of the moss lingers throughout various entries though it is never identified. Hudson vocalizes the relationship of the men to the small wonders of the North:

There's a faint smell of spice in here, a smell I sometimes catch when I'm walking, trudging behind Jerome, but of course I never have time to stop and find out what it is, what kind of plant or flower it comes from (169-170).

The reader is thoroughly seduced and does not realize until the concluding pages of the text that the smell comes from the moss which J.L. has been gathering. She sews the moss into sachets and gives them to the men as presents. In this way, she brings to them the wilderness which they have been too busy to discover because of their games of staking and "laying". It is Franklin who appreciates J.L.'s gift:

So that's what she was doing, gathering moss and sewing it into sachets, capturing the smell of the tundra for us. She went around and left them in our belongings like a token, a pungent memory. The smell of her there, between my dirty socks and underwear, makes me see that in something so small, so pure, there is perfection (224).

It is ironic that Franklin, the poet, does not recognize the moss until it has been given to him as a present. Even the male poet is blind to the feminine spirit of the North. He

is reminded by J.L., the mediator, that it exists even in the littlest things.

The third symbol which connects J.L. to the Northern wilderness is the powerful rock-slide. The slide reminds the reader and J.L. that the wilderness is strong and potentially destructive as well as beautiful. The entire scene moves beyond realistic depiction as J.L. faces the rock-slide in terror and awe. The descriptive and evocative scenes, which often seem awkward in the short fiction, here are polished and refined:

The sound seems to fade but then it's joined by the smaller chinks and spatters of stones, a trickle that gradually cascades to a small stream gathering earth and shale and rocks, begins to sing, to surge, to roar, and finally to rumble, to thunder immense and savage, tearing pieces of the mountain's granite with it, boulders tumbling over themselves in heavy consternation, the whole slide of the mountain caught in a torrent of itself, sliding in heavy loss down its own flank (121).

Here realistic episode is transformed into the postmodern "different". The rock slide doesn't remain as "the descent of a mass of earth or rock down a hill or mountainside" as Mackenzie's definition assures him (122). Instead it is the voice of the wilderness as communicated to J.L.. This voice is beyond language; it is intuitive. For example, J.L. wakes not because of a noise, but because of a feeling:

I felt the mountain rumble, I felt it stir and I was instantly awake, listening with every bone arched. Silence, perfect silence, taciturn and patient (120).

This silence moves J.L. to the mountain where the wilderness communicates her power and strength. The language of the mountain is exclusively for J.L. as the men do not hear it. This celebration of the feminine landscape is reserved for women only because, as J.L. claims, the male characters are: "Men with no ears, men with no connection to the earth" (121).

As mediator J.L. tries to communicate her experience to the men, though she does not thoroughly understand what has occurred herself. Mackenzie feels angry with himself because he does not hear the rock-slide. His definition, as noted above, does not explain this particular phenomena. When J.L. admits her fear to Mackenzie, he begins to see her as a person rather than a generic female. However, Cap, in contrast to Mackenzie, uses the incident to further mythologize J.L. into a witch figure:

She's a witch, I swear. I should leave
her well enough alone, if I'm not careful
she'll hex me. Even so, I would like to get
her clothes off...
How does it feel to screw a witch? (125)

Thus, the symbol of the landslide serves to illuminate the nature of J.L.'s duplicitous position. She is humanized through Mackenzie's perspective and further mythologized through Cap's perspective. She remains both a mythic presence and a flesh and blood character.

Through the bear, the moss and the rock-slide, the reader witnesses J.L.'s personal transformation from

character to mythic figure much in the way she witnesses Judith's and Arachne's metamorphoses in van Herk's other two novels. This connection between J.L. and the wilderness has largely been misunderstood by van Herk's readers. For example, when R.P. Bilan attempts to discern a "theme" he claims that The Tent Peg is abundant in "stereotyped assumptions about women's intuitiveness, natural grace and instinctive communion with the universe".³⁵ He fails to recognize that this celebration and rehabilitation of the feminine is not only a celebration of J.L. as a woman, but a celebration of a wilderness which has been feminized and thus rewritten. This is not a wilderness that can be avoided but must be confronted in order to know self. Barbara Godard, in a generally more sympathetic review, claims that van Herk develops the theme of woman as land; J.L. as land.³⁶ If one accepts this interpretation then one accepts the nature/ civilization dichotomy.³⁷ J.L., however, is not the land but mediator between the land and the community. This relationship transforms both J.L. and the male characters. History becomes her-story; the story of the feminized wilderness. J.L. is raised to mythic proportions while, at the same time, clinging to her status as a "real" character.

This tension between the "real" and the mythic plays an important part in the social construction of the mythologies surrounding gender roles. As mediator between the men and

the wilderness and the men and their lives outside the wilderness, J.L. is responsible for making them aware of the social construction of gender. Through the guidance of J.L. each man, excluding Jerome,³⁸ resolve conflicts within himself. These conflicts involve coming to an understanding about the roles which society demands men play. J.L., as mediator, allows the male characters to recognize and partially reject these roles. The development of the male characters varies. The men are not presented as a homogeneous group but as individuals who come to different realizations. However, there are some similarities in their discoveries. Cap and Ivan, for example, both learn to reject masculine stereotypes which their society has constructed for them. Both Thompson and Mackenzie learn to question their assumptions about the relationship between marriage and ownership. Generally, as the men reject masculine constructions and challenge traditional notions about heterosexual relationships, they also begin to mythologize J.L..

Cap and Ivan reject masculine roles and simultaneously hail J.L. as a mythic figure. Cap realizes that male and female self-worth are not necessarily measured by sexual performance. When he shares the shower with J.L. he forgets about making love and weeps instead. He learns to question the traditional correlation between masculinity and sexual

performance and presents J.L. as a priestess who has purified him:

And then she does the funniest thing. I'm bent over, ashamed, picking up my pants, and she lays her hand on my head, like a blessing. I remember the priest doing that when I was little. She just rests her hand on my head and says nothing, looks at me so warm and gentle I'm suddenly calm, washed clean, complete (193).

To Cap, J.L. is no longer a witch (125) but a priestess who cleanses and purifies. He is free of the socially constructed role of man as sex-machine but he projects another socially constructed role onto J.L.. Ivan undergoes a similar process as he learns to express his fear of death and to overcome the macho reserve which is demanded by society. Ivan admits his fears to J.L. who, again, appears as a healer. Ivan has blind faith in her. Like Cap he rejects a masculine role and simultaneously projects a feminine stereotype onto J.L.. To Ivan J.L. is a prophetess who intuitively reads the future:

"Ivan", she says softly and her voice over the headphones comes from another country, "you won't get killed flying. You'll die in bed. I promise". And I believe her. Maybe it's irrational, but I believe her (187).

It is ironic that while Ivan and Cap struggle to free themselves from stereotyping, they project restrictive female mythologies onto J.L., constructing her as priestess and prophetess.³⁹

It is through Thompson and Mackenzie that The Tent Peg makes its most extensive commentary on the social construction of sexual stereotyping. Both of these men have narrow attitudes toward women and their relationships with women. They both have fallen prey to societal mythologies. J.L. forces them to question their assumptions and reevaluate their judgements. J.L. serves as an arbitrator between Thompson and his lover, Katie and Mackenzie and his wife, Janice.

Thompson posits that "women are these hidden, inexplicable people" (156). This mythology, which both Thompson and Mackenzie have accepted, further claims that as mysterious beings women must be owned through marriage in order to keep them loyal. Thompson believes that by marrying the beautiful Katie she will "belong" to him (158). J.L. forces Thompson to reexamine this assumption that one person can ever belong to anyone else. She attempts to deconstruct the patriarchal notion that a married woman is a man's property. J.L. claims: "Thompson, I know you won't believe me, but you could marry her a hundred times and she would never belong to you" (158). Thompson is forced to reexamine his chauvinistic assumption and to accept the temporality of life and love. Although his awareness regarding his relationship to Katie is raised, he, like Cap and Ivan, further mythologizes J.L.. In his next entry he also identifies J.L. as a mysterious priestess:

Strange how after I told her everything about Katie and me I feel relieved, emptied out. She treats me just like before, doesn't mention it again. I like her better everyday. She's the kind of person that you want to stay watching, moving like a silver fish between us, all we men trailing in her wake (165).

Mackenzie's understanding regarding his relationship with his wife is probably the most complicated of the various realizations reached by the male constructs in the novel. Significantly, Mackenzie is the most psychologically developed male character.⁴⁰ Like Thompson, he creates an aura of mystery around women. He also directly equates this mythology to J.L.:

Because women are so mysterious, so blind and inward and silent, so tuned to vibrations that we have never been able to hear. They turn in faultless circles, they move like vases forming, always changing but always perfect. And even J.L., slight and angular as she is, has the fluidity, the deep swirling motion of water (145).

Also, like Thompson, Mackenzie's realization makes him reevaluate his assumptions about the woman in his life, his wife, Janice. Mackenzie believes that marriage denotes ownership. J.L. helps him comprehend that he has no right to believe that he can control Janice's life. J.L. claims:

"That's it right there. The very idea that you could allow her or prevent her. That's why she left" (202).

Mackenzie feels shame at his self-centredness. He is assured by J.L. that this shame is the first step toward redemption. Like the other men, Mackenzie has reached a

higher understanding of heterosexual relationships through J.L.. Unlike the others, he manages to see J.L. as an ordinary human being as well as a mythic figure. For example, in the same entry he first sees her as "a small woman who is holding one of my hands in both of hers" (203). However, at the same time he also claims her as his redeemer:

The irises of her eyes could widen indefinitely to enclose me. If I could become a figure inside those bottomless pupils I would be saved, redeemed (203).

J.L. is both redeemer and woman to Mackenzie. As a woman J.L. teaches him how to appreciate feminine beauty. Mackenzie worships J.L.'s body and transforms her into a statue:

She turned herself inside my hands, with each movement the porcelain clarity of her skin more luminous, as if my hands could ignite a light within her (213).

In this way he saves the memory that will never allow him to take for granted "the way a woman feels" (213). He learns to appreciate feminine beauty without laying claims of ownership on it.

Mackenzie's final entry, which closes the text, reveals an awareness that the other men do not possess. Mackenzie knows that J.L. has affected him profoundly and that she has changed his perceptions of women in general. He also recognizes the roles which J.L. plays as a woman. He

watches J.L. celebrating herself as she dances to "an unheard music, that of tambourines and golden trumpets" (227). He sees J.L. as the mythological Jael and he compares himself to Sisera.⁴¹ Mackenzie also sees J.L. as an ordinary woman: "no longer the witch, the saint of fire, but our own J.L., flat and skinny as before" (227). To Mackenzie J.L. is both mythic presence and woman, while to the other men she remains primarily a mythological entity. Mackenzie's realization focuses on the roles which men construct for women, not only on his own life. His development is not merely egocentric as he insightfully notices how women play multiple parts at once.

The transformations in this novel are numerous. Through their names, van Herk's male characters recall historical, male personages. Thus, van Herk signals that she is offering an alternative to those accounts of the North which were offered by the explorers. The psychological development of her male characters focuses on heterosexual relationships and the social construction of gender. As a result, the mythological explorers of North are substituted with more humanized fictional counterparts. While male mythologies are demythologized, the female character, J.L., is further mythologized. As a conveyor of the "essential feminine" spirit of the wilderness, J.L. is granted mythological status outside realistic depiction. Also, the male characters mythologize her as they project societal

constructions onto her. Her status as character is maintained and her psychological development portrayed through her confessional journal entries. Yet, J.L. is more than character and mythological figure. She is also the metafictional representation of the feminist artist in society. She foreshadows the creation of Tip in "Waiting for the Rodeo" (1984) and Arachne in No Fixed Address (1986). As the artist, J.L. struggles in her decisions whether or not to join the community. This metafictional struggle is best reflected through the confessions which J.L. makes to her friend and mythological companion, Deborah.

The relationship between J.L. and Deborah is brilliantly crafted in The Tent Peg. It is much more developed than the relationship between Mina and Judith in Judith and is analogous to that of Arachne and Thana in No Fixed Address. The mythological significance of this relationship is apparent. In the Bible Deborah is a prophetess, leader and songstress who, through song, celebrates Jael for her heroic murder of the enemy, Sisera.⁴² Jael kills Sisera by driving a tent peg through his skull. Throughout the novel the tent peg becomes a metaphor for the feminist act of consciousness-raising. Each time one of the male characters reaches a realization there is a reference to a hammering in his skull to recall the image of the tent peg.⁴³ Both J.L. and Deborah celebrate this feminist victory through

Deborah's song which recalls the song from the Old Testament.⁴⁴ Here the mythological layer of this text becomes metafictional. A closer examination of the relationships between J.L. and Deborah and J.L. and Jerome illuminates this metafictional layer of The Tent Peg.

A number of J.L.'s entries directly refer to or address Deborah. Throughout the text Deborah is presented as a feminine spirit. For example, it is her voice which speaks through the she-bear (111).⁴⁵ Deborah's voice is her art and it is her artistic nature which initially attracts J.L.:

That voice could make shape of chaos, give
tongue to every inarticulated secret and
intuition. I loved her. At that moment I
wanted to abandon men forever (111).

Deborah, as artist, serves as a confidante to J.L. who is a metaphor for the feminist artist. J.L. too is a storyteller.⁴⁶ Both J.L. and Deborah, as tellers of women's stories, discuss the process of how the feminist artist selects what to write or sing:

"Women don't like my songs".
"You scare them".
"She sighs. "I don't mean to. I'm only
trying to sing what I feel".
"That's a sin. You're supposed to sing our
tradition and history and structure. The
cerebral".
"But singing is visceral".
"It used to be".
"To me it still is", she says fiercely.
"Sorrow or celebration, that's where it all
came from" (112-113).

Deborah encompasses the philosophy of the feminist artist who defies "tradition and history and structure" to sing

songs of sorrow and celebration. The Tent Peg, too, defies "tradition and history and structure". It reexamines traditional gender constructions, rewrites the popular images of the Canadian North and defies the univocal structure of the journal form. In its defiance it celebrates the rehabilitation of the feminine. Thus, the conversation quoted above is a self-reflexive comment upon The Tent Peg itself.

Two entries in particular which J.L. addresses to Deborah are metafictional commentaries on the conspiracy of feminist artists. In one entry J.L. complains that the men are forcing her to be part of their community and she questions whether or not she should allow herself to become part of this community. As has been noted earlier in this chapter, this struggle between self and community plays an important part in J.L.'s development from sexist to feminist. The conflict not only depicts J.L.'s development as a character, but also has metafictional implications.

