



universität
wien

DIPLOMARBEIT

Titel der Diplomarbeit

Un/Covered Origins:
A Mythological Mapping of Aritha van Herk's Fiction

Verfasserin

Katrin M. Fennesz

angestrebter akademischer Grad

Magistra der Philosophie (Mag. Phil)

Wien, im September 2008

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt:

A 190 344 299

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt:

UF Englisch, UF Psychologie und Philosophie

Betreuerin:

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Carmen Birkle

to lose oneself is not the same as
not to find one's way
(Monty Reid, *Dog Sleeps*, 12)

Impossible: somewhere to come from/
never to run away to.
(Aritha van Herk, *Places Far from Ellesmere*, 15)

You don't ask where you are going;
going is what you are there to do.
(Robert Kroetsch, *Alberta*, 30)

Acknowledgements

Writing is an act done in solitude, but this paper would not be what it is today without the many people around me who have shaped my ideas in endless conversations and steered my thoughts along avenues less traveled by.

I would like to begin where it all began. Thank you Prof. Carmen Birkle for making me read *No Fixed Address* – the world needs more of those eccentric, immoral, unconventional heroines. Also, thank you for allowing me the freedom to express my voice in my own style. I really appreciate it.

In Calgary, a big thank you to the whole staff of the Special Collections Department at the University of Calgary, above all Apollonia Steele and Marlys Chevrefils. You know that the view of the Rockies is there for a reason.

A very special thank you to Aritha van Herk. You made me think big. Thank you for all your time, wise words, and encouraging and inspirational thoughts. With you I discovered that Calgary too has its ghosts. I'll never forget.

And M., you were a definite instance of serendipity.

Contents

Acknowledgements

1. Introduction	1
2. More than Mothers and Muses	4
2.1. Myth means... – Towards a Definition	7
2.2. Laughing Witches Refusing to Eat Shit	11
3. The Space of the Imagination or the Mythology of Landscape	17
3.1. Tumbling Giants and Undulating Prairies – The West	19
3.2. Elusive Silences and Imperialist Practices – The North	24
4. Of Pigs and Bears – Escaping	30
4.1. “Pig shit” – <i>Judith</i>	32
4.1.1. Judith on Circe’s Magic Island or Circe on Judith’s Enemy Territory	34
4.1.2. Refusing to be Victims	40
4.2. “Hearing the mountain shift” – <i>The Tent Peg</i>	45
4.2.1. The Diverse Mythological Levels in <i>The Tent Peg</i>	47
4.2.2. Transforming Realities	52
5. Magic Mountains – Landscape Renderings in <i>Judith</i> and <i>The Tent Peg</i>	58
6. Dead Reckoning or Map’s Myths	65
7. “ALL STORIES ND” – Disappearing	68
7.1. “Movement without end” – <i>No Fixed Address</i>	71
7.1.1. Witty Weavers	75
7.1.2. Arachne’s Odyssey	80
7.1.3. Raki, the Rouge	85
7.1.4. Landscape of Confusion	89
7.2. Tip, the Disappearing Maverick	96
7.3. “I want to become a ghost story” – <i>Restlessness</i>	98
7.3.1. The Color of the Chinook	100
7.3.2. Chosen Erasure or the Search for Something that Matters	104
8. Malleable Myths	111
9. “Then heroes are not all men?” – Conclusion	117
10. Appendix	120
11. References	135
12. Index	149

1. Introduction

[G]eography is also part of text in a strange way.
(Robert Kroetsch, *Labyrinths of Voice*, 8)

Restless travels, impatient movement, and never-before-seen vigor are characteristics, barely doing justice to Aritha van Herk's heroines. Judith, J.L., Arachne, and Dorcas are women of the open road, refusing to stay at home and bake muffins, rejecting the monotony of normalcy, and discarding the offer of a life as "wife of." They are female figures with the nerve to be repugnant, the self-confidence to be different, and the courage to go beyond well-trodden paths with allegedly accurate maps. All find themselves in unpromising situations but they neither answer with silent indifference nor timid submissiveness. Instead, they break out of the roles mythology has assigned for them and endeavor to re-define, however unrealistic their definitions may be.

"[N]arrative is an archaeological dig, a multi-layered thing," Aritha van Herk (Clayton, 169) tells us. Consequently, multiple layers allow for multiple readings, multiple voices, and multiple stories. Or, as Kroetsch puts it, "Archaeology allows the fragmentary nature of the story, against the coerced unity of traditional history. Archaeology allows for discontinuity. It allows for layering. It allows for imaginative speculation" ("Discovery," 7). Both, van Herk and Kroetsch obviously draw on Michel Foucault's concept of archaeology and its significance for a re-discovery and re-evaluation of supposedly fixed, historical patterns. Regarding structures as archaeological layers suggest that the same can, in fact, be dismantled and deconstructed, as van Herk proves in her works.

Aritha van Herk's novels are, if any classification is applicable, postmodern. Lyotard characterizes postmodernism as follows: "Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives" (xxiv). However, this postmodernist incredulity does not imply downright refusal of meta- or master narratives. Instead, as Linda Hutcheon asserts, "it contests it from within its own assumptions" (*Poetics*, 6).

Mythology is such a master narrative and one that van Herk very overtly uses and abuses in her works. For her, "[m]ythology [...] is not just all the forerunners of the stories that we live with, but a kind of template for the way that we imagine the story of living" ("Personal Interview," 120). Hence, mythology is very influential in our

lives and therefore often appears, as Barthes has it, “natural and *goes without saying*” (143). Postmodernism, now, according to Hutcheon again, “argues that such systems [as mythology] are indeed attractive, perhaps even necessary, but this does not make them any the less illusory” (*Poetics*, 6). Therefore, writers seek to undo these ostensibly natural, pre-given, illusory, mythological orders and subvert them, from within.

Obviously, when considering mythology in connection with literature, the field of research is not clear-cut. In this paper, I will discuss mythology, as it is used in van Herk’s fiction, as a fusion of “many different and competing mythologies” (“Personal Interview,” 120). Very often, van Herk plays with this web of myth and truth, history and mystery, fact and fiction, the witnessed and the invented – and the sensation that one can never quite tell apart the one from the other. In particular, I will focus on mythology in connection with the depiction of women, the mythology of the landscape, and the interconnectedness of various mythologies of different cultures.

Mythology gives shape to experience and provides a framework, in which to locate oneself. However, women, in classical mythology, were either denied representation and, thus, a history and genealogy, or were portrayed ambiguously, making it difficult for women to find their own identity. But Kroetsch knows that, “In a sense, we haven’t got an identity until somebody tells our story. The fiction makes us real” (*Creation*, 63). Aritha van Herk retells those habitually forgotten and frequently effaced, ancient stories of female figures, and I will analyze how she transports the women’s fictional lives into our postmodern world, “using the master’s tools to dismantle the master’s house” (Bloomberg, 13). By doing so, I will portray how she uncovers women’s original strengths and experiences. In particular, I will focus on the representation of women and the landscape in *Judith*, *The Tent Peg*, *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey*, and *Restlessness*. I aim to show how Aritha van Herk infiltrates male realms – be it classical mythology, more recent prairie literature, or the act of mapping – to raise her voice in this archaeology of stories. She does make herself heard through her inimitable heroines who are never repentant, never sorry, and never satisfied with stasis. Moving across Canada’s West into its northern regions, I will portray the women’s mobile power and audacity to leave the map and, instead, dive into the landscape and beyond the map’s borders into, no, not death, but disappearance, the ultimate “erotic adventure” (van Herk, “Disappearance,” 1).

Tackling a field as wide as mythology clearly means having the guts for gaps. However, in the first part of this paper, I try to engage, after a definitional digression, in the discourse of mythology especially from a feminist point of view. Beginning with Simone de Beauvoir who states a case against myth, I will mention critics such as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Aritha van Herk, among others, who underscore the significance of the engagement with myths. Following the discussion of feminist re-writing of classical mythology, I will focus on the representations, values, and symbols of Canada's West and North – the mythologies of the landscape. Both regions become fictions and are heavily mythologized by men in their works. Again, Aritha van Herk sets out to infiltrate this male terrain and create, with her heroines, a new mythology.

After this methodological background, I will fully engage with Aritha van Herk's novels. Regarding Judith and J.L. as allies, as well as Arachne and Dorcas, I will discuss the novels respectively. While the heroines in *Judith* and *The Tent Peg* escape from home and, towards the end, find a place to stay or a way to make do, *No Fixed Address* and *Restlessness* refuse the reassurance of a well-concluded conclusion. Instead, Arachne as well as Dorcas disappear.

In the end, mythological characters are given new life, women a voice, the landscape is granted its own identity, the city of Calgary its own face and, thus, a new, a contemporary narrative is being told that often neither seems linear nor realistic and not at all rational.

2. More than Mothers and Muses

What did she do? Did she gnash her teeth? Did she cry?
 Did she hit him? Did she scream at him?
 I am so sick of never hearing [...] [the women's] side of the story.
 (Aritha van Herk in an interview with Ingwer Nommensen, 87)

Myths still have a very powerful effect in our society, despite the fact of them being old, despite the fact of them being written in a world very unlike ours. They resonate among us, echo our deeply-rooted beliefs, and reiterate our ways of perception.¹ After all, “[m]yths are clues to the spiritual potentialities of the human life” (Campbell, *Power*, 5). The greatest mythologies in the western world have been written by men – *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, *The Metamorphoses*, The Christian Bible, to name but a few. We remember Zeus and his liaisons; Jason and the Golden Fleece; Odysseys and his travels. Stories about heroes, gods, adventurers, and questers narrated from a male perspective.

Joseph Campbell, a myth critic who sparked a new interest in the study of mythology, traced the universality of the hero's quest, and he “let the symbols speak for themselves,” in order for them to reveal “a vast and amazingly constant statement of the basic truths by which man has lived throughout the millenniums” (*Thousand*, viii). For Campbell, the hero has “a thousand faces,” as indicated by the title of his study,² but women seem not to be included as the ones who are undertaking a journey.

Woman is present, according to Campbell, as “helpful crone and fairy grandmother” (*Thousand*, 71); commonly as “Virgin” (*Thousand*, 71); as “mother, sister, mistress, bride” (*Thousand*, 111); but also as the “‘bad’ mother” (*Thousand*, 111). She is the “helpful female figure, by whose magic [...] he is protected” (*Thousand*, 131); she “lures, she guides, she bids him burst his fetters” (*Thousand*, 116); woman “is life, the hero its knower and master” (*Thousand*, 120).

She is the ‘other portion’ of the hero himself – for ‘each is both’: if his stature is that of world monarch she is the world, and if he is a warrior she is fame. She is the image of his destiny which he is to release from the prison of enveloping circumstance. But where he is ignorant of his destiny, or deluded by false considerations, no effort on his part will overcome the obstacles. (Campbell, *Thousand*, 342)

¹ Cf. Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 1-43.

² Josef Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

She is the hero's prize, dependent on his doings, the supporter of the hero's "mighty task" (*Thousand*, 72), and finally, woman, for Campbell, "in the picture language of mythology, represents the totality of what can be known. The hero is the one who comes to know" (*Thousand*, 116).

Women are passive, representing the "benign, protecting power[s] of destiny" (Campbell, *Thousand*, 71). They appear at best on the margin – as wives, mothers, daughters, or witches and whores, "a passing mention of most of them and little else" (Bell, ix). Or, in Duncker's words, "We, the women, were of course present in the making of history. But in the writing we appear only in brief passages, fragments" (137-38). Men, preoccupied with their narratives, might not even have noticed that women want to tell their versions of the story too, and hence want to participate as well, as the following incident with Joseph Campbell illustrates:

At the end of a lecture on the Arthurian quest legends about the Holy Grail, one of [Campbell's] students asked why there were no roles in the legends with which women could identify. [Campbell] was puzzled and pointed out that women are present as the hero's mother, the hero's queen, and the damsel-in-distress. 'What more do you want?' he asked. 'I want to be the hero, of course!' the student replied. (quoted in Noble, 21)

And heroines we need. Therefore, women writers strive to create powerful female figures by revisiting what "seems an inhospitable terrain" (Ostriker, 316) – mythology.