J.L. notes:

Ah Deborah, it's started. They're coming to me one by one, pouring their pestilence into my ears, trying to rid themselves of the poison....They suck at me like quicksand but I have to listen. I know that if I repulse them, they may never speak again, they'll have lost their only opportunity to become men (172).

J.L. knows that the first step in changing the community is understanding it. Therefore, she must listen to the men in

order to change their assumptions. The feminist, too, must listen and understand before she can thoroughly challenge and subvert various power structures. In order to drive her tent peg J.L., and feminists in general, must work from within these structures. To the feminist artist this means working within established literary norms while simultaneously subverting the form and content of these conventions. J.L. notes:

I'm beginning to think that unless we take some action ourselves, it may never come. It's time we laid our hands on the workman's mallet and put the tent pegs to the sleeping temples, if ever we are going to get any rest (173).

This call to action is not a call for the sexist isolation of self from a supposed homogeneous male community. J.L.'s rhetorical plea is a call to awareness; a challenge to the conventions of a sleeping society. This is the position of the feminist artist who takes an active role in instigating change in a community in which she is both centralized and marginalized.

In the same entry J.L. also makes a comment which can be applied not only to The Tent Peg, but to all of van Herk's novels. J.L. recognizes that women's mythologies have been destroyed by patriarchal systems:

And women, we have no temples, they have been razed, the figures of our goddesses defaced, mutilated to resemble men, even Athena destroyed. Where do you worship when your temples are stolen, when your images are broken and erased, when there is only a pressure at the back of your brain to remind

you that we once had a place to worship.
 Now lost, leaderless, no mothers, no
 sisters, we wander and search for something
 we can have no memory of (172-173).

Van Herk reconstructs women's memories by recreating women's mythology. Each of her three novels attempts to reclaim women's stories. The feminist artist must rebuild what has been destroyed. J.L., as a teller of the tale of Zeus and Io, exemplifies how mythologies are reconstructed as she retells the story from Io's perspective.⁴⁷ Again the text becomes self-reflexive by highlighting one of the feminist objectives which it is working toward.

J.L.'s anger at the destruction of women's history and mythology elucidates the nature of the very real antagonism between Jerome and J.L. in the novel. The conflict exists in the surface plot as well as in the metafictional subtext. As a character Jerome is the embodiment of chauvinistic blindness. I.A. MacLaren notes that Jerome may be named after Saint Jerome (xxviii). Although MacLaren does not develop his hypothesis, his insightful remark can be utilized to further develop the metafictional layer of The Tent Peg. Read in this way the relationship between Jerome and J.L. takes on added significance. If Jerome is read as Saint Jerome, who in 1546 revised the Latin version of the Bible, then the connection becomes clear. Saint Jerome's version of the Bible, named the Vulgate, became the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church.

Institutionalized Christianity has certainly ignored women's biblical tradition. The reconstructed story of Jael and Deborah is part of this neglected mythology. Therefore, the chauvinistic Jerome of The Tent Peg becomes a metaphor for the patriarchy of institutionalized Christianity. J.L., as Jael, is a symbol of the women whose stories have been altered and hidden to serve the purposes of these patriarchal power structures. In The Tent Peg Jerome attempts to silence J.L. with rape as Saint Jerome, as representative of the religious institution, tried to silence female mythologies. However, in The Tent Peg woman is not silenced. She is the victor.

The emasculation of Jerome in the attempted rape scene can be read as the emasculation of mythology and the reclaiming and rewriting of women's mythologies. J.L., as the feminist artist, retaliates against institutions which brutalize her and refuse to even listen to her call for equal and peaceful relations between men and women:

She's holding that deadly pistol at a point directly between Jerome's legs where he lies writhing on the floor of the tent.
 "Just try to get up", she says. "Just try to get up, you bastard, and I'll blow your balls off. That's the only language you understand" (221).

Significantly, Jerome is the only character who remains unchanged in The Tent Peg. He does not understand the redemptive, feminine language of the wilderness as mediated through J.L.. As a human embodiment of institutional

chauvinism, he is emasculated but not destroyed. Thus, all is not happy in "Fort Chaos" (46). The feminist artist fights to change institutions which often remain deaf to her pleas. Politically and artistically the feminist remains isolated from the power structures which name, judge and define her. This isolation is often reflected in the critical reception of feminist works; those occasions when the power structure judges through academic institutions. In another entry addressed to Deborah J.L. recognizes how the feminist artist is judged:

All we need is the daring, the nerve. Of course, we'll be condemned for acting, we'll be forever traitors and bitches, have broken all the rules of hospitality, but we'll have gotten what we want. Peace. To hell with the historians and analysts. They always decide against us anyway (191).

"Historians" and "analysts" (critics) tend to neglect or misinterpret feminist works. That, of course, doesn't stop those with "daring" and "nerve". However, with history and contemporary popular opinion against the feminist artist, sabotage of accepted norms is not always appreciated. Here J.L. could just as well be referring specifically to the critical reception of van Herk's novels, including The Tent Peg.⁴⁸

As in van Herk's other novels, the feminist poetics of The Tent Peg is found in its questioning of which stories are told and how they are told. The effort to reclaim the North from those accounts offered by the explorers' journals

is coupled with the attempt to rewrite women's mythology. The act of telling reflects a distrust of univocal narrative and here, as in Judith, this narrative is sabotaged. Multi-voiced, repetitive discourse replaces the pragmatic and linear documentation of the journal form. The feminist story-teller, represented in The Tent Peg by J.L. and Deborah, hopes for an audience. In The Tent Peg the audience consists of all the male characters in the "pseudo-wilderness" community, though Mackenzie is the most promising listener. Certainly he is a more promising listener to feminist causes than is Jim in Judith. In The Tent Peg the reader is called upon to participate in the narrative, and like Mackenzie, is "seduced"⁴⁹ into the art of the novel's making.

As a way of temporarily exiting from The Tent Peg, it is probably justified to claim that it is the most politically radical of all of van Herk's novels. It rhetorically examines the differences between sexism and feminism and dispatches a feminist call to action. The feminist messages generated in this text are multiple and unresolved. Van Herk's feminist postmodern poetics continue to focus, as in Judith, on the rewriting of landscape, myth, history and narrative. In The Tent Peg, however, van Herk also celebrates an "essential feminine" which she encompasses both in the North and in Deborah. For van Herk this mysterious feminine, which is exclusively shared by

women, is mediated through J.L.. The celebration of this "essential feminine" may cause problems for some feminist critics. On the one hand, van Herk directly reaffirms humanist philosophy by celebrating the existence of an "essential feminine" as the quintessence of female identity.⁵⁰ On the other hand, by sabotaging the pragmatic and univocal journal form, van Herk also questions the humanist philosophy which is perpetuated through the traditional usage of this form.⁵¹ As a result, The Tent Peg remains open-ended and unresolved. It rejects but also inadvertently accepts the metaphysics of humanism. At times its feminism conspires with humanism while its hermeneutic philosophy rejects humanism. As Judith remains trapped in and simultaneously subverts the form of the realist novel, The Tent Peg both critiques and is imprisoned by humanist philosophy.⁵² In No Fixed Address the rejection of humanism and realism is more complete.

The metafictional layer of The Tent Peg rescues it as a feminist postmodern work. The novel avoids the sexism which permeates Judith as male characters remain specific rather than representative and universal. The metafictional sub-text allows van Herk to comment generally on the plight of the feminist postmodern without creating universal characters. The metafictional exploration of the multiplicity of the feminist artist continues in No Fixed Address. Van Herk's interest in narrative sabotage,

intertextuality and the reconstruction and rewriting of mythologies also persists. In No Fixed Address, however, intertextuality is much more developed and sustained.

Endnotes

1. Van Herk uses the term "male virgin" to describe how the literature of the west is abundant with male characters who fearfully blame their seduction and loss of innocence on females. The North can be referred to as such a kingdom as it is usually the male-authored mythologies of the North which are credited. Van Herk attempts to challenge this notion of the North in The Tent Peg. The title of this chapter takes its name from van Herk's article "A Gentle Circumcision".

2. The terms "essential feminine", "essential womanhood" or "essential femaleness" refer to the belief that there is an ahistorical, mysterious feminine principle at the heart of womanhood. Chris Weedon offers an excellent discussion of the notion of an "essential femaleness" or "essential feminine" at the heart of radical feminist philosophy. For example, she claims that radical feminists posit "an essential femaleness which women must seek to recapture beyond the structures of the patriarchal family" 17. For further discussion see Weedon, 80- 81. At times in The Tent Peg van Herk seems to propagate this concept of essentialism by assigning the North a feminine spirit.

3. The ambiguity of the political implications of the feminism in The Tent Peg will be discussed in greater detail throughout this chapter. For an excellent discussion on the complicity of radical feminist theory and humanism see Chris Weedon, 80-81.

4. Peter Newman, Company of Adventurers, vol. 1 (Markham, Ontario: Penguin Books, 1985) 35.

5. Marcia Kline, Beyond the Land Itself (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970) 42. Kline's rather narrow dialectic approach does not sufficiently deal with the multi-voiced ambiguity of responses to the Canadian wilderness. She claims that fear typifies the early reactions to the Canadian landscape. However, her theory is applicable to the colonial mentality of nature versus civilization as exemplified in van Herk's Hudson.

6. Aritha van Herk, The Tent Peg, (1981; New Canadian Library Edition, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart-Bantam Limited, 1987) 66. Because I am juxtaposing actual historical journals with van Herk's text, I will use the abbreviation TTP to refer to The Tent Peg in the first part of this chapter.

7. The reference to "laying" here is from Annette Kolodny's Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters (Chapel Hill : The University of North Carolina Press, 1975). Kolodny emphasizes the tendency of the American explorers and poets to view the land as a virgin waiting to be "laid" and exploited. Though Kolodny's text is not really translatable to the Canadian experience, it does characterize the attitude of van Herk's Hudson.

8. Samuel Hearne was an artist as well as an explorer. He painted the North as well as explored it.

9. John Franklin, Narrative of a Journey to the Polar Sea in the Years 1819-1822 (London: Dent and Sons, 1824) 117.

10. Samuel Hearne, A Journey From Prince of Wales's Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean 1769-1772 (First Published London: T. Cadell Junior, and W. Davies, 1795. Rpt. Toronto: MacMillan, 1958) 145.

11. Gaile McGregor, The Wacousta Syndrome: Explorations in Canadian Landscape (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985) 30.

12. Thompson's journals actually can be used to disqualify some of Kline's rather narrow observations on the nature/civilization dichotomy. Thompson's reaction to the wilderness is not one of terror but celebration. He also meticulously records native mythology and customs. See Travels in Western North America 1784-1812.

13. David Thompson, Travels in Western North America 1784-1812, ed. Victor G. Hopwood (Toronto: MacMillan, 1971) 297. This edition of Thompson's journals relies upon his unpublished manuscripts.

14. For an autobiographical sketch of Alexander Mackenzie see W. Kaye Lamb, introduction, The Journals and Letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie, Extra Series no.41, ed. W. Kaye Lamb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) 1-53. Lamb describes Mackenzie as a large, strong man whose "stamina and endurance were remarkable", 16.

15. Alexander Mackenzie, The Journals and Letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie, 238. This text includes the letters of Mackenzie as well as his journals which were originally published as Voyages From Montreal on the River St. Laurence, Through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans In the Years 1789 and 1793 (Edinburgh: T. Cadell Junior and W. Davies, 1801) .

16. Again refer to Annette Kolodny's Lay of the Land.

17. Historically, Mackenzie and Thompson never actually journeyed together. Mackenzie's explorations were from 1789- 1793 and Thompson's 1784- 1812.

18. These two accounts are quoted earlier in this chapter; first from Thompson's journal and second, from Mackenzie's journal.

19. See The Tent Peg, 21-22. This is Zeke's only journal entry in the text. He provides a perspective to which the reader can compare J.L.'s and Mackenzie's accounts.

20. Reingard M Nischik also notes the anti-climactic effect of this scene in "Narrative Technique in Aritha van Herk's Novels", 118.

21. Coral Ann Howells, Private and Fictional Words: Canadian Women Novelists of the 1970's and 1980's (London and New York: Methuen, 1987) 16.

22. J.L. also functions as a metaphor for the feminist artist. The metafictional layer of the text will be discussed later in this chapter. When applying Murray's theory to J.L., it is interesting to note that Murray claims the "pseudo wilderness" is descriptive of the position of the Canadian woman artist: "In its simultaneous centrality and marginalization, the situation of the woman author in Canada clearly displays the position of woman, within and without culture, within and without discourse" (82).

23. Van Herk is referring to Engel's Bear when she makes this statement which can easily be applied to her own novels.

24. Heather Murray, "Women in the Wilderness", A Mazing Space, eds. Shirley Neuman and Smaro Kamboureli (Edmonton: Longspoon/ Newest, 1986) 74- 83. Murray's continuum is innovative and revises Frye's binary of garrison/ wilderness and Marcia Kline's binary of nature/ civilization. According to Murray's article a dichotomous relationship does not exist. Instead there is a continuum where wilderness and city meet in the "pseudo-wilderness". This meeting place blurs oppositions to create a new space of creativity. For Frye and Kline the relationship between garrison and wilderness and nature and civilization remains oppositional and exclusive.

25. I am slightly redefining Murray's term "city" here to refer to that world outside the "pseudo-wilderness" from which the characters come. In The Tent Peg the term city can refer to the cultural baggage which the characters bring

with them from their outside lives to the "pseudo-wilderness".

26. For an excellent discussion of how feminism is anti-sexist see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "French Feminism in an International Frame", In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics (New York and London: Methuen, 1987) 150- 151. Spivak claims that French feminism, especially, has "double vision"- "against sexism and for feminism" (150).

27. Rosalind Coward, Female Desire: Women's Sexuality Today 158.

28. The bear is a relatively popular symbol in Canadian women's wilderness literature. See, for example, Marian Engel's Bear or Margaret Atwood's Surfacing.

29. Annis Pratt, "Affairs with Bears: Some Notes Towards Feminist Archetypal Hypotheses for Canadian Literature", Gynocritics: Feminist Approaches to Writing by Canadian and Quebec Women, ed. Barbara Godard (Toronto: ECW Press, 1987) 174.

30. Refer to Pratt as quoted above.

31. Deborah as metaphor for the feminist artist will be discussed towards the conclusion of this chapter.

32. The tent peg as a symbol of feminist consciousness-raising will be connected to the biblical myth later in this chapter.