The discussion of mythology in connection to literature appears to be a most fruitful one. Northrop Frye argues that "[l]iterature is conscious mythology: as society develops, its mythical stories become structural principles of story-telling, its mythical concepts [...] become habits of metaphorical thought" ("Conclusion," 232). Myths, for Frye then, are rendered in the stories that are being written; myths are the origins of the stories that are being written, or, in Russel's words, "[m]yth is for Frye the term for the form in which secular literary works speak as well" (xv).

Mary R. Lefkowitz argues slightly similar to Frye, however, channels our thoughts towards this idea in critical avenues. While Frye is talking about the structural influence of myths, Lefkowitz is more concerned with plot and narrative patterns. Her "contention is simply that narrative patterns established in ancient times have shaped literary forms since antiquity. The plots of myths recur even in contemporary writing, with only names, dates and places changed" (Lefkowitz, 41). Tradition is familiar, and familiarity is good. We know what to expect; "it makes communication

easy; it sells books,” according to Lefkowitz, “[b]ut it also limits understanding” (41).

Yet, “[m]yths are not lies,” as Sarah B. Pomeroy argues, “but rather men’s attempt to impose a symbolic order upon their universe” (1). Therefore, being given a male voice and a male perspective, women, as Duncker says, “are always interpreted. We rarely interpret ourselves” (138). However, as mentioned above, female writers go back to the myths to question, to un-read, re-read, and more importantly, re-write them in order to give characters a voice and an opportunity for an alternative life.

Aritha van Herk is one of those writers who turns to mythology because for one thing, she says, “there are no new stories! We’re only retelling old ones. And we’re finding new forms and new versions. But they’re all stories that already exist” (Lutz, “Gespräch,” 114). The other reason van Herk gives is the more interesting one for feminist criticism, since it addresses their concern of women only being in stories as bit parts: “One of the things that has always disturbed me is the way that the stories of women have been effaced. They haven’t been lost or utterly destroyed, but they seem to have been erased” (Lutz, “Gespräch,” 114).³ Elsewhere, van Herk argues that “the experience of women has slipped into a fissure: the stories that we use presumably include them, but never directly, only through the dubious embrace of the generic ‘man’” (van Herk, “Imagination,” 110).

The question that arises now is *how* female writers, and particularly van Herk, use mythology to their end. But before going *in medias res*, let us first try to define what we understand by mythology in the first place. Definitions abound, and in the following I will try and clarify how I comprehend the terms myth and mythology in this paper, and more importantly how Aritha van Herk understands and approaches mythology. Clearly, there are many studies and ideas on mythology that I will not be able to consider, because on the one hand, they would exceed the space of this paper and, on the other hand, they are beyond my expertise. Besides, big names like Spengler, Frazer, and Frye come up in popular myth criticism; however, I would like to dedicate more room to the counter-discourse, and Beauvoir, Cixous, Irigaray, and

³ For a further discussion of why van Herk uses mythology in her fiction, see Aritha van Herk, “Women and Faith: The Reach of the Imagination,” 107-21; Gyrid Jerve, “Aritha van Herk: Interview,” 71-72; Ingwer Nommensen, “Self-discovery,” 86-88; Eva Tihanyi, “(Un)riding the Range: The Ficto-Critical Travels of Aritha van Herk: An Interview,” 54-55; Dorothy Jones, “Interview with Aritha van Herk,” 12-13; Petra Wittke, “No Lies this Time: An Interview with Aritha van Herk,” 141-42.

others have contributed significantly to an understanding of mythology from a woman's perspective.

2.1. Myth means... – Towards a Definition

Mythology is like the god Proteus. [...] The god 'will make assay,
and take all manner of shapes of things that creep upon the earth,
of water likewise, and of fierce fire burning.'
(Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 381)

When employing the term mythology, one can never be quite sure of what it really means. Often vague and imprecise and ever changing, like Proteus, it appears that we have reached a state of definitional problem, not to say chaos, as also Northrop Frye concedes: "The word *myth* is used in such a bewildering variety of contexts that anyone talking about it has to say first of all what his [or her] chosen context is" ("Koine," 3). Frye's context is that of "literary criticism" ("Koine," 3), as is mine, yet with an emphasis on female re-writings of myths. A definition is still wanting, which Frye provides: "to me myths always mean, first and primarily, *mythos*, story, plot, narrative" ("Koine," 3).

Frye, accordingly, sticks close to what the Greek word literally denotes, and that is "Wort, Rede, Gespräch, Überlegung, Erzählung" (Frisk, 264). Later, especially owing to Plato, *mythos* has become known as a story that is untrue.⁴ Hence, we can detect an ambiguity to which Frye also draws our attention:

A myth, in nearly all its sense, is a narrative that suggests two inconsistent responses: first, 'this is what is said to have happened,' and second, 'this almost certainly is not what happened, at least in precisely the way described.' It is this latter aspect of myth that has given it the vulgar sense of something simply untrue, something that did not occur. (Frye, "Koine," 4)

But why tell stories in the first place. According to Hans Blumenberg, stories are told "um etwas zu vertreiben. Im harmlosesten, aber nicht unwichtigsten Falle: die Zeit. Sonst, und schwererwiegend: die Furcht" (40) – fear of a world, of a reality that we cannot quite comprehend, that we cannot name, and that is not familiar. Blumenberg refers to this reality as "Absolutismus der Wirklichkeit" (9) which means, "dass der Mensch die Bedingungen seiner Existenz annähernd nicht in der Hand hatte und, was wichtiger ist, schlechthin nicht in seiner Hand glaubte" (Blumenberg, 9). For that

⁴ Cf. Annette Simonis, "Mythos," 159-60.

reason, humans created stories to explain, to name, to take away this *angst* of the unknown.

Fear is the reason why we have created myths, as Blumenberg asserts. Myths are being told to create distance from those fearful realities; however, myths do not provide answers: “Mythen antworten nicht auf Fragen, sie machen unbefragbar” (Blumenberg, 142). Blumenberg argues further:

Die Geschichten, von denen hier zu reden ist, wurden eben nicht erzählt, um Fragen zu beantworten, sondern um Unbehagen und Ungenügen zu vertreiben, aus denen allererst Fragen sich formieren können. Furcht und Ungewissheit zu begegnen, heißt schon, die Fragen nach dem, was sie erregt und bewegt, nicht aufkommen oder nicht zur Konkretion kommen zu lassen. (Blumenberg, 203-04)

Consequently, myths do not provide answers to questions, because there is no need to do so. Any question that might be on the brink of being asked is scotched. Stories do not have to go all the way, narrate all details. “Sie stehen nur unter der einen Anforderung: sie dürfen nicht ausgehen,” as Blumenberg (143) asserts.

Why then tell myths and why are we still fascinated by them? Blumenberg claims that the core of the myths stays the same throughout, yet at the same time this core is adaptable, changeable, and interpretable.⁵ Stories remain fuzzy, and hence there seems to be an endless repertoire of the same.

However, as history shows there are some patterns which remain the same throughout the mythologies; they are no longer variable but have developed as seemingly fixed structures and templates, and one of these patterns appears as the myth of women. Simone de Beauvoir similarly notes that there are “different kinds of myths. This one, the myth of woman, [...] is a static myth” (282). In this myth, women find themselves as wives, mothers, daughters, or whores and witches. “Review the myths,” Mary R. Lefkowitz urges us in her fascinating study *Heroines and Hysterics*,

and you will discover that they offer women only three life patterns. The first is birth and rising to maturity. After this step woman in the myths has only two options: marriage and childbirth – resulting in her death (literal and figurative) as an individual – or withholding/destruction – resulting in the preservation of her individuality. (Lefkowitz, 42)

According to Lefkowitz, the choice is either to marry or to remain celibate. If they decide to marry, “they may either die themselves or kill their husbands and/or

⁵ Cf. Hans Blumenberg, *Arbeit am Mythos*, 40-41.

children” (Lefkowitz, 42). The other option, celibacy, leaves them to “do men’s work or become frozen in some aspect of their maiden state; for example, they turn into trees” (Lefkowitz, 42). There “are no other possibilities,” according to Lefkowitz (42). Questions seem futile.

Der Mythos lässt das Nachfragen auf den Wall seiner Bilder und Geschichten auflaufen: nach der nächsten Geschichte kann gefragt werden, danach also, wie es weitergeht, wenn es weitergeht. Sonst fängt es wieder von vorn an. (Blumenberg, 287)

Myths do not provide answers, “nehmen sich aber so aus, als bliebe nichts zu fragen übrig” (Blumenberg, 319). However, women have found many things to question and as Mary Lefkowitz pointedly states, “Tradition is comfortable; we can place ourselves in it, as in a favourite chair. But it is useful sometimes to look at traditions [...] critically” (47).

To recapitulate, what is a myth? Myths are stories, stories often perceived to be untrue, nevertheless stories that resonate among us. They were devised because of fear of the unknown, fear of a world that was inexplicable, fear of a nature that seemed to harbor hazards. However, the narrated stories did not answer any questions; they dodged questions by pretending that there is no need to be asking any. Furthermore, when we talk about myth we do not refer to one single story but it is always a combination, an entity of stories that vary slightly from time and place. As Beauvoir argues, “It is always difficult to describe a myth; it cannot be grasped or encompassed; it haunts the human consciousness without ever appearing before it in fixed form: The myth is so various, so contradictory, that at first its unity is not discerned” (175). Additionally, patterns seem to remain the same throughout, especially when it comes to the narration of women’s lives – the male perspective of women’s lives, that is.

Roland Barthes, one of the most important figures when it comes to debunking mythologies, “has historicized the question of myth,” as DuPlessis (105) reminds us. Barthes “resented seeing Nature and History confused at every turn” (Barthes, 11) and started to dig deeper into our everyday mythologies.

In its essence, myth for Barthes is “*a type of speech*” (109), as he explains in his *Mythologies*. He goes on to draw on semiology and establishes a theory of myth as being a “*second-order semiological system*” (114), with the Sign from the first

system becoming the Signifier in the second.⁶ The main concern in this paper is, however, how Barthes aims at revealing the naturalness of certain ideologies, and especially the “question of an eternal essence for Woman” (DuPlessis, 105):

Are there objects which are *inevitably* a source of suggestiveness, as Baudelaire suggested about Woman? Certainly not: one can conceive of very ancient myths, but there are no eternal ones; for it is human history which converts reality into speech, and it alone rules the life and the death of mythical language. Ancient or not, mythology can only have an historical foundation, [...]: it cannot possibly evolve from the ‘nature’ of things. (Barthes, 110)

Myth has historical implications, but they are not seen as such; they appear to have been lost but, after all “[m]yth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion” (Barthes, 129). Here Barthes comes to talk about what myth ultimately does: “We reach here the very principle of myth: it transforms history into nature” (Barthes, 129). Despite the fact that myth appears natural, it is still defined by history and those in power: “[M]yth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal” (Barthes, 142). Furthermore, Barthes suggests:

What the world supplies to myth is an historical reality, defined, even if this goes back quite a while, by the way in which men have produced or used it; and what myth gives in return is a *natural* image of this reality. [...] [M]yth is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things: in it, things lose the memory that they once were made. (Barthes, 142)

Myths appear eternal to us and claim universal validity; they are “considered the most universal, describing deep structures of human need and evincing the most cunning knowledge of ‘mankind’” (DuPlessis, 106). And so it goes that female writers, when going back to these stories, face “material that is indifferent or, more often, actively hostile to historical considerations of gender, claiming as it does universal, humanistic, natural, or even archetypal status” (DuPlessis, 106).

Still, the female writer revisits these old stories, these alleged truths. She aims to break into these narrative patterns and rewrite erased words; she, in Duncker’s words, “articulates silences, absences, gaps, imagines women as speaking subjects” (141). Mythology lends itself for re-writing since Barthes claims that “there is no fixity in mythical concepts: they can come into being, alter, disintegrate, disappear completely” (120). Female writers go back to mythology written by men, even though or because it means “putting things at their most extreme” (DuPlessis, 106).

⁶ Cf. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, 111-17.

And it is Beauvoir quoting Poulain de la Barre, who says, “All that has been written about women by men should be suspect, for the men are at once judge and party to the lawsuit” (quoted in Beauvoir, 21).

2.2. Laughing Witches Refusing to Eat Shit

But the Gods are like publishers,
usually male,
[...]
Girls, forget what you’ve read.
It happened like this –
(Carol Ann Duffy, “Eurydice,” 59, 61)

“When you say Man,” said Oedipus, “you include women
too. Everyone knows that.” She said, “That’s what
you think.”
(Muriel Rukeyser, “Myth,” 498)

Ever since the 1960s, a strong interest in and a fascination with myth, or more precisely the re-writing of myth, has been noted.⁷ Women started to actively challenge the roles and the positions they have been inscribed and repressed in in those ancient stories.

Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* argues most forcefully that myths are created by men and hence define what it means to be woman.⁸ Men, she says, “have thought best to keep woman in a state of dependence; their codes of law have been set up against her” (Beauvoir, 171). Consequently, woman is defined as “Other.” “He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other” (Beauvoir, 16). Susan Gubar reminds us that “[w]hether she is the epitome of male desires or the symbol of male fears, the representative of his needs or his revulsions, the woman of myths is not her own person” (301). She does not have agency, nor does she possess individuality. Through myths, woman is being oppressed. In Beauvoir’s words: “Few myths have been more advantageous to the ruling caste than the myth of woman: it justifies all privileges and even authorizes their abuse” (285).

In “The Laugh of the Medusa,” an essay that in a discussion of women and myth inevitably has to be included, Hélène Cixous develops Beauvoir’s theory further. Whereas Beauvoir states a case against myth, Cixous finds it most fruitful to use

⁷ Cf. Alicia Ostriker, “The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking,” 317.

⁸ Cf. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 171-229; 282-92.

myth. While Cixous agrees that woman is oppressed through myth, she is concerned with the re-writing of the same. Cixous begins to do so already in her title: the laugh. The laugh can be read as way of earth-quaking male structures, of destroying fixed patterns, or as Cixous has it, “to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the ‘truth’ with laughter” (888). Cixous especially focuses on the body and argues that a

woman without a body, dumb, blind, can’t possibly be a good fighter. She is reduced to being the servant of the militant male, his shadow. We must kill the false woman who is preventing the live one from breathing. Inscribe the breath of the whole woman. (Cixous, 880)

Before she says, “Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time” (Cixous, 880). Therefore, Cixous urges women to “break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn’t be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem” (881). Aritha van Herk closely follows Cixous, when it comes to “writ[ing] through [...] bodies” (Cixous, 886), as Cixous declares together with her dictum: “More body, hence more writing” (Cixous, 886). Van Herk says, “I want to dare to inscribe my body on the page” (“Viscera,” 131) because “in fact what else do we have but the body” (“Personal Interview,” 127).

But let us go back to Cixous’s laughing Medusa. Why Medusa? Medusa was once beautiful but then turned into a gorgon with snakes where there used to be hair, faced with ugliness where there used to be prettiness, and when men came to see her they would turn into stone.⁹ In the representation of Medusa we can detect a pattern that runs throughout mythology and that is the paradoxical representation of women. Women are portrayed, on the one hand, as passive, beautiful, or as “angels” and, on the other hand, as vicious, deadly, or as “demons.”¹⁰ Beauvoir noticed this ambiguity as well: “But if woman is depicted as the Praying Mantis, the Mandrake, the Demon, then it is most confusing to find in woman also the Muse, the Goddess Mother, Beatrice” (Beauvoir, 284). Beauvoir furthermore asks:

What is she? Angel, demon, one inspired, an actress? It may be supposed either that there are answers to these questions which are impossible to discover, or, rather, that no answer is adequate because a fundamental ambiguity marks the feminine being: and perhaps in her heart she is even for herself quite indefinable; a sphinx. (Beauvoir, 287)

⁹ Cf. Barbara Walker, *The Woman’s Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, 629.

¹⁰ Cf. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 224, 287.

Ever since Beauvoir, other feminist critics have remarked on this ambiguity, so brilliantly captured by Elizabeth Grosz in her reading of Luce Irigaray: “within mythology women are both subordinated to patriarchal representation, yet their representations also exceed the tolerable limits of patriarchal order” (180).

Luce Irigaray is one of those feminists who are strongly influenced by Greek mythology and she concentrates particularly on the images of the forgotten and effaced daughters – Athena, Persephone, and Ariadne, among others. “Her interest in them,” as Elizabeth Grosz, in her excellent study *Sexual Subversions*, points out, “is partly a response to Freud’s neglect and partly a result of her search for a ‘genealogy’ and archaic prehistory for women” (162). However, in mythology, these women do not suggest “a pre- or non-patriarchal narrative, but are the consequences of an already functional patriarchal order” (Grosz, 162). This is not surprising, since the roles of the female figures are represented by men; are paradoxical ones; repressed ones; and, in the end, these images of women, as Pomeroy remarks, “may have little to do with flesh-and-blood women” (96). Still, in some instances, Grosz, reading Irigaray, argues further that “they represent an excess or superfluity that overflows their patriarchal context” (162-63). Therefore, it is imperative to reveal and focus on these representations.

Nevertheless, the search for a genealogy has only just begun, since women, over a long time, only found themselves as the ones who are being represented, or in Grosz’s words again, “The feminine has thus far functioned in muted, suppressed or unheard ways, obscured by the domination and pseudo-representation of the masculine” (179). Women as the “Other”; women with no bodies; women with no voices; and consequently, we are women with no stories, no past, no traceable genealogy, since the power to represent ourselves has not been granted to us.

According to van Herk, “[t]he dialectic between stories and experience is that stories give shape to experience and experience gives rise to stories” (“Imagination,” 110). Having argued that women did not have the freedom to tell their stories about their experiences with their voices, where does this leave us? “We live in a world where the stories celebrated in culture are told by and about the experience of men” (van Herk, “Imagination,” 110). Beauvoir argues quite similarly, some forty years earlier:

Women do not set themselves up as Subject and hence have erected no virile myth in which their projects are reflected; they have no religion or poetry of their own: they still dream through the dreams of men. Gods made by males

are the gods they worship. Men have shaped for their own exaltation great virile figures: Hercules, Prometheus, Parsifal; woman has only a secondary part to play in the destiny of these heroes. (Beauvoir, 174)

Ultimately, “woman is defined exclusively in her relation to man” (Beauvoir, 174). Women have taken the place on the margin in those stories, their characteristics defined by men, their experiences narrated from a male perspective.

But we need stories in order to establish an identity, autonomy. Van Herk straightforwardly explains, “[T]ell a child that she is ugly and stupid and she will grow up thinking that she is ugly and stupid” (“Imagination,” 114). We trust in stories, and, therefore, it is of utmost importance “to break down the spiritual hold these codified stories have over us” (van Herk, “Imagination,” 114). Because in fact, women can play the leading role, men only would not tell us. Or, as van Herk would phrase it in her inimitable language: “Women, damn it, did something. Women made a difference to their time and place, and however much their stories have been fragmented or censored, they demand a reading” (“Viscera,” 132).

Un-reading, re-reading, and re-writing stories is the new dictum. But how do female writers do so? First of all, whenever a writer takes up characters, figures, or stories “previously accepted and defined by a culture, the poet [or writer] is using myth,” according to Ostriker (317). By doing so, there is always a possibility of the outcome being “revisionist: that is, the figure or tale will be appropriated for altered ends, the old vessel filled with new wine” (Ostriker, 317). Van Herk is doing just that, i.e. using material from ancient sources, which, in keeping with Ostriker again, “has a double power” (317). She goes on to explain that the myth seems to belong to the public sphere, stories are known and re-told, and hence, the author engages with an authoritative voice and overlays it with her private one. Here is my first keyword – voice.

Female writers rewriting myths intend to give women a voice, let them speak, have them narrate their story, since “women are often talked about, yet seldom given voice” (van Herk, “Imagination,” 115). As Duncker puts it, “Feminist writers have been drawn to the stories where we were present, but silent; they have given women voices, motives, feelings, but above all, meanings” (Duncker, 137). It is not only that women have been silenced, but their experiences all together seem to have been obliterated. Therefore, van Herk argues, “every woman’s story [...] has importance:

For its anger, for its fierce and unrelenting rebellion, for its unwillingness to eat shit, to be man-handled, pushed around” (“Viscera,” 132).

Besides giving voices and meanings, Ostriker asserts that the “core of revisionist mythmaking for women [...] lies in the challenge to and correction of gender stereotypes embodied in myth” (318). Similarly, Purkiss states that “the rewriting of myths denotes [...] the struggle to alter gender asymmetries agreed upon for centuries by myth’s disseminators” (441). She continues to explain how women writers might try to achieve this goal of doing away with gender stereotypes, namely, “by changing the focus of the narrative from a male character to a female character, or by shifting the terms of the myth so that what was a ‘negative’ female role-model becomes a ‘positive’ one” (Purkiss, 441-42). Furthermore, Ostriker claims that “revisionism in its simplest form consists of hit-and-run attacks on familiar images and the social and literary conventions supporting them” (318).

Aritha van Herk fully engages in the rewriting of mythology. She says, “It’s our turn to create some male Madame Bovarys and Anna Kareninas and Molly Blooms. Not appropriating but [...] a righting of balance, an equalizing of the scales” (“Viscera,” 134). Judith and Circe, Jäel and Deborah, Arachne and Athena, and Dorcas and Death – where Circe was written as the seductress, she is being seduced; where Jäel brutally kills Sisera, van Herk has her triumph non-violently; where Arachne and Athena are foes, van Herk writes their story as them emerging as friends; and where Dorcas’s resurrection is seen as a miracle, van Herk’s Dorcas is not so sure whether to regard this life as a gift. Odysseys and Penelope as well as Persephone and Demeter among other mythological characters pay their visit too in van Herk’s fiction, even though they might not be distinguishable on a first glance.

“Because the narratives of Greek and Roman myth are rich in female figures, women poets have used the stories as a point of engagement,” as Purkiss (445) reminds us again. Gubar argues similarly when she says that “ancient myths *do* provide us with stories about women who have power, women who are not merely engaged in finding or rejecting a man, women who relate to each other” (302). Therefore, “they exert a strong fascination on many of us” (Gubar, 302), since their experience has only been told, if it has been told at all, second-hand. But female writers aim to illustrate “not only the inadequacy of male stories but also the authenticity of their own voices,” as Gubar (310) explains. Moreover, Purkiss states, “Women must

continue to struggle to tell the stories otherwise” (455). While patterns in women’s lives in Greek mythology are limited – or as Lefkowitz says, “There are no other possibilities” (42) – the re-writing constitutes a fruitful terrain for female writers and here “the possibilities are endless” (Purkiss, 455).

Consequently, stories are devised anew, with new voices of hitherto silent, with old voices only echoing in the distance, and with the belief that “we are free to create as many bastards and sweethearts and saints and gentleman and deluded idiots as there are such configurations among men” (van Herk, “Viscera,” 134).

In order to bridge a gap from the discussion of mythology to the one on landscape in the following chapter – a link which is in fact quite easy to establish, as we shall see – allow me to go back to Simone de Beauvoir again. In her discussion of man and the sexual act in *The Second Sex*, she draws on metaphors of woman as land, as frontier:

He [man] wishes to conquer, to take, to possess; to have woman is to conquer her; he penetrates into her as the ploughshare into the furrow; he makes her his even as he makes his the land he works; he labours, he plants, he sows: these images are old as writing; from antiquity to our own day a thousand examples could be cited: ‘Woman is like the field, and man is like the seed.’ (Beauvoir, 183-84)

Women and Nature, Mother Earth or Gaia, and the untouched landscape comparable to an “untouched” woman, Virgin and Virgin Lands.¹¹ “And nothing seems to a man to be more desirable than what has never belonged to any human being: then the conquest seems like a unique and absolute event” (Beauvoir, 186).

Explorers reach out to go where no man (yes, man) has gone before, yet at the same time there is the fear of a nature that is yet uncontrolled, unstructured, wild.¹² How men and more precisely writers deal with untamed nature, will be explored in the following, as well as the notion of how women are presented in these fictions written by men. Parallels to mythological narrative patterns can be noted also. Here, women, too, only appear on the margin; they, too, are represented as mothers or whores; they, too, are always interpreted.

¹¹ Annette Kolodny also draws on this metaphor of woman as landscape, as I will point out in the following chapter.

¹² See Northrop Frye in the following chapter.