33. Lorna Irvine, Sub/ Version (Toronto: ECW Press, 1986) 3. Irvine claims that the major task of feminist literature is to re-educate the literary imagination through a rewriting of myths, language and philosophy.

34. Refer to Murray, "Women in the Wilderness", who describes the sacrifice as giving up wilderness for city, nature for culture and vice versa.

35. R.P. Bilan, "Letters in Canada 1981", University of Toronto Quarterly 51: 4 (Summer, 1982) 395.

36. Barbara Godard, Rev. of Lunatic Villas, by Marian Engel The Charcoal Burners, by Susan Musgrave and The Tent Peg, by Aritha van Herk, The Fiddlehead 132 (April, 1982) 92.

37. This dichotomy assigns woman to either nature or culture, exclusively. See Heather Murray's "Women in the Wilderness" for a fuller discussion.

38. Jerome will be discussed later in reference to the metafictional layer of the text.

39. These are just two of the roles which the male characters assign to J.L.. I have discussed Ivan and Cap because they particularly represent simultaneous freedom from one role and imprisonment by another. J.L. is given many other names. Franklin, for example, hails her as a muse figure (168); Milton as a dangerous seductress (82) and Hearne as the "perfect picture" (210).

40. Mackenzie is allowed the most journal entries in the text- a total of twenty-two. J.L. has seventeen entries.

41. In the Bible Sisera is killed by Jael who drives a tent peg through his skull. See Old Testament, Judges, 4: 1-24, 5: 1-30. In The Tent Peg J.L. is celebrated and the tent peg becomes a symbol of feminist consciousness- raising.

42. Again see Old Testament, Judges, 4: 1-24, 5: 1-30.

43. For example see The Tent Peg, 158, 202, 212, 170.

44. See Old Testament, Judges, 5: 1-31, for Deborah's song in praise of Jael and see also The Tent Peg (223) for van Herk's version of Deborah's celebration.

45. See the analysis of this scene offered earlier in this chapter.

46. J.L. tells the men a number of stories around the campfire (153- 155). She recounts the tale of Zeus, Io and Hera from the perspective of Io instead of Zeus. In this way she humanizes the women of the myth (154). She also recalls the tale of a woman who loved a bear (155). This story is reminiscent of Marian Engel's Bear.

47. J.L. tells the story of Zeus and Io from Io's perspective (154) much in the same way van Herk retells the myth of Circe and Odysseus in Judith and Arachne and Athena in No Fixed Address.

48. Some of the critical responses to The Tent Peg have already been discussed in this chapter. A particularly narrow interpretation is offered by Urjo Kareda, "The \$50,000 Question", Saturday Night (April, 1981) 94- 96. Kareda claims van Herk continues to rewrite the same plot and misinterprets van Herk's feminist interest in rewriting myth.

49. Aritha van Herk, "A Literary Affair", 71- 74. In this article van Herk refers to the relationship between the reader and writer as a love affair. The writer as lover attempts to seduce the perfect reader. The reader is necessary in order to consummate a work of fiction.

50. For a full discussion of the complicity of the "essential feminine" with humanist philosophy see Toril Moi, 6-12. Moi offers a critique of feminist theory which depends upon the humanist notion of an essential self, even an essential female self, at the heart of discourse. Also see Chris Weedon, 80- 81.

51. The journal form presupposes a rational consciousness which is objectively documenting experience. The concept of a rational and unified entity at the heart of discourse is one of the basic premises of humanism which is contested by both feminism and postmodernism, as noted in the Introduction to this thesis. By sabotaging the univocal discourse of the journal van Herk questions the very existence of the humanist subjectivity.

52. In A Poetics of Postmodernism Hutcheon examines the complicity of postmodernism, in general, with the humanism which it critiques. She notes this as being one of the paradoxes which "problematizes" postmodernism. She claims: "For many today, it is the 'rationally, universally valid' ideas of our liberal humanist tradition that are being called into question. And postmodern art and theory are both playing a role in that questioning, while still acknowledging that they are inevitably, if unwillingly, part of that tradition" (187).

Chapter IV
No Fixed Address: Towards A New Picaresque

While it shares a great deal with Aritha van Herk's earlier fiction, No Fixed Address is significantly more experimental and adventurous than her earlier works. Van Herk's feminist postmodern poetics continues to focus on women's neglected mythology, narrative conventions and intertextuality. No Fixed Address subverts the picaresque genre from within as Judith and The Tent Peg subvert the "realist regional" and the journal form, respectively. Van Herk's transformation of the picaresque has both literary and social implications. No Fixed Address directly critiques the literary and social environment out of which it is generated.

The revolutionary aspects of No Fixed Address are propagated through a sophisticated network of intertexts which do not exist to the same degree in the other novels. These intertexts allow No Fixed Address to become multi-layered. Thus the novel presents more challenges to the reader than either Judith or The Tent Peg. The most significant intertext of the novel is not with a particular text, but with the thematic and narrative conventions of the picaresque form. Van Herk parodies and transforms the picaresque as she engenders its narrative and thematic norms. Other intertexts are also created as No Fixed Address deliberately recalls Ovid's Metamorphoses, Robert

Kroetsch's novels The Studhorse Man and Badlands, as well as van Herk's own The Tent Peg. The most sustained intertextual relationship, excluding that with the picaresque form, is the parodic affiliation of No Fixed Address with Robert Kroetsch's Badlands. Like the earlier works, No Fixed Address is a novel of process and discovery, rather than resolution. The intertexts echo the endless possibilities which the reader faces in the interpretation of the novel. In this sense, No Fixed Address remains even more ambiguous than van Herk's earlier fiction as its very structure questions the stability of hermeneutical interpretation. Thus the network of intertexts serves to further van Herk's intensive feminist postmodern questioning.

In No Fixed Address van Herk does not desert her feminist concerns, though her feminism does become more thoughtful and complicated. An endless series of parodies is created as she engenders both the picaresque form and the male quest. In No Fixed Address van Herk rewrites woman into the picaresque and quest modes. In doing so she explores the woman artist as ex-centric, examines the role of language in defining and naming and deconstructs gender identity. Unlike the earlier novels, she recognizes the relationship between feminist struggles and other political struggles. As a result, the literary and societal

implications of No Fixed Address become revolutionary in a way that the other novels do not.

No Fixed Address also diverges significantly from Judith, The Tent Peg and the early short fiction as the reader is called upon to participate in the making of the novel to a degree not demanded before. In The Tent Peg the reader's expectations are actively played with as narrative continuity and disruption defy expected patterns. In No Fixed Address the reader is called upon to directly enter van Herk's fictional world and to partake of a dialogue which involves narrator, researcher, protagonist and reader. The reader directly enters the text through the elaborate narrative structure which is a radical transformation of the picaresque narrative. The manner in which the story is told becomes paramount in No Fixed Address as it does in The Tent Peg. In both cases the quest for feminist legends is foregrounded.

As this brief introduction indicates No Fixed Address is a multi-layered text which defies any kind of fixed interpretation. This chapter temporarily assigns fixity to the text by focusing especially upon its various intertexts and parodies. The ambiguity and multiple possible meanings generated from this novel are represented by the full title No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey.¹ This title suggests that at least double messages are being produced by the text. The first part of this title, No Fixed Address,

identifies the picaresque nature of the novel. In No Fixed Address the picaresque narrative is transformed, picaresque traditions inverted and a new picara created. Arachne as the new picara transforms and ultimately transcends the form which creates her. The second part of the title, An Amorous Journey, suggests another layer to this text, not radically unlike the first layer. This "amorous journey" recalls that of Hazard LePage's in Robert Kroetsch's The Studhorse Man and offers a sustained parody of Kroetsch's quest novel Badlands. There are a number of quests going on in No Fixed Address, among them Arachne's quest for death and sex and the researcher's quest for the legend of Arachne. The narrator and reader join this quest which becomes a metaphor for the feminist need to revise the past and create new legends. This chapter first deals with the parody of the picaresque form by focusing on the thematic and narrative subversion of picaresque conventions. The metafictional implications of this sabotage are also focused on. Secondly, this chapter explores some of the other intertexts of the novel. The parodic relationship with Kroetsch's Badlands and the nature of the new picara's quest are examined in detail. While concentration on the intertexts of No Fixed Address will illuminate the revolutionary nature of this work, it remains but one approach to the most successful of van Herk's fictions. The creation of a new picara not only has literary implications, but political,

ideological and sociological reverberations as well. Therefore, critical interpretations of No Fixed Address deserve to be as multiple and far-reaching as the text's vision.

In "Picaros and Priestesses: Repentent Rogues" van Herk directly affirms her interest in the picaresque. She admits her attraction to Robert Kroetsch's The Studhorse Man in particular:

The first picaro I truly fell in love with was Hazard LePage, that black marketeer of equestrian lust, the star of Robert Kroetsch's novel, The Studhorse Man. My attachment to him was due not only to his roguishness, but the territory he travelled. It was my territory, my gothic and unapologetic country. Discovering The Studhorse Man was a germinal experience for me. I felt that a loose-lived itinerant was a better reflection of the world I had come from and still inhabited... (14).

In No Fixed Address the journey through the western landscape is certainly a trip through Kroetsch's West. Van Herk identifies this West as her own and allows her picara, Arachne, motion rather than assigning her to a static position.²

Van Herk's admission of the importance of The Studhorse Man to her fictional constructions has led some critics to read No Fixed Address as "a feminist reply to Robert Kroetsch's The Studhorse Man".³ The Studhorse Man does cover the same territory physically and perhaps spiritually as well. Hazard LePage moves through the same prairie

landscape as Arachne, encountering various adventures of life, sex and death. Both Hazard and Arachne are traced by biographers - Demeter and the researcher, respectively. Furthermore, Hazard's life after death existence is not unlike Arachne's adventurous romp after her supposed death in a Vancouver restaurant.⁴ Both texts concentrate on the role of the biographer/ researcher in constructing the lives of the protagonists after their supposed deaths. Wayne Tefs in his review of No Fixed Address defines the basic similarity with The Studhorse Man:

Both concern obsessed individuals on quests for wholeness moving through the prairie landscape. Both involve not a little wild and mercurial sex. Each suggests answers through reference to mythology and the primitive. Both are profound yet at the same time outrageously comic (56).

Although a loose intertextual relationship with The Studhorse Man does exist, the connection is more general than specific. No Fixed Address offers a more sustained parody of the picaresque form in general. The more sustained parodic relationship with the picaresque form permits a more detailed analysis of the literary and social implications of No Fixed Address.

Besides recognizing her general interest in the picaresque and in Kroetsch's novel in particular, van Herk also notes that the picaresque has significant social implications. In "Picaros and Priestesses: Repentant Rogues" she claims:

Like the picaresque himself, the picaresque fiction is often treated as though it lacks respectability;...That it has traditionally satirized money, honor, justice and judges, lawyers, doctors, bankers, innkeepers, false beggars, women and intellectuals is considered irrelevant, although it would seem to me that this role makes it relative indeed (15).

In No Fixed Address the social relevance of the picaresque is foregrounded. Van Herk works within the picaresque tradition to make social statements about the position of women and other marginalized people. The social relevance of No Fixed Address is often found in the novel's transformation of picaresque thematic and narrative conventions.

In order to grasp the social applicability of No Fixed Address the reader must be sensitive to the signals which van Herk offers as she critiques the conventions of the form which she is working within. In A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms Linda Hutcheon notes that parody involves the process by which a text is "parodically encoded" by an "inferred encoder".⁵ The reader decodes parodic references in order to grasp the meanings of the text. In "The Art of Blackmail: Secrets and Seeing" van Herk writes of a similar relationship between the reader and the writer and claims that reading fiction is a question of seeing the secrets which the writer is holding. The writer uses these secrets to seduce the reader. Van Herk claims:

So we begin and end, in all seductive fiction, with secret. Not just the secret

of writing itself, the secretive writer, the secrecy of the act, but secret within fiction as the ultimate and terrible conspiracy between blackmailer and blackmailed. Secret is the writer's counterstrategy to the deadly usual. Secret is the best enemy of the mechanics of plot, character, time and structure and thus, the true friend of fiction. Secret is the weapon of the writer, the real knife/hammer/ quill.⁶

The parodic relationship which van Herk's text holds with both the picaresque and Robert Kroetsch's Badlands can be interpreted as a "secret" which the reader tries to decipher. The revolutionary potential of the novel lies in the discovery of its secrets. Some aspects of the parodic "secret" of No Fixed Address have been noted by various critics; most notably Linda Hutcheon in The Canadian Postmodern who has claimed No Fixed Address as a picaresque novel.⁷ Keeping in mind van Herk's claim that the reader encodes secrets, No Fixed Address can be shown to contain various signals of its parody of picaresque conventions. The picaresque mode⁸ developed out of a rich Spanish tradition. It is episodic in structure and contains elements of romance, satire and tragedy. Ulrich Wicks in "The Nature of Picaresque Narrative: A Modal Approach" claims that the "Picaresque satisfies our darker yearnings for demonic disharmony, dis-integration, ugliness, disorder, evil and the gaping abyss" (106). Normally the story centres on the picaresque hero who is again best described by Wicks as:

an unheroic protagonist, worse than we,
 caught up in a chaotic world, worse than
 ours, in which he is on an eternal journey
 of encounters that allow him to be
 alternately both victim of that world and
 its exploiter (106).

The protagonist is usually an orphan with loose social connections who moves in and out of the social structure. Although the protagonist doesn't offer any sociological, philosophical or psychological interpretation of his/ her actions, the reader is encouraged to do so through the presence of a narrator. The earliest Spanish picaresque novels trace the history of a male picaro who narrates his adventures with a comic tone.⁹ He is loosely implicated in the social order though he remains an ex-centric and an outsider.

The story of the female picara was being told as early as 1605 in La Picara Justina by Francisco Lopez de Ubeda. However, the picara occupied a substantively different position than the male picaro as she did not experience the same liberties. The early picaras were usually prostitutes who repented and remained socially helpless. Peter Dunn in "The Picara: The Rogue Female" notes that the kind of realism evident in the original picaresque necessitated that the female picara take on different roles from the male picara.¹⁰ Since these roles were limited in the society of the time they were also limited in the picaresque novels of the time. He claims:

In this sense the picaresque novel may fairly be called realistic, the availability of female roles corresponding closely, at the appropriate social level, to that of the real world (246).