3. The Space of the Imagination or the Mythology of Landscape

The landscape had become a kind of hero to me.
(Robert Kroetsch, *A Likely Story*)

When talking about Canada, one has to talk about space, geography, landscape. Stereotype – possibly. New insights – hopefully. Still fascinating – definitely. It was Michel Foucault who said, “[t]he great obsession of the nineteenth century was as we know, history: [...]. The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space” (“Spaces,” 22). Space, Canada has, and that Canadians show a certain affinity to their landscape is undeniable. But are Canadians “at the mercy of the landscape,” as van Herk (“Mapping,” 58) puts it? Consider Margaret Atwood and *Survival*; Northrop Frye and the “garrison mentality” (“Conclusion,” 225).

In this context, Northrop Frye, one of the greatest Canadian critics, can hardly be ignored. In his “Conclusion to a *Literary History of Canada*,” Frye talks about the influence of the landscape on Canadians. “To feel ‘Canadian’ was to feel part of a no-man’s-land with huge rivers, lakes, and islands that very few Canadians had ever seen” (Frye, “Conclusion,” 220). Some would enjoy venturing in such an environment, but no, nature is terrifying, according to Frye. People are “confronted with a huge, unthinking, menacing, and formidable physical setting” (Frye, “Conclusion,” 225). Or, in “Canadian and Colonial Painting,” he states that

a large tract of vacant land may well affect the people living near it as too much cake does a small boy: an unknown but quite possibly horrible Something stares at them in the dark: hide under the bedclothes as long as they will, sooner or later they must stare back. (Frye, “Painting,” 198)

And then Frye says his most often quoted, most (allegedly) insightful, most (definitely) famous line, namely that Canadian identity “is less perplexed by the question ‘Who am I?’ than by some such riddle as ‘Where is here?’” (“Conclusion,” 220). Now, First Nations people, “of all Canadians, can assert confidently, in answer to, ‘Where is here?’ – ‘Why here, of course!’,” as Aritha van Herk (“Undressing,” 62) tells us.¹³ Not such a big enigma, after all.

Still, landscape seems to preoccupy Canadian minds. Or, as William Lyon Mackenzie King, tenth Prime Minister of Canada, has been quoted to say, “if some countries have too much history, we have too much geography” (quoted in Pianos,

¹³ Besides, as Aritha van Herk once said in an interview: “I’m kind of fed up with him [Frye] as being the articulator of the Canadian ‘here.’ I mean he says ‘Where is here?’ but then he goes on to tell you by gum and you better not disagree with him” (Pianos et al.).

24). The two regions that occupy the minds of Canadians are the West and the North which abound with mythologies and representations alike.

The west is virus, a nightclub, a chain letter. The west is a door and a window, neither and both, transparent but private, directive, orientative for all that it is not east, this corner where the sun sets instead of rising, and yes, we all know that going west is a metaphor. Go west: die, perish, disappear. (van Herk, "Blundering," 4)

Writing about the prairies has a long tradition in Canada, and it was men who mythologized this landscape in their works, men who imagined it as a frontier, men who structured, fixed, and colonized the region. The map of the West has been outlined, designed, and plotted by men; a male map, where Aritha van Herk could not position herself. But she knows, "We are, all of us, in thrall to our private wests, wests we tame and possess, wests we conquer and abuse, wests we succumb to, swoon before, wests we worship and pleasure" (van Herk, "Blundering," 3-4). Hence, she intrudes into this landscape with her fiction, as we will see. Yet, she is not so much interested in the conquering of space, as she tells Marcienne Rocard in an interview, but for her "space is something to be archeologized [sic] [...]; it has layers and levels of meaning" (Rocard, "Unreading," 90), again reminding us of Foucault. But geography is even more than that for Canadians and definitely for van Herk. For her, Canadian space "is also the space of the imagination" (Rocard, "Unreading," 89). While the West (primarily the American, but also applicable to the Canadian West) was "meant to be conquered and occupied, [...] a territory for masculine challenge, [...] a linear space and a fresh page for the writing of history" – the North "was seen as an antigarden of snow, cold, and endless night" (Grace, "Mythologies," 250). Still, Canadians invented themselves as a northern people, the fierce white and endless ice notwithstanding – "they insist upon surviving" (Grace, "Mythologies," 247).

In the exciting ongoing debate not only over *where* North is but also over *what* its history is and *who* can tell it lies the creation of Canada itself, and North is *neither* synonymous with Canada *nor* different from it [...]; it is not either/or but both/and: it is a part of the imagined community called Canada and a defining characteristic, a crucial metonymy, for the whole. (Grace, *North*, 49-50)

The North – a space that exerts its influence on the Canadian imagination; a space that is regarded as a decisive factor for Canadians and their understanding of themselves as a northern nation and a northern people. However, many deny the impact of the North on Canadians since many have never been there. Besides,

common portrayals of the North as a frontier, as a blank page, have been championed recently, especially by First Nations people who have been neglected and erased from this picture of the North, but also by women who find no space to plot in this male North, the place for male adventures and heroes.

Consequently, we can detect similarities between Canada's West and North, as also Aron Senkpiel remarks.¹⁴ Both regions have traditions of male writers portraying and imagining these geographies, yet many can no longer identify with these and thus, "it is tradition, not landscape, that must be rewritten, reformed" (Senkpiel, "Places," 123).

3.1. Tumbling Giants and Undulating Prairies – The West

*The mythologies embedded in the West exert their own ironies and displacements,
their own refusals and contingencies.*
(Aritha van Herk, "Leading the Parade," 487)

Canada's West, without a doubt, has its own mythologies woven into its landscape, its history, its fiction. "West is where all trails grow faint, west is where the line between the literal and the imaginary fades" (van Herk, "Blundering," 5).

The West, the prairies, are often portrayed in terms of their vastness, their (alleged) flatness, their emptiness, their enormous space without order or structure. When settlers arrived, they encountered a land which was unstructured, unmapped, and unnamed (from a white European perspective that is, which tends to ignore indigenous cultures). Or, as Harrison has it, "The Prairie, in effect, lacked the fictions which make a place entirely real" (ix). Hence, to name is what early Canadian writers set out to do, as Kroetsch also emphasizes (an assertion he would later revoke):¹⁵

In a new place, and in its literature, the Adamic impulse to give name asserts itself [...]. Writers in a new place conceive of themselves profoundly as namers. They name in order to give focus and definition. They name to create boundaries. They name to establish identity. Canadian writing is the writing down of a new place. (Kroetsch, "Name," 41)

¹⁴ Cf. Aron Senkpiel, "Places of Spirit, Spirits of Place: The Northern Contemplations of Rudy Wiebe, Aritha van Herk, and John Moss," 124.

¹⁵ In his essay "Unhiding the Hidden," Kroetsch argues, "At one time I considered it the task of the Canadian writer to give names to his experience, to be the namer. I now suspect that on the contrary, it is his task to un-name" (58). See Robert Kroetsch, "Unhiding the Hidden" 58-63.

It is predominantly with fiction that men tried to name and structure the Canadian prairies. The three major studies addressing prairie literature are Edward McCourt's *The Canadian West in Fiction*, Laurence Ricou's *Vertical Man/Horizontal World*, and Dick Harrison's *Unnamed Country*. They trace a literary history starting from early explorers and their need to name – as in “[p]ut a name to it, put it on a map, and you’ve got it” (O’Hagan, 80) – through to major names in more recent prairie fiction, like Wiebe, and Kroetsch, to name but two.

McCourt’s study sets the scene for the West as “primarily flat and agricultural; [...] hot in the summer and cold in winter and the wind blows hard and often” (v). Writers, men portray the country, “men of action,” that is, “who wrote as they lived, with a strict regard for essentials” (McCourt, 9). And men penetrated this region, “a land rich in all things the unsatisfied heart craved for [...], a clean naked land where a man might make his own way in his own way [...], worship his gods, cherish the customs of his fathers” (McCourt, 70). Laurence Ricou argues similarly and states, “Man on the prairie, [...], is defined especially 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” (ix). Again, the prairie as flat as the ocean. Dick Harrison, then, approaches prairie literature from the angle of new landscape and old culture and how this dichotomy of old and new has an impact on the literature.¹⁶ It is also Harrison who notes these stereotypes in literature about the description of the landscape: “The fiction frequently bears witness to the same spare, incomplete visual quality of the plains” (13). The vantage point is of importance, as Harrison further notes, drawing on Marshall McLuhan: “Perspective too, [...], is an artificial contrivance, but it provides an observer with at least a point of view and a rudimentary way of ordering what he sees” (13-14). However, it seems that men, in their need to structure, chose a vantage point where all they could see was flatness, and the men sticking out, or in Ricou’s words again: “[M]an’s dramatic vertical presence in an entirely horizontal world” (ix).

The fiction of the prairie and its depiction as flat, as frontier, as a land “boast[ing] adventure and chivalry,” as “big sky country,” has relied on “endless landscape as a crutch,” as Aritha van Herk (“Gentle,” 92) argues. And it is done by men. And it remained the same. And the two cornerstones, or as Harrison puts it, the “poles” (xii) of realist Canadian prairie fiction – Sinclair Ross’s *As For Me and My House* and

¹⁶ Cf. Dick Harrison, *Unnamed Country*, xiii.

W.O. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind* – belong to this tradition of rendering the landscape as flat. Aritha van Herk traces this same tradition in her essay "Prairie as Flat as..." She mentions another prototypical example of a portrayal of the prairies as flat and that is Frederick Philip Grove's autobiography *In Search of Myself*. At one point he portrays a man ploughing a field at sunset and "he looked like a giant" (Grove, 259). Again, we see Ricou's vertical man/horizontal world-assertion echoed. Aritha van Herk ironically states, "Perhaps it is simply that we do not wish to relinquish the comfort of these images, of our sure knowledge of a few things: that the world is flat, that the wind blows, that the weather is hard" ("Prairie," 131). Yet, van Herk is willing to drop these images in her fiction and therefore, change the mythology of this region.

Davidson in his *Coyote Country: Fictions of the Canadian West* looks at the three works by McCourt, Ricou, and Harrison and traces the changing myth of the West throughout the fictions. Starting with the garden-that-needs-to-be-cultivated-myth which was about hope; to the "stark realism of the late 1920s and early 1930s, with its dark portrayals of drought and depression" (Davidson, 17); to contemporary versions of the West which appear to be paradoxical. On the one hand, Davidson argues, fiction aims to depict a myth, especially a graspable myth of the past, of origin. On the other hand, this same "search for the missing myth is regularly mocked [...] in the very works that also portray that same search as essential" (Davidson, 17).¹⁷

Hence, we see what Henry Kreisel, in "The Prairie: A State of Mind," asserts holds true, i.e., "All discussion of the literature produced in the Canadian west must of necessity begin with the impact of the landscape upon the mind" (Kreisel, 6). Landscape and artist – "the two are cellmates" (van Herk, "Spies," 139).

But, so far the discussion on prairie fiction revolved solely around men – "Grove, Mitchell, Ross, Wiebe, Kroetsch. Laurence of course, not so much an afterthought as an anomaly" (van Herk, "Spies," 139). Where are the women in this landscape, one might ask? But then again, "a feminist western might well seem [...] a contradiction in terms," Davidson (97) asserts – "at first," he grants at least, since women do raise their voices in this male terrain.

¹⁷ Cf. Arnold E. Davidson, *Coyote Country: Fictions of the Canadian West*, 16-18.

However, as Aritha van Herk is not tired to point out, “[t]he west is male. Masculine. Manly. Virile. Not that it had much choice, [...]. It posed, still poses, indifferent, [...] [but] the art that has defined it is masculine and it appears to have defined its art as a masculine one” (“Spies,” 139). One of the masculine desires in Canadian prairie fiction seems to be imposing structures on the landscape. Similar to Northrop Frye, who asserts that “[c]ivilization [...] has advanced geometrically across the country, throwing down the long parallel lines of the railways, dividing up the farm lands into chessboards of square-miles sections and concession-line roads” (“Conclusion,” 224), Rudy Wiebe, in his “Passage by Land,” finds it necessary to employ an “architectural structure” in order to render this landscape with words:

to break into the space of the reader’s mind with the space of this western landscape and the people in it you must build a structure of fiction like an engineer builds a bridge or a skyscraper over and into space. [...] You must lay great black steel lines of fiction, break up that space with huge design and, [...] build giant artifact. No song can do that; it must be giant fiction. (Wiebe, 26-27)

This intrusion into, or perhaps more aptly the penetration of the landscape reminds us of the colonization of what was perceived as *Virgin Land*, the United States, and hence the notion of the landscape as woman. Annette Kolodny in her groundbreaking study *The Lay of the Land* stresses American settlers’ “experience of the land as essentially feminine” (Kolodny, 4), thus reminding us of Beauvoir’s statement – woman as land and man as its conqueror.