In "Picaros and Priestesses: Repentent Rogues" van Herk seems to agree with Dunn as she comments extensively on the picara. She notes:

Moll Flanders and Fanny Hill dissatisfied me; they were incomplete and repentent, as well as being at the mercy of their very femaleness. I dug deeper and found Mother Courage and Justine (16).

Van Herk continues to note the limitations of the traditional picaras. She claims that the picaras did not enjoy the same freedom as the male picaros:

It seemed to me that unlike male picaros, Moll Flanders didn't enjoy stealing for its own sake; she did it not for the joy but for the money. Worse she didn't enjoy disguise; she was ill at ease dressed as a man (16).

Displeased with the traditional picara van Herk decides to construct a new picara in No Fixed Address. The new picara, Arachne, does enjoy "stealing for its own sake" and also she enjoys "disguise". This new picara is ambiguous. Her ambiguity is emphasized in the extent to which she is implicated in the social order. As a rogue, the picara partially repents but the reader is never sure whether or not her repentance is sincere. Again van Herk comments on the "repentent rogue":

The unredeemed sinner was, I thought, the purest ore, but further examination showed that the unrepentant rogue is consistent, reliable, dependably dubious one scrape

after another, while the repentent rogue uses his repentence as a plot mechanism....The ambiguity of the rogue's act of repentence is always possible; by repenting the rogue can slip more easily into his deceptive role....Conversion is one way of preserving self-interest (17).

The reader is left to decide whether or not Arachne is a "repentent rogue". Arachne becomes implicated in the social order and subverts it from inside. Her position in the social structure is ambiguous but it changes significantly toward the end of the novel.

In her analysis of No Fixed Address Linda Hutcheon defines Arachne as a female picaro rather than a picara. She claims that many of the traditional clichés attached to the male picaro are both inverted and adhered to in No Fixed Address (The Canadian Postmodern, 126-127). For example, Arachne's working-class background and her disguises are a "straightforward female version of the traditionally male picaro" (127). She notes also that Arachne tends to invert the tradition as well as adhere to it. In general, Hutcheon claims Arachne as a parody of the picaro.¹¹ Certainly all of Hutcheon's insights are well grounded. However, it is more politically satisfying to define Arachne as the new picara, rather than the female picaro. As the new picara Arachne's journey transforms the Western landscape as she enters roles previously denied women, picaras and even picaros. She does not simply partake of a male world, she alters this world by her presence. For example, she leaves her mark on the world

of Ladies' Comfort as her femaleness is the very basis of her success and her popularity. She celebrates her female body and discovers a new place outside the existing order. Arachne, as the new picara, creates a new space rather than partakes of an old one. Although she does hold a great deal in common with the male picaro she also transcends him. This transcendence is found especially in the last fifty or so pages of the text where Hutcheon claims "the death of the picaresque" occurs (The Canadian Postmodern, 127). This chapter will later show that the picaresque does not end or die at this point in the novel, but is transformed. It is in this final transformation that the reader really grasps the significance of Arachne as new picara rather than female picaro. As noted above in van Herk's commentary on the picara, the new picara is both repentent and ambiguous. It is especially this life after repentence which defines the new picara.

Thus Arachne is more than a female picaro, as Hutcheon would have it, as her role and her very identity are defined by her sexuality. This change in terminology, the usage of the term picara rather than female picaro, better illuminates the political implications of the invention of Arachne. First of all, the new picara shares some of the traits of her traditional picara ancestors.¹² Arachne uses her sexuality to her own advantage but she does not become prey to it. Her sense of identity is based on her female

sexuality as is her quest for a freer place outside the social order- free of both sex and class restrictions. Secondly, she moves beyond the roles open to the male picaro. Ultimately she rejects the world accessible to the picaro and moves beyond the form which creates her into unexplored worlds. In No Fixed Address these worlds are connected to Arachne's female identity as the experiences of women are explored from a picara's perspective. When Hutcheon uses the term female picaro, she also notes that the change from "he into she is crucial" in the novel (The Canadian Postmodern, 126). This chapter maintains that not only is the "he" changed into a "she", but this "she" rejects the roles assigned to both the traditional male picaros and female picaras. In the idealistic ending of the novel, which will be examined later, Arachne as the new picara emerges from the picaresque form which creates her. It is necessary to clarify here that this chapter does not reject Hutcheon's claim that Arachne does indeed parody the male picaro. The analysis offered here will refer to the inversion of sex roles on a number of occasions. However, it is important to note that while the picaro is parodied, the roles of the traditional picara are also transformed. Hutcheon, by naming Arachne as female picaro, does not fully recognize the possibilities inherent in Arachne's position as new picara. In van Herk's hands the picara progresses from powerlessness to empowerment. This empowerment lies in

the deconstruction of gender roles which dominates No Fixed Address.

Certainly Arachne fits the general description of the male picaro-as-orphan as outlined by Wicks above. She is an orphan in the sense that her home life is hardly presided over by loving and caring parents. Her parents are described simply as "Toto and Lanie, two people she lived with as a child".¹³ Arachne is also an outsider not only to her family, but also to the middle-class world of Thomas' family. Furthermore, she is an ex-centric to the artistic world of publishers as portrayed in the sections entitled "An Incursion Between Tomes" (145-148) and "Another Incursion Between Tomes" (198-203). She is even an outsider to the highly intellectual world of institutionalized feminism as depicted in the episode "Bail Skippers and Bacchants" (241-253). However, as Hutcheon notes, she is also substantively more implicated in the social order than the traditional picaro (Hutcheon, The Canadian Postmodern, 127). She is the "repentent rogue" who plays an ambiguous part as member of and subverter of power structures. For example, she is a successful saleswoman who drives a Mercedes. Unlike the traditional picaras she never becomes a victim to her sexuality. Instead she manipulates it to get what she wants. Her role as a trickster depends largely upon her ability to use her femaleness to her advantage. As trickster she is street-smart in dealing with thieves,

police officers and the male-dominated world of bus drivers and Ladies' Comfort salesmen. In Arachne's world societal gender roles are deconstructed. Edward Freidman in an analysis of the twentieth-century transformations of the picaresque comments on the ability of even the early picaras to challenge gender norms:

The picaresque antiheroines make a mockery of purity, matrimony and conventionality. They serve their instincts, physical and pecuniary, and go to great lengths to ridicule a society that is not only hierarchial but also decidedly misogynous.¹⁴

Certainly Arachne as picara overtly mocks "purity, matrimony and conventionality".

Arachne's life is unconventional by the very nature of the way her family life is deconstructed. Lanie and Toto are her merely physical parents - her "progenitors" (37). Thus like the picaro, Arachne is alone, without the advantages of a reliable family. The stereotype of the nurturing mother and the notion of the maternal instinct are certainly not propagated by the character of Lanie. She leaves Arachne at home while she works at the restaurant across the street. The reader first meets Lanie as the mother and war bride. Through the commentary of the narrator/ implied author¹⁵, the maternal instinct is redefined as a social construct which Lanie has not passed on to Arachne:

Motherhood rouses no idealized sentiment in her. That is something socialized, something incubated in a girl child with

dolls and sibling babies. Arachne had neither (38).

This is an attempt to sabotage essentialist views of an innate womanhood and emphasize the poststructuralist concern of woman as a social construct.

This sabotage of the notions of "purity, matrimony and conventionality" continues through Arachne's relationship with Thomas, which further inverts sex roles. Thomas cares for the house and plays the role of home-maker while Arachne is the travelling saleswoman, involving herself in an endless maze of relationships. Thus, the binary stereotype of the conscientious housewife and the unfaithful salesman is reversed. Thomas becomes the faithful wife-figure, waiting for the partner to come home and attempting to save the partner from her own self-destructive tendencies. Arachne is the cruising saleswoman, the "man" away from home. Thomas is actually referred to as Arachne's savior and the section of the novel describing their meeting is entitled "Savior" (75). Often Arachne is chastised both by Thena and her mother for her unfaithfulness to this saint of a man (174). The reader is assured that "Arachne is not unkind to Thomas. She is only consistently unfaithful" (62). As the new picara, Arachne not only mocks monogamy but also enjoys sex for its own sake. Conventions of "purity and matrimony" are disregarded by Arachne as she rejects traditional restraints placed upon women's

sexuality. Thus van Herk manages to present fresh alternatives by moving away from the presentation of women as victims. This has been a consistent characteristic of all of her novels and short fiction as well.

Arachne's initial attraction to Thomas is, of course, connected to the stability which he offers in the form of a middle-class existence. Like the picara and picaro, Arachne also has desires for social mobility. These desires are central to her partial "repentance". From the first time Arachne meets Thomas on the bus, discontent with her position is aroused:

But there, locked into a schedule of stops, fixed to her seat by lines, she watches him one morning walking away in the group that threads from her bus - she sits behind her huge wheel and feels a choking lust. Not for him, oh no, but for an indefinable quality that he represents, conveyed in his walk and the angle of his head and the surety of his hands....This is different, a sharp gnaw of discontent, a sense of something graspable brushing past. If she can only force her hands into the right shape, she can have it too (76-77).

This discontent is the beginning of the picara's urge to better herself, to rise out of the squalor into which she is born and to become a member of the social structure which excludes her.¹⁶ Arachne is transformed into the "right shape". Here van Herk makes a significant departure from the picaresque tradition. Arachne is no Moll Flanders manipulated by men in her effort to climb the social ladder.

Arachne is the one in control of her transformation and Thomas serves as her guide.

Arachne's gradual transformation from bus driver to successful saleswoman is presided over by Thomas. Thomas identifies the game of the upwardly mobile, of which Arachne becomes a part:

"You know", he says, "it's only a game. People are just wearing costumes. Some have money to rent something elaborate and some have lots of practice dressing up. But underneath, everybody's the same" (135-136).

Thus begins the process of creating a "disguise" for Arachne with Thomas as costumer and conspirator (136). He does not manipulate Arachne but works with her. Arachne is not turned into a "princess" but into someone "respectable" (138). Thomas oversees this transformation delicately and painlessly: "in one afternoon he gives her trappings, the trick of illusion" (138). Following this metamorphosis are the lessons in social etiquette. The result is a new Arachne:

She can pass now, you would never know the girl who spilled her wine. She is sometimes unsure, but if she moves slowly and watches how everyone else does things, she can cover her tracks. Arachne's natural inclination to dissemble helps a great deal. She is not so much an actress as a double agent, an escaped criminal who has survived by relying on what slender veneers are available. She wonders, though, if she should have let Thomas manage her, even, by God, dress her up and fix her manners. She is disgusted by women who need men to rescue them. (141).

This is not the traditional *picara*, exploited by a system beyond her control. Arachne is becoming implicated in the social order. In this sense she is repenting. She is also becoming better equipped to exploit this order. Her disguise allows her the ambiguity of the reformed *picara*, as defined by van Herk in "Picaros and Priestesses: Repentent Rogues".¹⁷ Arachne doesn't want Thomas to serve as her rescuer, she doesn't need him to play "Savior". She recognizes the implications of her transformation. She now plays the role of a "double agent" who enjoys her disguise. She is at once the "unrepentent" *picara* and the transformed, supposedly "repentent" *picara*. For example, despite the outer change in clothing, the old Arachne still exists when she is alone with Thomas: "Still, alone with him, she is herself, as angry and abrupt as she wants" (141). She can play both parts at once, conformer and subverter. She is in disguise now and able to exploit her environment.

Arachne's disguise enables her to become a successful saleswoman of women's underwear. However, she does not wear her own product. By repenting, Arachne "can slip more deeply into [her] deceptive role" (van Herk, "Picaros and Priestesses: Repentent Rogues", 17). As the "repentent rogue" Arachne does not change herself, but disguises herself. She uses this costume and her sexuality to get what she wants. The clearest example of this combination is her conduct at the Ladies' Comfort Conference. Here she

wears her green outfit, initially described as the clothes which don't "cover her nature" but "blare it out" (139). Arachne wears this "costume" to accept her award for best salesperson of the year. She has been recognized as a valid member of the power structure. Arachne celebrates her manipulation of this power structure by asserting her own power, which is found in her sexuality. She seduces the salesman with her green costume. She purposefully distracts their attention from the fact that she is making love to the young salesman in her hotel room (217-221). Here she manipulates her sexuality to satisfy her physical desires and maintain her position of respect in the established order. The "repentent rogue" in disguise is the new picara who fools and confuses everybody.

Although Arachne is in a position of power in the social structure, she is also subservient to it. This dual position is quite characteristic of the picaresque protagonist who both remains outside the social structure, contesting its power, and also becomes part of it in his/her quest for social mobility. In No Fixed Address the picara is, after all, a saleswoman of underwear- symbol of women's oppression in a capitalist society which markets female sexuality. However, she also refuses to wear underwear herself - one of her own "private acts of revolution" (227). Her status within the power structure does not immobilize her as she does ultimately reject the position which she has

obtained. It is ironic that while she first learns the art of disguise in order to become part of the social order, toward the end of the text Arachne orchestrates her own disguise to escape from this same society.¹⁸

Arachne's position as the new *picara* is compared directly to that of other female characters in No Fixed Address who do not occupy the same position. These relationships further display Arachne's marginality as *picara*. The most significant of these liaisons is the relationship between Thena and Arachne. Here van Herk illuminates another intertext of No Fixed Address - Ovid's Metamorphosis.¹⁹ Here, as in Judith and The Tent Peg, van Herk resurrects neglected female mythology. In No Fixed Address the story of Arachne is rewritten and the relationship between Arachne and Athena is placed in a twentieth-century context. In Metamorphosis Arachne, the lower-class weaver, challenges the goddess Athena to a weaving match. Arachne's work defeats that of Athena but, out of shame and guilt, Arachne tries to hang herself. She is "repentent"; not unlike the *picara*. Athena feels pity for Arachne and turns her into a spider condemned to weave webs forever. In No Fixed Address this endless web corresponds to Arachne's endless travels and quest. Edgar M. Glenn, in The Metamorphosis: Ovid's Roman Games, interprets the personality and the art of the mythological Arachne:

... she is latently lascivious and lickerish, delighting in and absorbed by what she abhors. Arachne's morality is as limited and as warped as her personality. It is all concerned with sex, and it is the morality of insult and hypocrisy. As with her pride in weaving, she takes everything to mean extremes.²⁰

What repulses Glenn intrigues van Herk. She creatively transplants the mythological Arachne's artistic concern with sex to her character's sexual needs. As well, Arachne and Athena are rewritten as friends and confidants, though their relationships to the power structure serve to emphasize their differences. In his biocritical essay on van Herk, I.S. MacLaren notes that in legend Athena wove stories of "war for power and ideological supremacy" (xxxv). Arachne's tapestries were silenced because they were quite different from Athena's. MacLaren notes the significance of van Herk's rewriting of this legend:

In a witty reconstitution of the power-conscious goddess Athena, van Herk traps her Thena in a ceaseless hatred of how society works; Thena defines herself wholly by her social context. She is infuriated by Arachne who refuses such a trap. It seems fitting indeed that a woman who told her story in pictures...should not need words to represent herself. Van Herk's Arachne uses the language of her body; it is all that Athena left the mythic Arachne (xxxvi-xxxvii).

In No Fixed Address Thena and Arachne do not compete with tapestries, but Thena serves as a confidante to Arachne's tales of her sexual adventures. They are both marginalized though they react differently to the power

structure. Like Arachne, Thena too has been formed by her environment.²¹ For example, a great deal of her hostility with regard to men in general comes from her anger towards her ex-husband. However, Thena allows herself to be immobilized by society and Arachne does not. Arachne, the individualist and ultimately, the anarchist, is set up in relationship to Thena, the radical feminist. Not unlike the early J.L. of The Tent Peg, Thena is awaiting the revolution and in the meantime blaspheming the existence of all men. To Thena all men, with the exception of Thomas, are thieves, users and manipulators: "To her, even the kindest man is a dictator" (142). Arachne and Thena are friends because they are "equally disillusioned with the world" (142). Thena is angry because she believes the power structure is exclusively a patriarchy. Arachne's anger, however, is different:

She does not understand Thena's deliberate hatred. Arachne has always hammered against the impossible: fate, birth, life. She hates wider, more general things, has never focused on something specific (142).

This in itself is probably the most important overt political statement of the novel from a feminist perspective. The fact that Arachne and not Thena becomes the legend speaks for itself. When the researcher visits Thena she is still talking, not acting. She is immobilized by her anger. Arachne, as the weaver of stories and creator of legends, moves. She equates women's subservience within

power structures to other struggles. Thena isolates herself and, instead of acting and identifying with others, does nothing. Thena's hatred traps her while Arachne's larger vision frees her.

No Fixed Address utilises the relationship between Arachne and Thena to initiate a philosophical discussion on the feminist movement. The text explores the politics of feminism and compares the different ways women deal with their positions in twentieth-century society. No Fixed Address is radically engendered as Arachne as new picara enters worlds which a male picaro could never partake of- the world of feminist politics. No Fixed Address, unlike van Herk's other novels, overtly examines some of the problems and weaknesses of twentieth-century feminism. The best example of this kind of in-depth questioning of feminist goals is contained in the section "Bail Skippers and Bacchants".²²

Arachne enters the world of feminist politics by accident. Her first stop on her run from the police is at a hotel in Banff where a women's conference is taking place. Here the radical feminists meet the conservative women who do not share their vision. The differences between the two groups of women are defined through their clothing:

In the lobby are five hundred women dressed in blue jeans and sweaters and five hundred women in polyester dresses. The women in dresses are standing in demure knots, nodding their permed heads and keeping their eyes fixed on each other's faces. The women

in blue jeans are swinging from the
bannisters and luggage racks (242).

This division is further exemplified inside the sauna where "Two-halves" (246) confronts the two representatives of the Women's Ministry. Two-halves is split in two pieces, possibly to reflect the division which her (and Thena's) brand of feminism encourages.²³ The two women in the swimsuits belong to a fundamentalist church movement and are opposed to the Women's Movement. They support the existing power structure and their places in it. Arachne belongs to neither group.

Throughout the episode a dream-like atmosphere is created, not unlike the Tefler's dinner party.²⁴ The women all have briefcases, exchange cards and define themselves by their careers- the answer to the question "What are you in?" (243). The litany of careers which is listed as an exchange between the women creates the same kind of language barrier which is erected at the Tefler house. However, it also exemplifies that the group, which is united for a common purpose, is heterogeneous and diverse. Arachne is isolated from all these women. She steals a blouse and a name tag in order to attend the conference in the first place. She enters through roguery.

At the dinner, in particular, the political power of the feminist movement to draw together women of different backgrounds is emphasized. The tempo aroused by the "icon,

a figurehead, a priestess" (251) is described as sensual and seductive. In this leader the women have created their own mythic figure whom they follow:

The titan speaks. Her voice low, hoarse, reaches into the farthest corners of the room. No one can escape its gravelly, tongue-licking power. Under her words the women in the room melt, they flower, they lift their expectant faces toward her podium, they sigh, they nod, they shout with laughter, they clap, they pound their tables with their fists. They love her, oh, they love her. She talks for them, all their mute and tongue-clipped mouths one wordless inarticulate cry for her bright shining, for her laughing anger (251).

Although the women are seduced by "the titan", Arachne is not. She remains outside this order as well. This too becomes something she uses rather than becomes part of. She robs one of the feminists and escapes.

Arachne's escape in itself is important. She leaves the women and returns her borrowed identity. Her get-away is not only the get-away of a thief who has robbed twenty-five thousand dollars. It can also be read as a rejection of institutionalized feminism and a movement beyond its limitations. The text has already questioned the validity of radical feminism through the subtle criticism of Thena who, as a radical feminist, is immobilized by her anger. However, the presentation of the feminist movement in this section remains ambiguous. The united spirit of the movement seems to be praised, though its implicit relationship with power structures is condemned. The women

all are connected to the power structure through their professions and yet, as feminists, remain outside it. Arachne, though she occupies a similar position, rejects the institution of feminism and moves on. In order for productive action to occur there must be motion. Arachne moves beyond anger, defensiveness and institution.

For some feminist critics Arachne may cause problems. She is certainly the new *picara* and, as such, an antiheroine.²⁵ Arachne is not a voice speaking for the rights of women. She does not identify herself as a feminist, nor does she particularly like women:

Arachne has never had a woman friend, never liked women or trusted them. Arachne's companions, confreres, have always been males. Women stay away from her. She is too tough, too dangerous (172).

The reader is allowed a certain distance from Arachne through the narrator and understands the significance of Arachne's actions through this same narrator. Therefore, the reader begins to see the feminist implications of Arachne's inversion of gender constructions, her disregard for "purity, matrimony and conventionality", and her marginality in general. Arachne, though not a feminist, becomes a metaphor for the feminist's position in society. The reader appreciates Arachne as a challenger to literary and societal norms. She is encouraged to interpret Arachne as an individual struggling for freedom from gender and

class restrictions. This freedom is gained through motion rather than immobilizing anger.

Once the reader understands Arachne as a metaphor for the feminist artist, her relationship to the other marginals of society allows the text's feminism to take on a more revolutionary tone. In No Fixed Address Arachne is marginalized not only because of her gender, but because of her class. Thus, the feminism in the text goes further than either Judith or The Tent Peg and incorporates class and racial considerations, as well as gender construction, in understanding the process of marginalization. In this sense Arachne, as the new picara, is the perfect agent through which to illuminate feminist struggles and equate them with other struggles. As marginalized picara, Arachne meets other ex-centrics. Her relationships with them emphasize her further marginalization, especially the extent to which she is excluded from the dominant forms of discourse in society. As the novel's picara and metaphor for the feminist artist Arachne is placed not only inside and outside society, but also outside the discourses and languages of this society. Thus van Herk takes a poststructuralist approach to the position of the picara within the social structure.²⁶ Arachne's unconventional relationships serve to emphasize her sense of "linguistic marginality"²⁷ which is related to her identity as a picara marginalized by her class and her sex. Thus the feminist

postmodernism of No Fixed Address transforms the picaresque form. Postmodernism and feminism enable the text to offer a radical new perspective on the political applicability of the picaresque mode as it engenders and politicizes the speech act.

The clearest example of Arachne's linguistic class-consciousness is contained in the sections entitled "Eat and be Eaten" (125-131) and "Erase" (132-136). The difference between Arachne's language and the Teflers' language is emphasized. For example, her way of naming things is the result of her social construction:

Those are the kinds of words his family understands: relationship, lifestyle, recreation, career, situation. Arachne would say: shackled up, life, fun, job, mess (119).

Arachne's names for the same kind of situations stress disorder, temporality and changeability while the upper-middle class status quo attempts to centralize these experiences. The differences of the languages of the classes are further emphasized throughout the dinner party episode where Arachne attempts to communicate with Thomas' family. The world of the Tefler family is not only physically static with everyone sitting in a fixed place, it is also linguistically static. Games are being played with language as it is manipulated as a symbol of social position. It is a game which Arachne does not have the social background to know how to play: "She is in a game

where everyone knows the rules except her" (128). When she speaks she is conscious of the breaks and gaps of her language as opposed to the manipulative flow of the Tefler family. Her answers are curt and defiant. Finally, in the face of the implied superiority of the Teflers, Arachne lapses into silence or more specifically, shrugging (129). The Teflers seem to understand, or perhaps more appropriately misunderstand, the subtlety of language as a weapon. For Arachne language is not a weapon which she can use in her defense and so she becomes further dislocated from the language of the upper-middle-class: "And so the conversation goes, words tumbling past Arachne. She hears only scraps of words, but it is as if the language spoken is not hers" (130). Indeed the language being spoken is not hers as it does not describe Arachne's experiences or form her conceptions. This manipulation of language makes Arachne feel uncomfortable "unwashed, illiterate, unsocialized" (131). Her reaction to her feelings of marginalization is defensive- silence. Even Thomas's language is foreign to her as "everything he says bounces back. Silently" (133).

Arachne's "linguistic marginality" is further portrayed through her relationships with the other marginals of No Fixed Address, especially Josef and Basilisk. Arachne's marginalization and isolation are shared by others who are equally marginalized. However, these are not picares or

picaros but characters who are rejected by the centralizing forces of a unitary system. They differ because of their age, race and political orientations. In van Herk's feminist postmodern version of the picaresque the margins are haunted not only by picaros and picaras, but by all those whom society excludes from its inner nest. Arachne's communication with these marginalized figures is not hindered by language as it goes beyond the kind of language manipulated by people like the upper-class Teflers. Arachne doesn't use words to express herself.²⁸

Basilisk is a good example of societal marginalization. He is not marginalized because of class or sex but because of his race. Arachne and Basilisk communicate mysteriously through silence, not language. He likes to watch her in silence and to listen to classical music rather than to talk. It is not Basilisk's words which Arachne understands but his music:

The first notes he touches, delicate as they are, lash, and she shrinks in her seat, knowing he is performing those intricate motions for her, that the stretching of his fingers and the half smile on his face are for her, a way of watching her, an invasion. It is unbearable, so thin, so brilliantly cruel, he is skinning her with the razor blades of his damnable breeding, his culture, his learnedness, the fact that he can lift and fall his giant hands over those black and ivory keys and bring out such perfect sounds. She keeps her eyes fixed on his hands (73).

Basilisk's music, the symbol of imported European culture and learning, invade Arachne in the same way that the Teflers invade her with their upper-class language. However, Arachne's reaction this time is not silence for she identifies with Basilisk. She tries to make an exchange-her skin for his culture:

Lift me, she screams, take the driver, give me music lessons and evening clothes, give me ears. And he shouts, take it, take my skin, take all the notes, give me a bus and a uniform and a closed face and oblivion (73-74).

Here the sexual bond is also a political union formed out of despair and isolation.

This non-verbal bonding between marginals is even more clearly illuminated through Arachne's relationship with Josef. Josef is marginalized because of his nationality, his politics and his age. When the two meet in the graveyard, their pact is formed not through words but through silence. Josef follows Arachne in silence, leaving the figure of the circular dancers as a recognition of the bond between the two of them. His poor command over language is comparable to Arachne's linguistic naiveté. It is Josef's revolutionary spirit which attracts Arachne as she shares this spirit. This union is depicted when they make love and Arachne notes the connection between them:

But this man is strangely wild; he calls her from her body despite the cane flung down in the stubble, his slack skin. They are

thieves locked in the same cell, a man with too little and a woman with too much (187).

Their love-making, like that of Arachne and Basilisk, is a different kind of union - it is the union of dissidents. The act of a young woman and a ninety-year old man making love is in itself rebellious, let alone the union of marginals from different cultures.

Arachne and Josef's relationship is further cemented after Arachne rescues Josef from the wrath of the power structure, as characterised by the home for the elderly where he has been deserted by his daughter. Again the sex act becomes representative of a politics of resistance. While Arachne may not understand Josef's language, she does understand his spirit- his inner language. This is not the language of the Teflers which only has a surface existence. This is a language of identification. It is disordered, chaotic and beautiful:

And in the darkness they talk. Words, a language where they do not have to dissemble because the speaker cannot see the other's eyes, words disembodied, no layering to voices without face or body. It is the narration of captives who lie awake between their sleeping guards relating experience, why they are both prisoner, their private acts of revolution. She tells him some of hers: Lanie, Toto, east Vancouver, buses, Gabriel, the car. She has no idea if he understands or even hears. The words fall from her mouth into the stillness between them, small stones (227).

Although this is a different kind of language, it is not language without meanings:

The names bewilder Arachne, their litany confuses. She knows nothing of what he speaks, but she recognizes a chord of the same bitter displacement that she remembers tasting. East-ender Raki shredded by her own time and place (228).

Paradoxically, it is exactly this displacement of gender, class and linguistics which defines Arachne as "East-ender Raki" and Josef as an aged immigrant and revolutionary.

The role of language in naming and defining experiences is further explored in the section entitled "Rerun" (278-279). Here the loss of the picara's virginity is related through a deconstructed and magical language. The experience is described as a seduction through a window with the words of a "conjurer" (279). These words mix various names: men's names, place names, the names of months and the alphabet.²⁹ The new language stresses non-fixity as new ways of connecting and disconnecting words create sensual possibilities:

Arachne crept closer, trampled a chrysanthemum bush under a window. "Charlie Oscar Mike Echo. India Alpha Mike Whiskey Alfa India Tango India November Golf". The voice was an insistent hand under her elbow. Arachne backed away slowly, fearfully, even as the voice continued, knew she would return. "Charlie Oscar Mike Echo Bravo Alpha Charlie Kilo" (279).

The words here shift position with spaces or echoes between them. Alpha, the beginning, evokes a primordial language which Arachne seems to understand as the language of seduction. She is attracted to, yet frightened of, this

language which serves as the defining force of the sex act.