In *The Lay of the Land* Kolodny traces this myth throughout history, beginning with early colonial writings, and detects ambivalence, since the woman was once seen as a Mother, once as a Virgin, and this ambivalence is again reminiscent of how women are portrayed in mythology, as has been indicated:

Implicit in the metaphor of the land-as-woman was both the regressive pull of maternal containment and the seductive invitation to sexual assertion: if the Mother demands passivity, and threatens regression, the Virgin apparently invites sexual assertion and awaits impregnation. (Kolodny, 67)

So, in Kolodny’s words, “the American literary imagination found itself forced to choose” (71) – either passively enjoying the beauty of the landscape or actively employing nature for one’s use. In the end, this metaphor was “a bold exercise of masculine power over the feminine” (Kolodny, 22).

While Kolodny’s work is limited to the characterization of the landscape of the United States, Marlene Goldman ensures that her findings are relevant to Canadian

experience as well.¹⁸ In Wiebe's words quoted above we can clearly see this urge of structuring, fixing, ordering, and forcing a map on this allegedly female landscape – male metaphors; metaphors van Herk rejects. To her, these male structures are “extremely phallic and extremely [...] deconstructable for that very reason. They can be taken apart, they can be killed, they can be destroyed” (“Personal Interview,” 123).

Similarly, she rejects the portrayal of women in prairie fiction as static, confined to their house. Men, in comparison are usually depicted as mobile, on horses, in motion. “The basic grammatical pair in the story-line of prairie fiction is house: horse,” as Robert Kroetsch so vividly explains in his essay “The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction: An Erotics of Space” (76). “To be *on* a horse is to move: motion into distance. To be *in* a house is to be fixed: a centering unto stasis. Horse is masculine. House is feminine” (Kroetsch, “Fear,” 76). We have nothing to add – “a perfect excuse for everything,” van Herk (“Spies,” 143) is furious. Women in prairie fiction are static; passive; they wait like Persephone waits for her Odysseys; they are muses like Eurydice is a muse for Orpheus. Women are “fixed as mothers/saints/whores, muses all” (van Herk, “Spies,” 143) and “ain't supposed to move” (Kroetsch, “Fear,” 76).

Where can the woman writer enter this landscape, enter fiction, van Herk asks. The answer is through the landscape itself. Landscape is indifferent; it “is after all, a curve; despite those steel lines, an undulation. We can get into it, enter this world, because it belongs to us,” van Herk (“Spies,” 143) asserts.

Hence, Aritha van Herk intervenes in this male discourse of the West with a female voice. “Refusing to be silhouettes, we [women] slide into the fiction of the prairies,” she emphasizes, because after all, “[t]he male west has to be earth-quaked a little, those black steel lines and the looming giant toppled. Not destroyed, oh no, but infiltrated” (van Herk, “Spies,” 143, 149). With her characters Aritha van Herk does infiltrate that male West, the male discourse, and the male map.

Yet, it is not only the West which has to be earth-quaked, it seems, because Canada's frontier is in fact not so much the West any more as it is the North. Mott argues, “Both West and North originally reflected European dreams about uncivilized

¹⁸ Cf. Marlene Goldman, “Earth-quaking the Kingdom of the Male Virgin: A Deleuzian Analysis of Aritha van Herk's ‘No Fixed Address’ and ‘Places Far From Ellesmere’,” 22.

wilderness, adventurous frontier, mysterious virgin land that had to be explored and conquered” (100). While there is no more territory to conquer that is unknown or unmapped in the West, people transferred their longing of untouched nature to the North.¹⁹ Consequently, Canada’s mythic region actually turns out to be the North, or as Aron Senkpiel has it:

The North is to the twentieth century what the West was to the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: a place with more future than past, more unexplored reaches than carefully mapped topography. (Senkpiel, quoted in Mott, 100)

Consequently, correlations between the western and northern regions in Canada cannot be dismissed easily. These parallels are also reflected in the changing representation of the landscapes. The prairies, as has been indicated above, were regarded simply as being flat. However, van Herk in “Prairie as flat as...” rejects this view as it would only reveal “a terribly myopic view of the secret and undulating world around us” (“Prairie,” 127) – as Aron Senkpiel reminds us.²⁰ While the prairies as such obviously remain the same, the representation alters, since writers seem to undertake a shift in their position, a change in their perception. Hence, as van Herk puts it, “[T]he landscape [is] now not written upon but permitted to write, to cry out its own naming” (“Prairie,” 134); “[i]t now has irony, and voice, and multiplicity” (“Prairie,” 137). This same altering of depictions can also be detected when considering the representations of Canada’s North, which is, according to Grace, “as beautiful, powerful, inviting, disturbing, exclusionary, and exploitative as the individuals creating and using them” (*North*, 23).

3.2. Elusive Silences and Imperialist Practices – The North

[F]ind the north in your own head.
(Aritha van Herk, in Rudy Wiebe, *Playing Dead*, 113)

North – *the* place for explorers, escapees, seekers, survivors, adventurers, cartographers, geologists, and heroes. North – a blank page, waiting to be written on; a tabula rasa, ready to be mapped. North – a playground for grown-ups, the last frontier; an area where one still has the ability to get lost; a territory where one can

¹⁹ For a discussion of the West in comparison to the North also see: Tamara Pianos, *Geografiktionen in der anlgo-kanadischen Literatur*, 43-46, 215-19.

²⁰ Cf. Aron Senkpiel, “Places of Spirit, Spirits of Place: The Northern Contemplations of Rudy Wiebe, Aritha van Herk, and John Moss,” 124.

leave footprints on a land where no one has been before; and a piece of soil where one can hear silence breathe. Or, North – where are the women? North – where are those who call it their home? North – where are the voices of First Nations people?

Canada's North has been heavily mythologized throughout the years. Understandably, since, in the words of Frye, no other country "has had so large an amount of the unknown, the unrealized, the humanly undigested, so built into it" ("Conclusion," 220). It is a fact that while the Territorial North, consisting of the Yukon Territories, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut, represents the largest region in Canada – almost 40 per cent, its population is the smallest – about 0.3 per cent.²¹ It is also a fact that very few Canadians have ever set foot onto this North. Nevertheless, it seems to inhabit the country's consciousness. "To say, therefore, that Canada is 'northern' is to state more than a geographical fact; it is to acknowledge the central place of the North in the Canadian ethos" (Senkpiel, "North," 192).

For Rudy Wiebe, Canada's "*nordicity*" is obvious as he considers the North as "both the true nature of our world and also our graspable destiny" (*Playing Dead*, 111). Aritha van Herk similarly shares this idea of the North as inhabiting a central position in the country: "If Canada has an imaginative grail of sorts, it is the North," and "it inhabits the imaginations of even Canadians who have never been there" ("Personal Interview," 123-24). Thus, she follows Kroetsch who argues that "we don't have to go there [the North] literally in order to draw sustenance from it, [...]. It presses southward into the Canadian consciousness" ("Tradition," 54). Hence, Stephen Leacock's assertion seems to hold true: "I never have gone to the James Bay; I never go to it; I never shall. But somehow I'd feel lonely without it" (179).

Still, the North remains somewhat elusive for southern Canadians, who "have always felt ambivalent about the North," as Sherrill Grace tells us. They are

attracted by its austere beauty, its challenge to the spirit and imagination, and its lure [...], they are equally horrified by the months of darkness, the remoteness, and the cold of those vast lands lying beyond the fragile chain of southern cities. (Grace, "Encyclopedia," 818-19)

²¹ Different sources name different facts. These are taken from Robert M Bone, *The Regional Geography of Canada*, 14, 487-88. Aron Senkpiel maintains that the North makes up about 70 per cent of Canada's landmass with a population of about 2 per cent. See Aron Senkpiel, "The Canadian North," 192.

Or, in Hamelin's words: "For most Canadians, the North remains an unknown quantity. Even though they experience its influence, they do not know what it is, how far it extends how it may be subdivided, or what its future may be" (15).

But the North is more than just a space, more than a place, "more than an area, it is a passion" (Hamelin, 9). "To all of us here, the vast unknown country of the North, reaching away to the polar seas, supplies a peculiar mental background" (Leacock, 179). The North is "a power in itself, an areal space where the white man, at least, becomes lost," as Grace ("Mythologies," 250) asserts. Also, the North resists a unitary history, a single truth, "accepting, at most, the archaeological layerings that represent centuries of multiple rediscovery" (Grace, "Mythologies," 250) – which once more brings us back to Foucault's concept.

And then, there is the silence. "This silence – this impulse towards the natural, the *uncreated*, if you will – is summed up by the north," according to Kroetsch ("Tradition," 54). Van Herk is equally aware of this oscillating silence: "The silence of the North is a silence that is rich with whispers and echoes. And it isn't a silence that harbors a kind of defensiveness or fear" ("Personal Interview," 124). Kroetsch again: "that North desired its silence as much as it desired to speak" (*Likely*, 16).

Elusive and mysterious as the authors' renderings of the silence may be, they illustrate a mythology of this landscape that might be beyond human understanding. To employ Kroetsch's words once more: "To go North is to slip out of the fastenings of night and day into other versions of light and dark. I don't know how to explain this" (*Likely*, 15).

Still, "[t]o a significant degree, Canada's story is an attempt to define and locate North" (Grace, "Encyclopedia," 818), as a wealth of studies concerning this Canadian region prove. In this paper, I will draw on Rob Shields's *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity*, John Moss's collection of essays *Echoing Silence: Essays on Arctic Narrative*, Renée Hulan's *Northern Experience and the Myths of Canadian Culture*, and especially, on Sherrill Grace's studies.

The two basic questions in the discourse of the North have already been covertly adumbrated, but allow me to state them more directly. On the one hand, we are concerned with the problem of representation. How do we define, articulate, and represent the North with its mythologies, its ambiguities, its elusiveness that seems beyond comprehension? On the other hand, we are faced with the difficulty in how

far the North acts upon the imagination of Canadians. Is the North a decisive factor for Canadians being Canadians? Or is the North no more than a geographical space that is immortalized as “True North strong and free” in the national anthem, but in the end merely “remains a stranger in the house”? (Hamelin, 281)

Rob Shields in *Places on the Margin* brings both of these questions together, by proposing two “Norths.” The North is, he argues, for most Canadians “not just a factual geographical region but also an imaginary zone: a wilderness, an empty ‘space’ which, seen from southern Canada is white, blank” (Shields, 165). The “ideological ‘True North’” then, he circumscribes as “empty page onto which can be projected images of the essence of ‘Canadian-ness’ and also images to define one’s urban existence against” (Shields, 165). Consequently, Shields claims further, “definitions of the North oscillate between the poles of frozen wilderness hinterland and hotly-defended cultural heartland” (165).

Renée Hulan recapitulates Shields’s definitions and says that they “describe the symbolic function of the North in Canada both as an empty space waiting endlessly for definition and as a repository of images defining the official national identity” (*Experience*, 5-6). Both of these functions, however, are challenged by Hulan in her study *Northern Experience and the Myths of Canadian Culture*. Not only does she criticize the representation of the North, she is also very critical of the North as a basic Canadian experience. She rather bluntly states, “I believe [...] that the north has little if anything to do with being Canadian today” (Hulan, *Experience*, 27). She aims at breaking the myth of the North as a unifying experience that all Canadians share and argues, “The national culture that Wiebe [in *Playing Dead*] wishes for [...] is a myth both in the sense of an untruth, or false notion, and in the sense of a story that articulates a specific world view” (Hulan, *Experience*, 3).

In complete opposition to Hulan, Sherrill Grace in her *Canada and the Idea of North* emphasizes that “no matter who, when, or where we are, we are shaped by, haunted by ideas of North, and we are constantly imagining and constructing Canada-as-North, as much so when we resist our nordicity as when embrace it” (Grace, *North*, xii). Being Canadian means being aware of this idea of the North. In line with Grace’s argument is John Moss in his preface to *Echoing Silence: Essays on Arctic Narrative*: “We are a northern nation and, more significantly, we are a northern people. [...]. The Arctic is a condition of our imagination” (“Echoing,” 5).

Consequently, Grace proposes her “Magnetic North thesis,” and to endorse in it, she argues,

is to understand ourselves as a people drawn by ideas of North [...]. It is to accept North as multiple and always changing and to respect the diversity and heterogeneity of our home and native land. It is to search for new ways of creating an inclusive nationality that inscribes an empowering ideology of dialogic hybridity. (*North*, 268)

But what is this North that seems to shape and exert its influence on the Canadian imagination? For Grace, it is not a unitary construction with a definite definition, and consequently, she speaks of “the *discursive formation* of North” (*North*, xiii). With this word-choice alone, we see that Grace allows for a polylog, not only tolerates but “insist[s] upon a plurality of ideas of North that are in constant flux yet are persistent over time” (*North*, xiii). After all, “there are so many Norths in the North!” (Hamelin, 282). Yet, Grace is well aware that this means to revisit representations since many have become problematic, as has been hinted at in the beginning of this section, and as we have seen with representations of the West as well.

“There are many aspects of the representations of North that are destructive and repugnant. They are often racist and sexist and almost always imperialist” (Grace, *North*, 23). For one thing, the notion of the North as being a blank space or the North as unwritten wilderness is regarded as problematic, since it “writes out First Nations people” (Surgeoner, 645). Hulan stresses that the north-as-a-blank-page-imagination is nothing more than a “stereotype” (*Experience*, 149). Very often, “the north is figured as the place of male adventure, the space for testing and proving masculine identities, where sissies and wimps will be turned into real men or be destroyed, or be sent home/south to the women or the bottle” (Grace, “Gendering,” 166-67).

Frobisher and Franklin, Mackenzie and Thompson – “appropriated as heroes, ‘Argonauts of the North’ in the struggle of man against nature” (Shields, 178). In this space, perfectly imagined as a playground for adventure and exploration, man “enjoys an erotic embrace with the landscape as he follows rivers ever deeper into his sublime, mother nature,” as Hulan (“Adventure,” 183) describes. Again, we have this reference to Annette Kolodny and the land as a woman and again, as with the West, it is applicable to the North. Hulan further suggests that “later, he [man] lives

the masculine fantasy of the American frontiersman, that [...] Annette Kolodny's research caught happily penetrating the virgin landscape" ("Adventure," 183).²²

Hence, in Grace's words "meanings do and must change" ("Representing"), and attempts by writers such as Kroetsch, Wiebe, and van Herk are being made – writers who have previously been criticized for their representations of the North. Van Herk's portrayals of the North, too, in *The Tent Peg, No Fixed Address*, and especially in *Places Far from Ellesmere*, have been championed by various critics for ignoring First Nations' traditions.²³ Even so, Goldman admires van Herk's endeavor to rethink and re-write her portrayals of the North. Especially in van Herk's essay "In Visible Ink," Goldman notes that "a concerted effort has been made to rethink and resolve some of the more troubling issues which constellate around her previous representations of the north" ("North," 159).

Besides southern writers depicting the North, northern story tellers and writers are beginning to be heard and read increasingly. Penny Petrone, for instance, has collected indigenous people's writing in *Northern Voices: Inuit Writing in English*.

From a concept thoroughly imbued with a raced, gendered, and classed imperialist ideology, North has shifted to include critiques of this ideology and resistance to its hegemonic power; it has expanded to include the voices, perceptions, and representations of those hitherto excluded. (Grace, *North*, 45)

Writers continue to be drawn to this region; they "have never overlooked the power of the North to generate myths, stories [...], legendary characters, ghosts, and monsters, and hauntingly beautiful, or desolate, landscapes" (Grace, "Representing"). They will continue to try and render the North with their voices; they will endeavor to define their North. However, a clear-cut definition of this region cannot be expected. As Grace says, "There are many Norths here and still others for you to discover!" ("Representing").

And yet – the desire to know, name, identify, represent North persists, and the picture remains tantalizingly incomplete. [...] Far from being a drawback, or a sign of failure on the part of geographers, historians, political scientists, or artists, however, this intransigent mutability, this resistance to measure and closure, is the beauty and strength of North. (Grace, *North*, 49)

²² The reference is towards Annette Kolodny's *The Land Before Her*. See especially pages 3-13.

²³ For a detailed discussion of the critique, see Asta Mott, "Aritha van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere*: The Wild and Adventurous North?," 99-111. Also refer to Marlene Goldman, "Go North Young Woman: Representations of the Arctic in the Writings of Aritha van Herk," 153-62.

4. Of Pigs and Bears – Escaping

There is always something left behind. That is the essential paradox.

Even abandonment gives us memory.

(Robert Kroetsch, “The Moment of the Discovery of America Continues,” 2)

Abandoning and leaving the city to be a farmerette in rural Alberta, or a bush cook in a remote camp in the Yukon Territories might be an unusual thing for mid-twenty-year-old-women to be doing. Raising pigs and talking to a bear seems quite bizarre as well. However, Aritha van Herk’s women are anything but ordinary. Judith and J.L., J.L. and Judith – both biblical namesakes and both were, according to myth, responsible for killing a man; both were therefore condemned as vicious women. (That through their act peace was achieved seemed irrelevant); both are, in van Herk’s story, escaping, leaving behind their old life to live in the country or the North; and both are being referred to as witches in these novels for different reasons.²⁴ Judith and J.L., J.L. and Judith – allies in their plans and “spies in an indifferent landscape” (van Herk, “Spies,” 149).

With *Judith*, Aritha van Herk intrudes into the male-devised region of the West. But the West, in van Herk’s version is anything but flat; the snow is more than white; and women are capable of more than merely being “wife of.” Similarly, in *The Tent Peg*, van Herk portrays the North as a territory that is more than what maps represent; the mountains are anything but fixed; the ice is all but solid; and women are more than muses.

Judith and J.L. have different and complex reasons for leaving city-life but both want to escape. They are restless, looking for some something to go on. In *Judith* the wish to escape, or return for that matter, is primarily triggered by her relationship with her father but also by an unlucky affair: “there was a wariness in her voice, a bowing to the inevitability of it, the knowledge that she would have to carry her mad plan through, would have to face her unavoidable reparation and escape” (van Herk, *Judith*, 141).²⁵ For J.L. the urge to leave is more a leaving in order to clear her head, sort out life’s longings and her share in these: “I did it deliberately. I wanted this job, I wanted to head for nowhere and look at everything in my narrow world from a

²⁴ Cf. *Judith*, 149 and *The Tent Peg*, 101, 118.

²⁵ All further references will be indicated with *J* and the page number in parenthesis.

detached distance” (van Herk, *The Tent Peg*, 18).²⁶ And leaving, or going somewhere else is enough for both of them. (Not so for Arachne and Dorcas as we shall see.)

Aritha van Herk, as has been indicated in the introduction, employs, combines, and weaves in mythologies of various kind, as well as historical data, and by doing so blurs fact with fiction, myths with truths. In both novels, van Herk turns the mythology of the landscape, West and North, on its head and at the same time re-writes it. With *Judith*, van Herk introduces her story’s protagonist in the title and reminds us of the Judith we know from the Bible; the plot however, is more reminiscent of Circe, who gains (if only dubitable) fame in the *Odyssey* and the *Metamorphoses*. Besides, various names from women known throughout history are being employed to link fact with fiction. The same technique can also be found in *The Tent Peg*, where van Herk names some of her male characters after famous explorers and mapmakers in Canada. Her protagonist, however, with the name of J.L., has its source in the Bible, the Book of Judges. But it is not only that van Herk simply names her characters after mythological figures, the whole stories of these women then run like an undercurrent throughout her novels, as has already been hinted at.

In the Bible Judith and J.L. are both condemned by men for being brutal killers; they are not given the opportunity to tell their version of the story. They are there only in bit parts, as supporting roles for the hero’s adventure. What it comes down to in the end is captured so brilliantly by Aritha van Herk: “Oh, they are here to, you know, do a dance and chop of a head or two. But then we’ll get rid of them because they are all bad girls” (“Personal Interview,” 127). However, it is no longer that easy to forget about them, since women dig up these stories, and van Herk suggests further: “Well, hello, they too can bring down kings and princes – and not just as bit parts” (“Personal Interview,” 127).

Judith and J.L., J.L. and Judith – allies, spies, witches, escapees, and above all heroines with a voice, women with a story, and female figures with guts.

²⁶ All further references will be indicated with *TP* and the page number in parenthesis.

4.1. “Pig shit” – *Judith*

‘Of course. They’re supernatural. Whatever made you think I’d have ordinary pigs?’
(Aritha van Herk, *Judith*, 149)

Judith is many things: a first novel; a \$50,000 award-winning novel; an MA-Thesis (“When Pigs Fly”) that has been turned into a novel. *Judith* has been called many things: a “lively piglet of a novel that will appeal to those who like their country matters raw and their pork larded with sexual politics” (Ryle, 125); a “reassuring novel,” in that it proves that “pigs are no emotional substitute for a good man” (French); a novel that is “well crafted” but one that also has “its flaws” (McMullen, 256). Many reviewers dismissed the novel as a feminist tract that is overtly anti-man; others criticized it for being too detailed in the portrayal of the pigs and the protagonist’s relationship with them; but some reviewers realized the novel’s oscillation between the realistic and the mythic. Peter Lewis, for instance, states that “the central character takes on a symbolic role” and thus the story moves “beyond realism towards myth.” As Gail van Varseveld argues, “[W]e need to create our own mythology” (44). Aritha van Herk does just that.

Judith is the story of a 23-year-old woman, who grows up on a pig farm, but, unhappy with her situation and the relationship with her father, moves to the city. Taking a job as a secretary, she gets to know “him,” her boss and they have an unlucky affair. Judith Pierce then decides to escape from this situation and she returns to the country to run a pig farm by herself. Judith is on a quest, a quest to find herself, to liberate herself. Then she gets to know Jim, her neighbor, who “stirs her in ways she’d never thought possible” (*Judith*, Blurb). This hardly sounds like an award-winning novel captured this plainly. A contemporary topic with a contemporary, ordinary, young woman. But as Morely puts it, “Relatively little happens and much is felt, intuited, perceived.” And much is resisting articulation, defying definition, and occurring covertly.

The synopsis of the plot I have just given hardly does justice to *Judith*. The novel is not as straightforward; the story is not as one-dimensional; the characters are not as flat as my summary may lead one to imagine. Still, the location is all but exotic. However, as Boland stresses, van Herk “has the ability to make a commonplace situation unique, an isolated experience universal, and an ordinary person extraordinary” (34). One way of doing so is the form in which *Judith* is narrated.

The novel opens with the following line: “Pig shit and wet greasy straw were piled high in the wheelbarrow” (*J*, 1). It is Judith, working on her farm, shoveling manure. Van Herk introduces Judith, the farmerette, 23 years old, apparently not enjoying her work: “‘Damn you, damn you all anyway.’ [...] ‘You can rot in your own shit. I won’t do any more tonight!’” (*J*, 3). Suddenly we read “Daddy” and “Judy-girl” (*J*, 3) and might be startled at first, but soon realize, that we are now taken back to Judith’s childhood past. A few pages later we are introduced to “him,” who caresses her, and later find out that Judith is thinking of her life in the city.²⁷ Still in the first quarter of the novel we hear of “Norman” in connection to her mother, and realize that this must be a Judith of about 18 years old.²⁸ Hence, van Herk combines various time levels in *Judith*. All critics that I have come across suggest that in *Judith* we are presented with a “triple time frame,” as Boland (34) for instance indicates.²⁹ However, I believe it is four time levels that we are presented with. Reingard Nischik indicates all four of those levels, yet, still argues for a triple frame.³⁰

Most of the time, we are presented with the narrative present, with Judith who is struggling on her farm, struggling with her pigs, and struggling with neighbors and the community. Woven in, in “sporadic flashbacks” (van Herk, “Retrospective,” 278), are three strands of narrative, all of which being concerned with the men in Judith’s life. The most recent is Judith’s employer in the city, “he,” whose name is not given; before that, Norman, her “boyfriend,” when she still lived on her parents’ farm; and the most prominent man in Judith’s life, her father, James.