Here it is interesting to note that sex is not described by language, the sex act is defined through the discontinuity and endless shifts of echoes and sounds. This is the language of desire which defines Arachne's experience. This language seems to be an appropriate way to delineate the loss of the picara's virginity. The picara loses her virginity by climbing through a window and she commits her first crime by stealing a bra.³⁰ So-called "normal" female experiences are made bizarre and indefinable. By inventing her own language to describe Arachne's first sexual encounter, van Herk suggests that often established language patterns exclude women's experiences which remain marginal, without the words to describe them. Van Herk attempts to deconstruct the notion that naming in itself produces a fixed and rational order. Perhaps for feminists and for Arachne as metaphor for the feminist artist, it is more valuable to avoid labelling experience as unitary. Instead it may be more fruitful to emphasize the chaos of language in general. Thus, here "linguistic marginality" is related to female sexuality and desire. A new and temporary language between the sexes is devised.

As the naming process, notions of linguistic competence and gender constructions are deconstructed, the narrative

structure of the picaresque tradition is also transformed. The thematic parody of the picaresque, as has been examined above, highlights the feminist postmodern poetics of No Fixed Address. The text radically engenders a literary mode normally dominated by male characters and voices of authority. Arachne's female sexuality is always emphasized. It is important to remember that not only is Arachne a lower-class, tough, street-kid who becomes a bus driver and a seller of women's underwear, but that she is a lower-class tough, female street-kid who becomes a female bus driver in a male-dominated profession and subsequently a seller of women's underwear who doesn't wear her own product. The narrator and the narrative in No Fixed Address also serve to further transform the picaresque into a feminist vehicle. Thus far this chapter has been concentrating on how van Herk engenders the picaresque tradition to create a twentieth-century picara. How she transforms the picaresque narrative further illuminates how Arachne is constructed as the new picara.

Edward Freidman in The Antiheroine's Voice: Narrative Discourse and Transformations of the Picaresque offers an excellent analysis of the narrative transformations of the picaresque in the twentieth-century. Although he does not deal with No Fixed Address in particular, his theoretical claims can be applied to this novel. He claims that the "feminine variations of the

picaresque" (xi), especially the twentieth-century variations, sabotage the traditional narrative structure of the picaresque to offer different versions of the picara. In the conventional picaresque the voice of the picara is often silenced by a male narrator who mediates the "story" and makes judgements about her. Freidman claims that "The author aligns himself with the social institutions of his day to put the narrator/ protagonist in his place: in the margins of society and text" (xiii). However, in the twentieth-century transformations the implied author³¹ allies with the protagonist and makes judgements against an unjust society. Again Freidman notes:

The crucial distinction between the Spanish feminine picaresque and the contemporary transformations is the implied authorial attitude toward society. The male-oriented social structure ceases to be the symbol of justice, so that the female rebel - underprivileged and victimized- comes to stand for individual, minority and women's rights. Rhetorical manipulation works to win reader sympathy for the antiheroine in her struggle against the acknowledged order (227).

Such a description is certainly applicable to the relationship which is established between the narrator and reader in No Fixed Address. The four "notebooks" on the missing person, Arachne Manteia, are constituted by another missing person who has followed Arachne into unknown territories. From the "notebooks" the narrator as the author-figure reconstructs the tale of Arachne's adventures and the researcher's quest. The reader is left with a story

which is twice-removed from the actual occurrences in Arachne's life. There is a sense that the narrator is constantly restructuring the information in the "notebooks" in the creation of the fictional constructions of both Arachne and the researcher. There are two missing people in this text and at least one reaches legendary proportions. While Arachne is the *picara*, the researcher is the *quester* who focuses on Arachne. The narrator, implied author and editor, is the teller of their stories. She seduces the reader to align with Arachne.

The implied author, though unreliable, provides a judgemental base upon which the reader assigns a relatively fixed meaning. She serves as the mediator between the reader and the researcher's account of Arachne's life. In No Fixed Address Arachne is exalted by the narrator/ implied author who supports her and converts her life into a legend. The narrator presents Arachne as a *picara* who is marginalized by a society intent on maintaining homogeneity. The harshness of such a society is illustrated through other marginal figures besides Arachne such as Josef and Basilisk. The portrait of city life and the self-centredness of individualism is presented through a number of characters who pass through Arachne's life, from Lanie to the unnamed man crying on the bus.³² As these marginalizing effects have already been discussed above in reference to the deconstruction of gender roles and the presentation of

Arachne as the female marginal, the discussion will not be repeated here. However, it is important to note that the narrator, unlike the conventional picaresque narrator, aligns herself with Arachne against an unjust society. She inverts the traditional norms which society considers to be just and normal and makes them seem immoral and unjust. For example, Anna's treatment of Josef as a decrepit and senseless old man is quite acceptable in contemporary society, but here the insensitivity of forced old-age hospitalization is emphasized. Anna's actions are perceived as being more abnormal and unacceptable than a young woman like Arachne making love to a ninety-year old man. Throughout the text the implied author/narrator provides a judgemental base and makes the text referential to life. Through the narrator No Fixed Address becomes a critique on twentieth-century urban society. It rejects societal and cultural norms as well as those established by the picaresque tradition. Arachne is transformed from social outcast to legendary heroine. The narrative voice and the persona of the researcher join the new picara in the fight against social inequality.

The reader's reactions to and judgements of Arachne are thoroughly guided by the narrator who attempts to sympathetically create a heroine who is struggling against society. There are constant reminders throughout No Fixed Address that Arachne is being constructed by the narrator

who controls what the reader feels. Arachne's linguistic act of defining and naming becomes self-reflexive as the narrator writes and rewrites how Arachne would say something rather than how she would write it. This metafictional awareness surfaces early in the text as the narrator concentrates on the construction of Arachne's language:

"I am free of the shrill and the halt
purveyors of public transport".
Admittedly, they have been drinking
Beaujolais, but Arachne would never have
said it that way. More likely, "I never
have to put up with the assholes who ride on
the bus again"(14).

In the following scene the narrator again constructs and reconstructs Arachne's conversation:

"Marriage, Mother, is not the haven of
refuge for me that it was for you". No-
what she really said was, "I don't want no
ring in exchange for screwing" (60).

These narrative reflections on the writing process illuminate how the narrator creates Arachne as a fictional entity as well as how society constructs Arachne as *picara*.

Similar reflections on fictional construction surface when the Alberta landscape is described. Again the narrator makes the reader aware of the relationship between reality and fiction. The landscape in No Fixed Address is both real and metafictional. Maps name towns and provide the reader with a concrete sense of Arachne's travels. However, there is also a sense that the towns are being written into

existence in much the same way Calgary is later written into being in "Waiting for the Rodeo" and "Calgary: this Growing Graveyard". The following paragraph deserves to be quoted at length as it describes the realistic and simultaneous metafictional existence of these Alberta towns:

Rumsey, Rowley, Craigmyle, Delia, Michichi, Munson, Morrin Bridge, Ghost Pine Creek, towns like their names, isolated, hopeful, doomed. Each trip, they are eroded, less proud, the settings for impossible regional fictions, their reality doubtful and confined. They are there because Arachne is selling underwear, no other reason. Their names scatter her map tentatively; their streets edge toward oblivion, their post offices lie. Arachne sometimes has the spooky feeling that they are sets. If she could dart around the corner of a false-fronted general store quickly enough, she would discover the vacancy behind and the face would be free to fall. It is an illusion that she shoves away; these places are her livelihood, they give her a reason to travel, a story to inhabit (112).

Alberta is both art imitating life and life imitating art. The narrator reminds the reader that Arachne may be as real as these towns actually are or as fictional as the towns appear.

The actual identity of the narrator has generated some confusion. For example, when Hutcheon claims that the "third-person narrating figure following Arachne's trail" is a variant on the picaresque narrative (The Canadian Postmodern, 127), she assumes that the narrator and the researcher are one and the same. She further claims that the "you", who is directly addressed throughout the

italicized portions of the text, initially refers to the reader but toward the end of the text reaches out to include "narrator, reader and protagonist" (133). I.S. MacLaren in his brief but interesting discussion of No Fixed Address in his biocritical essay, claims the "you" as the "realistic reader" (xxxv). He does not make any comment as to the identity of the narrator but refers to the narrative intrusions as the "italicized voice" (xxxv). These critical interpretations reflect just how the ambiguity of the narrator's identity seduces the reader and lends this text its dynamics. This kind of seduction of the reader is focused on by van Herk in "A Literary Affair". In this article she claims that the relationship between the writer and the reader is central to the making of fiction:

A writer without a reader is a frustrated lover. A writer who does not anticipate his reader, who thinks of language as nothing more than memory, is masturbating. But if there is a reader's image, if the writer can seek, yearn for a reader, he becomes a lover. We write, I think, desiring the ideal reader, the perfect reader who will complete and fulfill our desire. And that wayward perfect reader needs to be seduced: writing is seduction, the wooing of the reader.³³

It is this "wooing of the reader" which is illuminated through the transformation of the picaresque narrative which occurs in No Fixed Address. The reader is called upon to play an active role in the rendering of the "story". Van Herk signals to her reader on a number of occasions to

remind her that her participation is required in order for the narrative to progress.

Various indications in the four "notebooks" of the text reveal the narrator as the editor of the researcher's "notebooks", not the actual researcher as Hutcheon claims. The narrator is the editor who presides over a pretext which consists of the researcher's notes or "notebooks".³⁴ She introduces each "notebook" in italics and tells the stories of two missing persons, Arachne and the researcher who follows her. The "you" refers on one level to the researcher and on another to the researcher as "realistic reader".³⁵ One thing is for certain- they are all women. The *picara* is not silenced by a male voice. However, the narrator's identity may be clarified through a further analysis of the four "notebooks" - the italicized portions of the text.

The first "notebook" sets up an analogy between women's clothing and women's positions of subservience. This analogy can refer to the novel itself - the inner garments being the editor of the text making the reader aware of her control:

At any given moment, the garments covering it have determined the contours of the body; but the final appearance of the outer costume was inevitably controlled by a supporting apparatus beneath (9).

Here the outer costume can be read as representative of No Fixed Address itself. The supporting apparatus may be

interpreted as the editor who reads the "notebooks" of the researcher and constructs the novel. Furthermore, the first "notebook" not only establishes the novel as a tale of "petty rogues" (10), signalling its parody of the picaresque, but also directs the novel to a particular readership- "we" - women (10). Hutcheon notes that the "we" of the novel "debunks the humanist notion of art's 'universal' accessibility to the 'common reader'" (The Canadian Postmodern, 132). Thus early in the text No Fixed Address rejects the humanism which The Tent Peg struggles with throughout.³⁶

At the beginning of the second "notebook" the narrator articulates what she believes to be the goals of the researcher and the reader. Again the "you" appears as the editor reasserts her control over the text. She claims that thus far in the novel "you" have been given the past and now "you" question where Arachne's present or future may go: "You see, it is easy to find out about Arachne's past, only too easy....It's the present you're after, maybe even the future" (183). The seduced reader, who is following the researcher in her quest for information about Arachne, occupies the same position as the researcher. Thus unlike MacLaren's claim, the "you" refers to both the researcher and the reader. Also in this "notebook" Arachne is given a real as well as a fictional existence. Lanie's actual existence outside of Arachne is confirmed. Lanie is a

fictional construct but she is also placed in the real world where the researcher/ biographer searches for Arachne. The researcher as biographer searches for concrete evidence of the real person, Arachne. If Lanie exists in the world of the researcher then so does Arachne. Thus Arachne is both fictionalized and humanized by the editor. She is a legend and a real person.

The development of Arachne as a real and simultaneously fictional and legendary figure is emphasized in the beginnings of "notebooks" three and four. In "notebook" three again the "you" appears as a real entity coming into contact with Thena who, like Lanie, exists outside the fictional realm of Arachne's story. Here the editor reconstructs not Arachne but the researcher. The researcher is presented as the biographer who is attempting to piece together the missing links. The "you" refers directly to the researcher who interviews Thena:

You hang about, bring over the occasional bottle of Scotch. You try to persuade Thena that she's the keeper of history, the perfect mirror. She never could resist an audience (237).

As the researcher searches to uncover the "truth" about Arachne, the narrator condenses the plot of the novel and presents it as a detective story:

How much of what Thena says is true? You know that Arachne felt she had found a home with Thomas. Why would she leave? Maybe he threw her out, the kidnapping charge the last straw, sick of her infidelities, of

putting up with her blatant indiscretions
(239).

Both the researcher and the reader have been seduced by the mystery. It seems as if the narrator may know the "secret" and is taunting the curious reader and the confused researcher to discover it.³⁷ Narrative continuity is also disrupted in this "notebook". The reader is made aware that Arachne has disappeared before the actual disappearance is reconstructed from the researcher's "notebooks". The reader becomes part of a strange detective story where she knows the events before they occur.

By the time the reader reaches "notebook" four, the editor has connected the predicaments of the reader and the researcher. The researcher becomes lost in her search for Arachne and the editor imagines the end of both of them. The storyline becomes less and less reliable as now even the pretext is reconstructed through the loose recollections of other people. Not only are the researcher and narrator constructing Arachne's life, but so are the geologists, the pilot and the folks from Johnson's crossing (313-314). The narrator abandons the presentation of the researcher as a biographer who is trying to realistically reconstruct Arachne's life. Instead the narrator reconstructs the researcher as an idealist following Arachne into a new, uncivilized world. Arachne is now a legendary figure, driving through the Yukon in her Mercedes, tossing underwear

out the window. The researcher is, of course, following her. At the end of the text the reader is left with many unanswered questions as to the validity of the pretext as well as the implied author's role as editor, history-maker, myth-maker and story-teller.

If the "you" and the researcher are read as the "realistic reader"³⁸ then this last "notebook" has metafictional repercussions similar to the first "notebook". The "realistic reader" oversees the sabotage of the picaresque as the narrative moves beyond the realism of the picaresque literary mode into other literary modes. Towards the end of the novel when realism is thoroughly disregarded, the researcher follows Arachne with tears in her eyes as does the "realistic reader" looking for a conclusion, an answer to the chaos of the novel. Certainly the reader is involved in the making of this text from the moment she reads the double title. The female reader is directly addressed from the beginning and feels privileged as the text is specifically directed toward her. The narrator seduces the reader to align with Arachne against an unjust world. An intimate relationship is established between the narrator and the reader as the reader participates in the story's making. The narrator/ implied author and reader are involved in a "literary affair" as the reader is necessary to the consummation of the fiction.³⁹

This interpretation of the identity of the narrator and the "you" allows the reader a more comprehensive vision of Arachne as new picara. When the reader abandons realist conventions of representation and conclusion, she comprehends Arachne as a metaphor for the feminist artist. She also interprets the implied author as the metafictional representation of the feminist artist. As the novel moves beyond the thematic and narrative conventions of the picaresque mode, Arachne moves beyond the very form which creates her. She is analogous to the feminist postmodern artist who moves beyond the literary forms which she works within. The voice of the implied author is also the voice of the feminist artist who reconstructs the past, recreates characters and reclaims women's mythology and legends. She is an innovator, telling stories which have never been told, serving always as the voice in italics,⁴⁰ reminding the reader that it takes reader and writer to create a new literature

As Arachne transcends the roles of female picaro and picara, the reader is asked to step beyond the picaresque and into uncharted territory. Unlike the early picaras or even picaros, Arachne moves beyond the form which creates her. She remains deceptive as the reader cannot decide whether or not she has actually repented. As has been noted earlier in this chapter, in "Picaros and Priestesses: Repentent Rogues" van Herk notes that it is difficult to

ascertain whether or not the rogue has actually repented. At times in No Fixed Address it seems as if Arachne may indeed be a "repentent rogue" who manipulates the power structure which she is part of. Her implication with the existing order allows the reader to believe that Arachne is "repentent". However, towards the end of the novel Arachne rejects the order she has been implicated in throughout No Fixed Address. Van Herk's questions, as quoted below, seem particularly appropriate as the reader attempts to interpret the concluding pages of No Fixed Address:

What happens when the rogue repents? What happens when the picaro, the quick change artist, is rehabilitated? Is there a story after repentence? Does the rogue find fulfillment, happiness, prosperity? Does she live happily ever after? Or, having repented, does she get assigned to the penitence beat, doomed to be a priestess of lost possibility, the once-chance of true roguishness passed by? ("Picaros and Priestesses: Repentent Rogues", 17)

Does Arachne live happily ever after or is she "doomed to be a priestess of lost possibility"? These questions are generated throughout the text's movement beyond the picaresque mode and into a series of other intertexts in No Fixed Address. Most notable of these intertexts is Robert Kroetsch's Badlands. As suggested at the beginning of this chapter, the second part of the novel's title discloses another layer to the text. An Amorous Journey suggests that this twentieth-century picaresque frolic through the Canadian West is also a never-ending quest.

It is not unusual for the quest to be equated with the picaresque. For example, Edward Freidman directly notes how the quest and the picaresque mingle:

The picaresque uses the lowly status of the narrator/protagonist to deconstruct the myth of the epic and chivalric hero and the saint, and the corresponding motifs of the quest and the journey toward perfection (221).

In a ground-breaking essay, Ulrich Wicks claims the picaresque as a mode rather than a genre and states that though the picaresque may be the major mode in a particular novel, there may also be a number of secondary influences at work.⁴¹ He further correlates the picaresque to romance and claims that the "picaresque can be seen as an antitype to romance" and that "romance is the mode that picaresque often tends to mix with" (106). It is interesting to note that, like Wicks, van Herk notes the bipolar relationship between romance and picaresque:

And although only the foolish generalize, I would venture that all Canadian novels can be seen as either romantic or picaresque ("Picaros and Priestesses: Repentent Rogues", 14).

Van Herk goes on to note that "the temptations of romance are enormous" and that the picaresque inevitably mixes with romance. To equate the quest with the "yearning for order" (Wicks, 106) prevalent in romance is not radical. While the picaresque remains the major mode in No Fixed Address, the romantic quest, or at least a parody of the quest, is also

evident. The layer of van Herk's novel where the quest actively operates is directly related to the parodic relationship between No Fixed Address and Robert Kroetsch's Badlands.

No Fixed Address offers a sustained parody of Badlands and van Herk places a number of signals in her text to alert the reader to this relationship. This is one of the many "secrets" of No Fixed Address which has not been noted by critics.⁴² In her biocritical essay on Robert Kroetsch van Herk claims that:

That Badlands succeeds in being a profoundly feminist work is a double irony, given Kroetsch's phallocentric fictional world and his fascination with male quest stories. The flying/falling male has hit bedrock.⁴³

In Kroetsch's text the female quest is defined in terms of the male quest and thus the deconstruction of masculinity and femininity is not an issue. Van Herk rejects such a definition of the female quest in No Fixed Address. There are really two quests in van Herk's text; the quest of the female researcher - a feminist quest for heroines and legends, and Arachne's quest for belonging. In No Fixed Address Arachne does not move backward through time as William Dawe in Badlands moves backward through geological time. However, the researcher does move backward through Arachne's past to claim her as a legend. The reader is brought through a landscape familiar to twentieth-century women in No Fixed Address. Arachne, as quester, constantly

haunts along the margins of a tightly sealed patriarchal structure. Only when Arachne enters a world uninhabited and uncontrolled by this structure, a world which is a "four-dimensional nothingness" (317), is freedom and discovery given mythic proportions. This is the same fantastic world of the North which dominates The Tent Peg. Thus while Kroetsch's quest moves into the past, van Herk's moves into an unknown future. Kroetsch deconstructs a legend and van Herk invents one. For Kroetsch women's quests are defined through male quests but for van Herk women's quests develop separately and independently from male quests. No Fixed Address explicitly depicts women's quests as being related to women's desires.

Van Herk's parody of Badlands is signalled extensively by the form and content of No Fixed Address. She manipulates the naming strategies and surface form of Kroetsch's novel. Like Kroetsch van Herk freezes episodes and entitles them, creating the illusion of fixing them and creating patterns. Such order is, of course, the order of the trickster as the reader is warned in the beginning of the text that: "Arachne has managed to get rid of what form and structure there was to her work, if not her life" (14). The functions of the narrators/ implied authors are quite similar in both novels as well. In Badlands Anna Dawe presides over the pretext of her father's work and reconstructs her own version of events. Her voice is

indicated through the use of italics. In No Fixed Address the narrator presides over the pretext of the researcher and she too reconstructs characters and events. Her voice is heard through the italicized portions of the "notebooks". Thus the narrative structures and the surface form of the two novels are paralleled.

Various movements throughout No Fixed Address correspond to similar movements in Kroetsch's novel. From the beginning of No Fixed Address van Herk signals her parody of Badlands. For example, the second sections in each text are comparable. In the second section of No Fixed Address entitled "The buried" (16-20) Josef and Arachne meet in a graveyard over the skull of an Indian. Near the opening of Kroetsch's Badlands Web and Anna Yellowbird meet in an Indian burial ground.⁴⁴ Arachne can also be read as a female counterpart to Web, as her name suggests.⁴⁵ Josef and Anna both share the common role as marginals in society- Josef as an aged immigrant and Anna Yellowbird as a native woman. While in Badlands Anna follows the men and becomes part of their quest, in No Fixed Address this order is reversed. Josef follows Arachne and becomes part of her "amorous journey". While for Kroetsch the graveyard is a reminder of the past which his characters are trying to reclaim, for van Herk it is a connector between the marginals of society - the haunting ground of the unwanted who become the legends of the future.

Throughout No Fixed Address a number of even more specific references are made to Kroetsch's text. For example, Arachne picks up a hitch-hiker outside Drumheller who stinks horribly (33). In Badlands McBride gets skunked and leaves the Dawe expedition near Drumheller (39). In Kroetsch's novel McBride is seduced away from the male quest through his memories of family life. The section entitled "You got till sun-up" (40-44) introduces a woman who is forced into silence by her husband. The woman's face seduces McBride from his quest. In No Fixed Address this woman reappears. However, here she is not a welcoming face behind the possessive husband, but a hostile, pregnant woman alone with a dog (32-36). She serves to remind the reader of what happens to so many women when well-meaning men, like McBride, go off on their male quests.

A comparison of the episodes entitled "Swath" (185-189) in No Fixed Address and "Tornado" (200-209) in Badlands discloses the sexual nature of Web's and Arachne's quests and correlates sex and death. In "Swath" the sex act is correlated directly to death as Arachne and Josef unite:

Riding under his weight, the straw a cushion
and above his head the moon spiked against
the sky, Arachne is lifted beyond herself.
They have not shed their clothes but they
are searingly naked,....

Their bodies raw, cooling despite the warm
straw, she brings her hand up to his face.
It is wet. Arachne turns her head, the
field drawn with poplars black lace against
the feathered sky. "Look", she says, "the
trees".

He raises his head from her shoulder. It is what you see at the edge of your eye before dying, black trees etching an autumn wind (188).⁴⁶

In "Tornado" Anna Yellowbird and Web consummate their quests in the Badlands of Southern Alberta and discover the Daweosaurus in the process:

..."I could see Anna under me, on top of me: that ball or bolt or bomb of lightning had entered through my asshole....And the crack of thunder deafened us. The inverted universe and undescended testicles of the divine, the refucking-union with the dead-" (206-207).

Both scenes powerfully evoke the power of the sexual experience and its relationship to the death instinct. However, in Badlands this scene leads to the discovery of the object of the quest. The dinosaur is unearthed and the connection with the past made. In No Fixed Address Arachne and Josef's sexual relationship moves Arachne further away from the social structure as it is because of Josef that she flees to the North. While for Kroetsch the sex act finalizes the quest, for van Herk it begins it.

Another interesting scene in No Fixed Address further confirms and illuminates the parodic relationship between van Herk's novel and Badlands. The physical description of "Wild Woman" (229-233) seems to share the configurations of Kroetsch's Albertan Badlands. Both serve as unexpected intrusions upon the prairie landscape. For Kroetsch the Badlands of southern Alberta serve as a gateway into the

past. For van Herk this unusual natural configuration serves as a way of further feminizing the prairie. It is described as a "nipple of land on the breast of the world" (232). While the Badlands of Kroetsch hide the secrets of the past which men try to excavate, Arachne can see the future from "Wild Woman". Here she mysteriously hides something. Dawe and Web dig into the land while Arachne puts something in it:

And there they find the Wild Woman, her
stone outline spread to infinite
sky...Arachne will never get tired of
looking at the sky from within the woman's
arms, but she finally rises and stares
beyond the outline of rock to the horizon
that wheels four dimensions around her.
What secret burial she makes before she
walks down the steep ridge to the car and
the waiting old man is buried there (232-
233).

Towards the last part of the novel van Herk's references to Kroetsch's work become more and more concise as the reader is reminded of the different directions of the two journeys- into the past and into the future. Kroetsch's text is present through van Herk's journey into the miner's house where Arachne becomes significantly buried beneath male bodies (262-266). However, unlike Dawe, Arachne does not enter the mine to dig into the past (Badlands, 78-83) but moves ahead into the future. It is significant that Dawe's descent occurs near the beginning of Badlands and Arachne's near the end of No Fixed Address. At the mine and the house of the miner Arachne comes into contact with the

real world of the picaro. Here, she realizes that her quest through travel is not only escape, but a movement toward freedom:

...their web of stories arouses in her a nostalgia for disorder and unwholesomeness, the satisfaction of a tattered life with no obligations or rewards. She is lusting after tawdriness again, as if it might be a refuge. And she realizes, listening to the two men chip away at the past, that she is escaping again. No, running toward anonymity, absorption, relief from expectation (260).

Arachne moves beyond the picaresque form which creates her and becomes a new picara heading for a new world. It is significant that her last trick as a picara is the ambush of Dougall McKay, himself a notorious picaro.⁴⁷ The new picara robs the male picaro. She seeks her revenge and does not allow herself to be manipulated. Arachne's quest continues as van Herk moves beyond the picaresque form and further parodies Kroetsch's version of the male quest.

As Dawe faces himself in the personage of Grimlich, so Arachne faces herself in the personage of the failed poet, her doppelganger (272-277). Again Arachne escapes not through the layers of geological time like Dawe, but into the promise of a future in the North. Through these correlations between Arachne and Dawe, Arachne is transformed from a Web-like figure into a Dawe-like (legendary) figure. However, while Kroetsch demythologizes Dawe, van Herk mythologizes Arachne.

The legend of Arachne is advanced through her second life, after her death in a Vancouver restaurant (280-284). In this after-life Arachne is a legend. She first of all kills the ferryman, who in Kroetsch's novel serves as the link between the hidden world of the past and the present. Once Arachne is freed of the past the novel moves out of Kroetsch's West and into Jack Hodgins' mythic British Columbia.⁴⁸ In No Fixed Address Arachne discovers that her maps are no longer useful to her as Vancouver Island is "the edge; not the end, but edge, the border, the brink, the selva of the world" (291).⁴⁹ Arachne goes over the edge into the fantastic, beyond the mapped areas into the unmapped Northern British Columbia and the Yukon. This is her second life as the narrator assures the reader that Arachne "has been back to Vancouver and died there, one of her lives certainly over" (301). The magical Yukon liberates the novel from any of the trappings of realism as well as moves the quest for a future into uncertainty. This is the same North as is celebrated in The Tent Peg and Arachne is likened to an explorer of this new world:

Her life has become movement without end,
the grind of motion wearing itself into her,
wearing all else out. Still, Columbus
returned even when no one expected him to;
he did not sail off the edge of the world.
Arachne drives (304).

The picara is now explorer, discoverer and legend- the new picara.

As Arachne enters the North another intertext briefly surfaces- van Herk's own The Tent Peg. The Bear glacier serves as the introduction to the Northern world (304-307). In The Tent Peg the bear is presented as the embodiment of the female spirit of the North.⁵⁰ Here the glacier is named for this feminine spirit and Arachne significantly falls to her knees in worship and awe of the amazing sight (307). Furthermore, the final "notebook" conjures up the image of a figure who recalls Ivan and Cap from The Tent Peg as well as Kroetsch's Web. He is a geologist who tells "bear stories, helicopter stories, tornado stories, camp cook stories and staking stories" (313).⁵¹ Thus besides echoing the texts of Kroetsch and Hodgins, van Herk also recalls her own text.

As in The Tent Peg, the metaphor for the feminist artist provides this text with its revolutionary spirit. Arachne and the narrator, like Tip in "Waiting for the Rodeo", are metaphors for feminist artists. Also Arachne, similar to J.L. and Deborah, is a weaver of stories. She creates stories as she travels. Arachne as traveller is also Arachne as artist. The maps which she employs to guide her can be interpreted as representative of the literary forms and conventions which the feminist artist manipulates in the telling of both new and reclaimed stories. As Arachne finally disregards the maps and moves into unmapped territories, so van Herk transforms the conventions of the picaresque mode and moves into a formless collage of

juxtaposed episodes. Arachne as the new pícara abandons the traditional literary form which has created her. The biographer/quester also abandons her "notebooks" and joins in Arachne's quest. Together, with the narrator, they step out of the text to invite the reader to become part of their quest. Van Herk as the feminist postmodern writer also abandons traditional forms and invites the reader to participate in her creations. The unresolved ending of No Fixed Address is both utopian and metafictional in nature. Arachne drives through the North throwing away underwear, which is both symbolic of women's oppression within a capitalistic society and of the underlying structure which gives the novel shape.⁵² There is a sense that the world can indeed be transformed through movement away from and rejection of the existing order. No Fixed Address becomes radical and revolutionary in this rejection, which is both societal and literary.