To distinguish these time frames, van Herk does not make use of italics, dates, or different typefaces or tenses, but she makes use of names as well as the plot itself. When referring to Judith’s childhood, the names “Judy” or “Judy-girl” indicate the remote past. In addition, shifts are “triggered by something taking place in the present that parallels, is reminiscent of, or associated with some action in the past” (Boland, 34). The similarity of events is a decisive factor, as Nischik claims, and it is Nischik who calls this technique “resonance technique” (108). Even so, as van Herk concedes, the “relationship [of the triggered events] is not necessarily obvious” (“Retrospective,” 278). These time lapses – in and out of the present, in an out of the

²⁷ Cf. *Judith*, 7.

²⁸ Cf. *Judith*, 37.

²⁹ Also see Lorraine McMullen, “Circe in Canada,” 256; William French, “Review of *Judith*”; Arnold E. Davidson, *Coyote Country: Fictions of the Canadian West*, 103; Reingard M Nischik, “Narrative Technique in Aritha van Herk’s Novels,” 108.

³⁰ Cf. Reingard Nischik, “Narrative Technique in Aritha van Herk’s Novels,” 108.

past – often hit the reader unprepared, but this “discontinuous structure of the novel” fittingly illustrates Judith’s “fractured and self-divided” self (Davidson, 102). This “abrupt and sporadic style is deliberate,” as van Herk also tells us and is “intended to reflect Judith’s splintered self-image” (“Retrospective,” 278).³¹

This “mosaic” (Nischik, 108) is told by an omniscient narrator, even though a highly sensitive reader might suspect that someone else is telling the story. In earlier drafts of her novel and in her MA-Thesis the author had the pigs narrate the story of Judith. Urged by editors, she changed it but the pigs still have their “implied role as silent but omniscient narrators” (“Retrospective,” 278). They know, they sense – after all, they are “supernatural” (*J*, 149).

Besides the form, the fascination with *Judith* is this supernatural air in the novel. The pigs, the magic, the women, the landscape, the transformation, and the myths that van Herk weaves into her story have its appeal. These myths, as Iannucci states, “universalize the theme and root it firmly in a tradition” (65). But van Herk does not only employ mythical names, figures and topics, she also “tempts her reader to indulge, in a sophisticated form of literary play through her use of myths” (Iannucci, 65). The name, Judith takes from the biblical or rather apocryphal Judith, her appeal from the magical Circe, and for her transformation quite unusual beasts are responsible, the pigs.

4.1.1. Judith on Circe’s Magic Island or Circe on Judith’s Enemy Territory

The myth of Judith narrates how Israel is threatened by king Nebuchadnezzar who summons Holophernes and orders him to “march out against all the peoples of the west who have dared to disobey my command” (“Judith,” 2, 5-6). Holophernes goes from one battle to the next, victoriously, until the Israelites show resistance. Achior, one of Holophernes’s men, tells him the Israelites’ story and warns to make war on them, “for fear the god they serve should protect them” (“Judith,” 5, 21). But Holophernes is unimpressed, leaves Achior with the Israelites, and answers with a siege of the city of Bethulia. Judith, a beautiful widow hears of Holophernes’s actions and says, “I am going to do a deed which will be remembered among our

³¹ For a thorough discussion of the narrative technique in *Judith*, see Reingard M Nischik, “Narrative Technique in Aritha van Herk’s Novels,” 107-20.

people for all generations” (“Judith,” 8, 32). Judith then, together with her servant, goes to Holophernes’s enemy camp, gains his trust by her looks and charms and waiting for the right moment, she decapitates Holophernes. Taking his head, Judith and her servant, who is afterwards set free, return to Bethulia. Achior, seeing what Judith is capable of, “came to full belief in God” (“Judith,” 14, 10). Judith encourages her people to strike back. Holophernes’s army is confused without its leader, perplexed, and intimidated by Judith’s act and flees. Judith herself is praised by her people.³²

The story of Judith and her triumph over Holophernes can be found in the Apocrypha, as Book of Judith. The word “apocrypha” is Greek and “means books that have been hidden away” (Goodman, 617). Hence, stories in the Apocrypha are stories outside of the canon, often believed to be untrue or of questionable authorship.³³ Brown, for instance, argues that “the book’s portrayal of male cowardice and impotence in the face of Judith’s cunning courage may have been disturbing to the patriarchal society of the time it was written” (647).

But not only the genuineness of the myth of Judith remains disputed, the figure of Judith herself still excites arguments. The dichotomy sinner or saint is not sufficient to describe this complex character, as Renate Peters argues:³⁴

For some she is a coquettish, sensuous, duplicitous murderess who does not merit a place in the Bible, while for others her deception is an essential feature in the making of a hero. For some she is the castrating female who usurps man’s role, while for others she is an exceptionally virtuous woman. (82-83)

“In no other book is a woman praised so explicitly and profusely,” Eileen Schuller (240) remarks, however, the reception of the figure of Judith remains ambiguous: “Painters have transformed her into a courtesan; moralists and pietists are shocked by her decision to lie and murder in order to accomplish an admittedly noble purpose; feminists criticize her blatant use of physical beauty and sexual wiles” (Schuller, 240). Peters further adds that while some refer to Judith as a quintessential example of feminism, highlighting her independence, her drive, her self-determination, these

³² The story can be found in the Apocrypha, Book of Judith. There are various ways of spelling the names; I adopted the one from the following source: *The New English Bible: The Apocrypha* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1970).

³³ There are complex and often unknown reasons why certain books are not accepted in the canon. Also, there are variations between Christians. While Protestants often excluded the Apocrypha from their Bible, Catholics included almost all stories of the Apocrypha. Orthodox churches, then, included all the books of the Apocrypha. See Schuller, “Apocrypha,” 235-43.

³⁴ Cf. Renate Peters, “The Judith Myth in the Apocrypha and in van Herk’s Novel,” 82.

same critics and authors also indicate Judith's powerlessness, since after all she is only one of God's instruments.³⁵

The parallels between van Herk's Judith and the apocryphal Judith, aside from their names, are, at first sight, somewhat obscure. But on closer inspection, the similarities are striking: both women enter "enemy territory," as Lutz ("Meat," 42) indicates – the apocryphal Judith into Holophernes's camp, van Herk's Judith on a farm in Norberg, Alberta. The character of Holophernes in *Judith* is, as Susan Innaucci identifies, "Judith's former boss, who invaded the sanctity of her body and of her home" (67). But it is Renate Peters who describes fascinating correlations between the Judith of the Bible and the Judith in western Canada:

God, the principal player, becomes Judith's father, Jim; Mannasseh, Judith's weak husband [...], becomes the weak and clumsy boyfriend, Norman, [...]. In the Apocrypha, Judith has a female servant and helper [...]. In van Herk's fiction, Judith's mother plays a similar role: servant to both her father and daughter, she is later replaced by the mother-substitute and friend, Mina – the servant set free to become a companion. Holofernes of the Apocrypha becomes Judith's boss and city lover, as well as the symbol of male dominance and power. And Achior, the renegade in Holofernes' camp (who eventually changes sides and converts to Judaism), becomes Judith's domesticated lover, again named Jim, who converts to her world view. (Peters, 86-87)

Aritha van Herk herself, then, draws our attention to the similarities of "her" Judith and the apocryphal Judith. She says that "they are both strong women who must act in order to redeem themselves" (van Herk, "Retrospective," 279). Judith in the Bible acts to free her people; Judith in Canada acts "to save herself" – but, as van Herk further suggests, "one is emblematic of the other" ("Retrospective," 279). However, the most striking parallel where this "acting" can be seen is the castration scene. The act of violence towards Holophernes, his beheading, or in a Freudian sense his castration,³⁶ is redirected from men to swine in van Herk's novel.³⁷

It is a fact that male pigs have to be castrated some time after their birth. Judith herself, however, has never seen the whole scenario, since her father would not allow it. "Perhaps he did not want her to witness a male emasculating a male, the castration

³⁵ Cf. Renate Peters, "The Judith Myth in the Apocrypha and in van Herk's Novel," 83.

³⁶ Cf. Peters, 83, 91.

³⁷ Reading beheading as castrating has not only to do with Freud, as van Herk points out. She mentions a critic saying that the act of castration was a subversive act for a woman. Hence, instead of castration, beheading was substituted, "a subtle form of censorship indeed" (van Herk, "Retrospective," 279). See Aritha van Herk, "*Judith and The Tent Peg: A Retrospective*," 279; Ingwer Nommensen. "Self-Discovery," 88-89.

of his own species” (*J*, 167). Yet, this time Judith runs the farm and she has to do it. However, she cannot do it by herself, and Jim, the neighbor helps her. With the scalpel in his hand, he is hesitant, clumsy, awkward, until Judith takes over. “And she slipped them out of him [the pig] so easily, so swiftly presiding over his emasculation like the savage witch of pragmatism that she was” (*J*, 166). But she has an epiphany: “I wanted too much, she thought. I have always wanted too much and not enough” (*J*, 165). And she castrates all the pigs.

Many male critics were rather taken aback by that scene. William French, for instance, writes that the castration scene is “so vividly described” that it is “enough to make a man cross his legs.” Why all these details, one might wonder. Van Herk argues for the pure realistic necessity of the castration of piglets: “She only emasculates them because she has to. You can’t eat pork if the males are not castrated. It is perfectly neccessary [sic]. The story dictated that. Whatever it serves as an image is up to you to decide” (Nommensen, 89). Critics certainly read many images out of and into this scene. Men, primarily, condemned this scene; they were afraid of Judith/woman: If liberating women entails emasculating men/swine, literally or metaphorically, then better leave everything as it is. However, Dorothy Jones argues for a different interpretation that I would underscore as well. While she acknowledges the parallels between the apocryphal and the Canadian Judith, Jones argues that “the castration symbolizes not an act of hostility towards men, but the excision from her own life of a long accumulation of feminine submission and the desire to please” (“Kingdom,” 271). After Judith had castrated the first piglet, she thinks, “Perhaps it was atonement for the acts of barbarity she had committed on herself for him” (*J*, 166). In the end, after the scenario was over and Jim had left somewhat embarrassed, “[s]he shrugged [...], feeling the lightness of relief. It was no longer her worry, her problem; she was free” (*J*, 170).

The pigs, Judith feels, she has betrayed; “she said nothing to them, did not speak to soothe them but simply released the pig in the pen and picked up another” (*J*, 164). And further, “Not even Circe’s turning men to swine could equal it” (*J*, 164). Here, van Herk is “neatly fusing the novel’s two major underlying myths” (Iannucci, 67) - the Judith-myth being the one, the Odysseys-Circe-myth the other.

Circe is allowed a bit part in Homer’s *Odyssey* – Odysseys’s famous travels and adventures (Book X) – as well as in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (Book XIV). Circe lives

on the island of Aeaea (also Aiaia), and is a magician or witch figure. She is notorious for being able to transform human beings into animals and when Odysseys's men come,

They all went with her in their ignorance.
[...]
She mixed for them cheese and barley and green honey,
With Pramnian wine. And she stirred into the food
Woeful drugs that make one forget his fatherland wholly.
But when she had given it and they had drunk, she at once
Struck them with her wand and shut them up into sties.
They had the heads of swine and the voice and the hair
And the body, but the mind was steady as before.
(Homer, *Odyssey*, Book X, 231-40)³⁸

Circe had transformed them into swine, only Eurylochus can escape to inform Odysseys of what has happened. With the help of Hermes, who tells him to ingest moley, a herb in order to resist Circe's magic, Odysseys enters Circe's palace,

She made me a mixture in a golden cup to drink
And put in a drug, devising evil in her heart.
When she gave it and I drank and it did not charm me,
She struck me with a wand and spoke right out directly:
'Come to the sty now. Lie down with the others, your companions.'
So she said, but I drew the sharp sword from along my thigh
(*O*, X, 316-21)

Odysseys threatens her with his sword – the Freudian way of reading this line is difficult to overlook – and in van Herk's words: "Now that is a fancy way for saying that, what he does, is, he makes love to her" (Nommensen, 87). Circe transforms the pigs back into men and for one year, Odysseys and Circe are lovers.