The ultimate destination for the revolutionary feminist is a new world free of class and gender restrictions. Van Herk identifies this place within the mythic North:

This is the ultimate frontier, a place where the civilized melt away and the meaning of mutiny is unknown, where manners never existed and family backgrounds are erased. It is exactly the kind of place for Arachne (316).

This is a place of equality and freedom where people from diverse backgrounds go and never come back. It is an untainted and ideal homeland for the dispossessed. In a literary sense, it is that space where the modal becomes a blur,⁵³ beyond a decisive literary form. It is the place where the reader, protagonist, narrator, researcher and implied author escape after they have taken off their underwear!

The utopian feminist act is to ultimately reject and create anew. In a literary sense it is the virgin territory of the experimental text- the metamorphosis of a form into something different, of a picara into a new picara. As readers we have been seduced into a fictional world where we glimpse a vision of an ambiguous utopia. This utopia offers a kind of freedom which is both enticing and frightening. As the feminist postmodern rejects societal and literary norms, she frees herself. Yet she then finds herself in untravelled territory where her world is undefined and often isolating. Like the researcher and the reader, the feminist postmodern has "lit out" and "now [she] can't stop" (317). The reader finds herself in a similar situation. She cannot resist the lure of the text and the fact that it allows her the freedom to interpret it in many possible ways. Van Herk leaves us with an albeit temporary and ambiguous, but nevertheless nostalgic place to inhabit. As van Herk

becomes a revolutionary writer she invites us to become revolutionary readers.

Endnotes

1. Though the full title of the novel is No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey, it is referred to simply as No Fixed Address.
2. See Kroetsch's assignment of man to motion and woman to stasis in "An Erotics of Space" as discussed above in Chapter two. Arachne defies this binary construction.
3. Wayne Tefs, Rev. of No Fixed Address, Border Crossings 5: 4 (Fall, 1986) 56. MacLaren also briefly notes the relationship between the texts in his biocritical essay on van Herk (xxxiii).
4. In one layer of The Studhorse Man Hazard dies in a fire and comes back to life after Martha makes love to him (152-155). In No Fixed Address the researcher is unsure as to whether or not Arachne died from eating poisonous fish in a Vancouver restaurant.
5. Linda Hutcheon, A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth Century Art Forms (New York and London: Methuen, 1985) 87.
6. Aritha van Herk, "The Art of Blackmail: Secrets and Seeing", Canadian Literature 100 (Spring, 1984): 330.
7. Linda Hutcheon offers a fairly indepth analysis of No Fixed Address as a parody of the picaresque form in a chapter entitled "'Shape Shifters': Canadian Women Writers and the Tradition" in The Canadian Postmodern, 107- 137. Hutcheon concentrates mainly on the novel's parodic relationship with the picaresque, though she does mention that there are other influences and parodies operating, such as the parodies of women's travel literature and the western. I.S. MacLaren also refers to the picaresque in his brief analysis of No Fixed Address in his biocritical essay.
8. The term "mode" directly refers to Ulrich Wicks' interpretation of the picaresque as a genre. Though this theory will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, it is useful to point out here that Wicks' model allows for a number of influences to operate within the picaresque. See Ulrich Wicks, "The Nature of Picaresque Narrative: A Modal Approach", Upstarts, Wanderers or Swindlers: Anatomy of the Picaresque, A Critical Anthology, eds. Gustavo Pellon and Julio Rodriguez- Luis (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1986) 103-111.

9. Some examples of these early picaresque novels are Juan Ruiz's Libro de Buen Amor (1348), the anonymous Lazarillo de Tormes (1554), Mateo Aleman's Guzman de Alfarache (1599), and Francisco de Quevedo's La Vida del Buscon Llamado Don Pablos (1626).

10. Peter N Dunn, "The Picara: The Rogue Female", In Upstarts, Wanderers or Swindlers: Anatomy of the Picara, A Critical Anthology eds. Gustavo Pellon and Julio Rodriguez-Luis (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1986) 246.

11. In A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms Hutcheon notes that parody inverts norms as well as adheres to them. She claims that parody does not have to mock or ridicule but produces an ironic difference. As such she notes that parody is "fundamentally double and divided; its ambivalence stems from the dual drives of conservative and revolutionary forces that are inherent in its nature..." (26). Arachne as a parody of the picaro both adheres to and inverts his characteristics.

12. Hutcheon also notes this in The Canadian Postmodern, 125, though she does not extend the comparison.

13. Aritha van Herk, No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey (1986; Paper back edition, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart-Bantam Inc., 1987) 41.

14. Edward Freidman, The Antiheroine's Voice: Narrative Discourse and Transformations of the Picaresque (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987) 227. Freidman does not refer to No Fixed Address directly. However, his analysis of the narrative structures of the twentieth-century transformations of the picaresque is applicable to No Fixed Address. Reference will be made to his observations as this chapter progresses.

15. The role and definition of the implied author will be discussed in more detail later when the narrative transformations of the picaresque are analysed.

16. For a fuller discussion of the picaro's tendency to long for a better place in the social structure see Harry Seiber, The Picaresque, The Critical Idiom (London: Methuen, 1985) 54-55. For the implications of this for the picara see Peter Dunn, "The Picara: The Female Rogue", 246-247.

17. See "Picaros and Priestesses; Repentent Rogues" as quoted earlier, 17.

18. Arachne cuts her hair short and dyes it blonde to escape the police. See "Cover", 270-271.

19. See Ovid's Metamorphoses, Book VI, trans. A.D. Melville, ed. E.J. Kenney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 121-125.

20. Edgar M Glenn, The Metamorphoses: Ovid's Roman Games (New York and London: University Press of America, 1986) 73.

21. The relationship between Thana and Arachne has also been examined briefly by I.S. MacLaren, xxxvi-xxxvii.

22. This section was published separately as "Bail Skippers and Bacchants", Canadian Fiction Magazine 53 (1985): 89-97.

23. Both Thana and Two-halves are radical feminists who encourage the separation of women from men and the formation of a sub-culture of women.

24. This party will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

25. Freidman refers to the picara as the antiheroine as indicated by the title of his text The Antiheroine's Voice: Narrative Discourse and the Transformation of the Picaresque.

26. Here I am referring to the poststructuralist notion that language both describes and is defined by experience. Van Herk perpetuates this notion through Arachne and the other marginalized characters of No Fixed Address.

27. This term is used extensively by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in a chapter entitled "Sexual Linguistics: Women's Sentence, Men's Sentencing", in No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth-Century (New Haven and New York: Yale University Press, 1988) 227-271. They claim that women writers take a revisionist approach to language and concentrate on how women's texts reflect their author's linguistic discomfort. While Gilbert and Gubar use the term "linguistic marginality" to concentrate specifically on how language defines experience, here the term is expanded to illuminate how language constructs experience and identity.

28. It is interesting to remember that the mythological Arachne also does not use language to communicate. She uses her tapestries.

29. The focus on the alphabet surfaces in the works of many feminist writers as an area of major concern. Gilbert and Gubar claim: "Thus, the complex process of reinventing, relearning, or re-viewing the alphabet... becomes for these

women a crucial act of both self-difference and self-assertion" (No Man's Land, 269).

30. See the section entitled "Routes of Passage", 119-124. The title of this passage recalls Margaret Laurence's section "Rites of Passage" in The Diviners and serves as a parody of this kind of realistic portrait of the coming of age of a young woman.

31. Freidman claims the implied author as the "presence of the author in the discourse of the narrator" (xiii). In No Fixed Address the implied author and the narrator are one and the same as the narrator is the editor of the pretext and inventor of the fiction.

32. No Fixed Address, 64-65. This scene reinforces the notion of an uncaring and de-humanized society.

33. Aritha van Herk, "A Literary Affair", Driving Home, eds. Barbara Belyea and Estelle Dansereau (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1984) 72.

34. Freidman notes that the author as editor presiding over a pretext is quite common in the twentieth-century transformations of the picaresque (xiv-xv). He refers specifically to the narrative structures of Hasta no verte Jesus mio by Elena Pointowska (1969) and Tereza Batista cansada de guerra by Jorge Amado (1972).

35. Again, this is MacLaren's term (xxxv). Here my reading of the "you" agrees with Hutcheon and MacLaren, though my interpretation of the narrating figure differs.

36. For a fuller discussion of the complicity of the feminism of The Tent Peg with humanism refer to the previous chapter.

37. The reference to the secret is made by Aritha van Herk in "The Art of Blackmail: Secrets and Seeing" which has been quoted near the opening of this chapter.

38. As noted above, MacLaren refers to the "you" as the "realistic reader". He does not also claim the researcher as the "you" as I have done in this chapter.

39. Aritha van Herk, "A Literary Affair", 71-74. This article, as quoted earlier in this chapter, compares the relationship between the writer and reader to that of lovers.

40. The sections of No Fixed Address where the implied author/ narrator speaks are in italics, suggesting a certain marginalization even from the text which she is constructing.

41. Wicks notes that in many picaresque novels there are other modes. He suggests the following modal approach to literature with the picaresque as a mode which is influenced by the other modes. This is his modal structure:
satire picaresque comedy HISTORY sentiment tragedy romance, 104.

42. I have not discovered any critical material which notes that No Fixed Address is a parody of Badlands.

43. Aritha van Herk, "Biocritical Essay", The Robert Kroetsch Papers: The First Accession, eds. Jean Tener and Apollonia Steele (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1986) xxix.

44. Robert Kroetsch, Badlands, General Paperbacks edition (1975; Toronto: General Publishing Company of Canada, 1982) 6-9.

45. Arachne's name can be interpreted as having double significance. It refers to the Arachne of Ovid's Metamorphoses and as the female counterpart to Kroetsch's Web, who weaves tall-tales.

46. MacLaren offers a detailed and quite an interesting reading of this scene.

47. Dougall recalls the Scottish outlaw and follower of Rob Roy in Sir Walter Scott's Rob Roy. See Clarence L. Barnhart, ed., The New Century Cyclopedia of Names, vol. I (New York: Appleton, Century, Crofts Inc., 1954) 1321.

48. The reference here is to the Vancouver Island created by Jack Hodgins in works like Spit Delaney's Island (1976) and The Invention of the World (1977).

49. This edge recalls Hodgins' "dividing line" between reality and fantasy in "Separating", Spit Delaney's Island (Toronto: MacMillan, 1976) 7, 23.

50. For more details see the preceding chapter The Tent Peg: Circumcising the North.

51. All of these stories are told in The Tent Peg and Badlands.

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52. See the discussion above on the first "notebook" for a presentation of the metafictional implications of underwear.

53. The reference here is to the Ulrich Wicks' modal which I have been referring to throughout this chapter.

Conclusion

Exiting from this thesis is even more difficult than exiting from van Herk's individual texts. This study has attempted to trace the various manifestations of van Herk's feminist postmodern poetics throughout her fiction. The preceding chapters have especially focused on narrative strategies, intertextuality, and the reclaiming of mythology. Van Herk's texts have been placed in the discursive and cultural context out of which they are generated. Single conclusions cannot be made as a feminist postmodern poetics still remains undefined and perhaps is undefinable. In order to hypothesize about the future of van Herk's fiction it is necessary to comment briefly upon some of the interpretations offered in this thesis.

Van Herk's feminist postmodern poetics is always evident in her textual practice. All of her fiction challenges both literary and societal conventions. For example, Judith challenges the form of the "realist regional" and simultaneously deconstructs the binary constructions associated with this form. The Tent Peg works within the journal form and transforms it into a subjective and multi-vocal discourse. No Fixed Address both adheres to and subverts the picaresque and quest traditions. These literary subversions are in themselves feminist achievements. Van Herk also subverts societal norms as she

questions the social construction of gender, reclaims women's neglected mythologies, and writes women into experiences and positions previously denied them. Therefore, van Herk's feminist postmodern poetics unites the aesthetic and the political. Femininism and postmodernism become inseparable in van Herk's fictions. The many layers of her texts generate literary and cultural critiques. Her texts are produced in the "world" and hopefully in turn will affect the "world".¹

Towards the end of No Fixed Address, and especially in the short fiction published since then, van Herk begins to move away from the boundaries of both the short story and novel forms. Her work turns increasingly toward hermeneutic philosophy, metafiction and self-reflexivity. At the forefront of this questioning is WOMAN and her place in twentieth-century postmodern society. Van Herk does not offer any answers but, from a feminist postmodern perspective, the questions themselves are sufficient.

It is too soon to comment upon how Aritha van Herk's questions will be received, in the long run, by the literary establishment. As this thesis has highlighted, the initial critical reception has not always been encouraging. Often van Herk's feminist postmodern poetics is misread by critics who are not sympathetic to either feminism or postmodernism. Yet, one hopes that despite these readings the reader will actively participate in van Herk's texts. The reader of her

fiction must actively respond to her seduction as van Herk notes in "A Literary Affair": "it is time for both readers and writers to bypass middlemen as interpreters/interrupters of our culture and to converge as lovers" (73).

As lover, the reader enters van Herk's texts and shares in her vision. As this thesis has indicated, this vision is ambiguous and unfixd. However, the reader is seduced by this ambiguity as she joins van Herk in an exploration of the connections between feminism and postmodernism. The idealistic words of Carolyn J. Allen seem to appropriately convey the vision shared by van Herk and her thoroughly seduced reader:

We keep trying to escape the old roads while we change the cultural and social maps that have kept woman from finding herself and women from shaping the world. We use what we can, we go where we must; the master's tools may not help us dismantle his house, but they might tell us how and why it was built in the first place....We hope for a different, freer future, one that we are still beginning to imagine. We make our theory and act our practice to ensure the social and cultural incorporation of feminist goals, to name that future not postmodernism but postfeminism.²

Endnotes

1. The word "world" is being used to evoke the political interpretation of texts as worldly as noted by Edward Said, The World, The Text, The Critic (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983).

2. Carolyn J. Allen, "Feminist Criticism and Postmodernism", Tracing Literary Theory, ed. Joseph Natoli (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987) 297.

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