"[F]or centuries," as Dorothy Jones explains, "Circe has symbolized the dangers believed to lurk in female sexuality" ("Kingdom," 266). Ever since the story was received, Circe's myth gave way to various interpretations but all of them arguing in its core for Circe as the witch, Circe as the seductress, Circe as "a variant of the femme fatale, reducing men to helpless passivity" ("Kingdom," 266). Further, Jones reminds us that Circe is closely associated with herbs, thus with nature, and thus with the "Lady of the Beasts" (Neumann, 273).

In *Judith*, there are various references to Circe and all of them in connection to the pigs.³⁹ And it is the pigs that bridge the gap from the story of Circe to the story of Judith quite obviously. Nevertheless, there are other devices as well that both *Judith*

³⁸ All further references towards Homer's *Odyssey* will be indicated with the letter *O*; the references towards the individual books will be indicated with roman numerals in parenthesis.

³⁹ Cf. Aritha van Herk, *Judith*, 2, 164, 170.

and the *Odyssey* share, as Iannucci indicates.⁴⁰ For one thing, the *Odyssey* is the story of a man on a long voyage far away from home. Judith is similarly struggling on her adventure, but instead of trying to make her way home, as Odysseys does, she is trying to escape. Born on the farm she moves to the city to escape her father's rule and the narrow way of life where "all the women are housewives and all the men are country louts. The only thing to do is go to pot-luck suppers and Elk's dances" (*J*, 84). Being in the city, another man enters her life, and again, she has to escape, this time back to the country – a "circular plot," as Davidson remarks (103), also pointing out this circularity similarly to be found in the pigs' life and the pigs' portrayal in the novel. Secondly, the narrative technique in *Judith* is, one might find it difficult to believe, similar to Homer's technique in the *Odyssey* in its use of flashbacks.⁴¹ Iannucci also stresses that it was "only Odysseys among the Homeric heroes [who] was fully aware" of the notion "in which human beings are dominated by the past" (66). Judith's past still dictates her very much and, as Nischik points out, "the past is [also] given structural weight by taking up about a third of the novel" (115). "Ghosts dog her footsteps" (Iannucci, 66), the ghosts of the past, and it is some sort of ghosts that establish a third parallel with the *Odyssey*.

When Odysseys decides to leave, Circe advises him not to go home directly, but to go to the Underworld in order to consult Tiresias (or Teiresias), the blind seer: "Do not stay any longer in my home unwillingly./ Yet you must first achieve another journey and come/ To the halls of Hades and dread Persephone,/ So you may consult the soul of Theban Tiresias,/ The blind prophet in whom there is a steadfast mind" (*O*, X, 489-93). In the Underworld, Odysseys also meets his dead mother. Iannucci now draws a parallel from Odysseys's dead mother to Judith's dead father: "Judith consults her father's spirit: he taught her how to raise pigs, and she relies on his presence every step of the way" (67).

Eventually, Odysseys leaves Circe and she is alone again on her island. As soon as Odysseys is gone, Circe is gone too – removed from the story.⁴² If Circe had a say in

⁴⁰ Cf. Iannucci Susan, "The Place of Myth in Literature," 66-67.

⁴¹ Cf. Irene J.F De Jon, *A Narratological Commentary on the Odyssey*, xi.

⁴² Various sources of later writers mention two or more children that have come out of the liaison between Circe and Odysseys – Homer does not refer to any. These later writers indicate the Circe still longed for Odysseys and later sent her son Telegonus to find him, but he killed Odysseys, without knowing who he was. Odysseys's body then, accompanied by Penelope, was brought to Circe's island Aea to be buried. See Robert E. Bell, *Women of Classical Mythology: A Biographical Dictionary*, 125-26.

the story, this is what she might have thought about Odysseys leaving her:

It's the story that counts. No use telling me this isn't a story,
or not the same story. I know you've fulfilled everything you
promised, you love me, we sleep till noon and we spend the
rest of the day eating, the food is superb, I don't deny that.
But I worry about the future. In the story the boat disap-
pears one day over the horizon, just disappears, and it doesn't
say what happens then. On the island that is. [...]

Am I really immortal, does the sun care, when you
leave will you give me back the words? Don't evade, don't
pretend you won't leave after all: you leave in the story and
the story is ruthless.

(Atwood, "Circe/Mud Poems," 68)

Both, Judith and Circe find themselves in mythology to fulfill their deeds – Judith kills to free her people, Circe initially the vicious sorceress turns out to be yet another one of Odysseys's love adventures. In van Herk's version the women are given the leading role – not just the bit part, and how the author chooses to employ the stories and characters of Judith and Circe to create a new mythology will be the focus of the next section.

4.1.2. Refusing to be Victims

In *Judith*, Aritha van Herk transfers the mythical figures of ancient stories into a contemporaneous, a "feminist context," ("Personal Interview," 121), and into a new geography. By doing so, she aims to subvert the myths and write a Judith who emerges as a liberated woman, free from patriarchal and geographical constraints, in a role that is no longer the one of the victim or the "bad girl."

Van Herk covertly echoes and retells the myth of Judith, but also aims to change it. Quite obviously, Judith is not undergoing an actual battle and decapitating a man. However, her struggle is "interior," within the "community," with "a social structure that says that [...] [she] can only do this and that this is what women are supposed to do" ("Personal Interview," 121). More overtly, as a reader, we are reminded of Circe from the *Odyssey* and again we see that van Herk's Judith/Circe is not transforming men into swine, she does not have magical powers and in the end, Judith does not end up on her lonely island as a lonely woman.

The parallels with and deviations from the myths have been recounted, but does van Herk succeed in adapting the myths to her needs, to women's needs? Does she

succeed in subverting the myths to establish a new social order? Or does the re-writing merely re-inscribe patriarchal order, or, in Peters's words, "[D]oes the subversion ultimately become only another sub-version of the myth" (82)?

Renate Peters argues that "despite van Herk's attempt to destroy the archetypal image, that image remains more powerful than ever" (93). Similar to her forebears, Judith is castrating/beheading; she is a witch, she is angry, and she "remains the Other – in de Beauvoir's sense" (Peters, 93). Peters furthermore claims, "Both Judiths become the matriarchs of their households, rather than rulers of a new societal order," and "[u]ltimately, van Herk does not escape mythology" (Peters, 93) – on the contrary, Peters argues, the author merely stresses the significance of the original myth.⁴³ Conversely, Carol L. Beran states that van Herk's "Judith, like her ancient prototype, [is] a strong image of female power," and the Canadian Judith "too sets an example that can bring deliverance to her society" (60) – she is a woman who proves that she can make it on her own.

Obviously, I side more with Beran but I also agree with Peters in so far that van Herk, in fact, does not escape mythology. One cannot. Mythology is all pervasive in our society – even though often only covertly. Barthes also argues that "the major power of myth" is "its recurrence" (135). Peters claims that *Judith* "does not break away from the traditional structure of the myth" and hence "does no more than restate Barthes' contention" (Peters, 93). Barthes's argument reads as follows:

It thus appears that it is extremely difficult to vanquish myth from the inside: for the very effort one makes in order to escape its stranglehold becomes in its turn the prey of myth: myth can always, as a last resort, signify the resistance which is brought to bear against it. (135)

But Peters stops short here. She argues that van Herk "resists the myth but the myth reappears within her resisting narrative" (Peters, 93). However, I believe that van Herk not only not resists but actively engages with myth, as she has often stated in interviews and essays alike.⁴⁴ Therefore myth does not appear as an unwelcome guest; even more, it claims its place in the novel as a different myth, a re-written myth. The aim, therefore, is not the eventual destruction of the myth, as Peters

⁴³ Verhoeven similarly underscores Peters's interpretation and says that "mere inversion reconfirms rather than reconstructs gender-related value-systems" (36-37). See W.M. Verhoeven, "West of Woman, Or, Where No Man has Gone Before: Geofeminism in Aritha van Herk."

⁴⁴ See for example Aritha van Herk, "Women and Faith: the Reach of the Imagination": "I do believe, however, in the regenerative power of story, that if we give our silenced caste the opportunity, they will begin to develop a vocabulary, to speak, to understand their own experience" (119).

believes,⁴⁵ but its re-working. Again it is Barthes who hints at this idea, which Peters chooses to overlook:

Truth to tell, the best weapon against myth is perhaps to mythify it in its turn, and to produce an *artificial myth*: and this reconstituted myth will in fact be a mythology. Since myth robs language of something, why not rob myth? [...] Literature offers some great examples of such artificial mythologies. (Barthes, 135)

Van Herk provides some of those examples. She seems to be engaging in a fictitious dialogue with her mythical characters, asking them to tell her their version of the story, in order for her then to put in on paper. She is giving ancient women a voice. But above all, the key for van Herk's novels seems to be transcending the reality and laughing at traditions.

In an early interview with Sharon Batt, van Herk says that she is very critical of "the extreme and dedicated realism" in "the Canadian novel" and therefore tries to "move beyond that realism" (Batt, 28). In *Judith* she succeeds in doing so with the role of pigs. They are not real, no. They transcend reality on the one hand by being described as "supernatural" (*J*, 149); "enchanted" (*J*, 2), "priestesses" (*J*, 48). On the other hand, they are such odd and "unlikely animals" and "comic as well," as van Herk ("Personal Interview," 131) says, that they seem wonderful for taking a step beyond reality. "Pigs are both unlikely centres of consciousness and not at all cute" (van Herk, "Retrospective," 277) – and, as has been mentioned, a link to Circe. As Circe seems to "change from one personality to another" (Bell, 126) – first the evil enchantress, then Odysseus's lover and helper – Judith undergoes a transformation as well – "from an angry young woman into an independent and accepting person" (van Herk, "Retrospective," 277) – and who else than the pigs are the agents of change?

"With a motionless and uncanny intelligence they watched her, holding her captive"; she was "hypnotized by their curiosity, the fathomless bottom of their knowing eyes" – "Circe's humans standing fat-chinned in shafts of dusky light; like oracles" (*J*, 2). Ten sows in the barn, and then Judith. For MacLaren, the barn is the place where "the 'real' and the mythic blur as Judith and her pigs test each others' resolve and mutual need, deciding which the human will be – enchanter or enchanted" (5) – invocation seems possible – and it is soon apparent who transforms who, and who has the mystical powers – namely the pigs.

⁴⁵ Cf. Renate Peters, "The Judith Myth in the Apocrypha and in van Herk's Novel," 82.

Besides, Judith and the sows seem to be “engaged in an almost spiritual union,” as Boland (35) claims. They seem to be at point part of Judith and this “‘oneness’ Judith feels with the pigs is brought to a peak when one of the sows is having trouble giving birth” (Boland, 35).⁴⁶ But it is not so much the physicality in this relationship many critics disapprove of but the human quality the pigs seem to possess. “She goes too far in her anthropomorphism,” French says (obviously not having appreciated Marian Engel’s *Bear* either), but it is exactly through the pigs that mythology is re-written, that roles are changed. Besides, it is the pigs that notice that Judith/Circe is finally given the opportunity to tell her story: “They swung their heads to follow her movement to the end of the row. She had words, a voice!” (*J*, 72-73).

Judith has found her voice, even if it is still a hesitant one. She only speaks with the pigs at first and, hence, acknowledges the presence of the same: “[...] If this is a partnership, you have to have a share. A name” (*J*, 78-79). Consequently, Judith christens all ten sows. To some readers, they are just names; to more perceptive readers the names van Herk employs have their own story behind them: Marie Antoinette, Josephine, Daisy Buchanan, Emily, Circe, Venus Annie, Lilith, and finally Mina and Judith herself. There is a queen, like “Marie Antoinette” (*J*, 79) – duchess of Austria and later queen of France, notorious for her alleged excesses and eventually executed. “Josephine” (*J*, 86), then, may refer to a number of figures but the following seem to be the most plausible ones. Joséphine de Beauharnais – Napoleon Bonaparte’s first wife, first Empress of France, renowned for her love for roses and Hippolyte Charles, alike. Yet, Josephine could also refer to a character from Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* – Josephine or Jo, the tomboy actually fashioned after Alcott herself.⁴⁷ Another figure from a novel appears as “Daisy Buchanan” (*J*, 114). Daisy seems to be taken from Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*. Of course, figures from classical mythology are mentioned as well and these are “Circe and Venus” (*J*, 145): Circe, the goddess with magic powers; Venus or Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty and love.

Lilith seems to be the most interesting one of those names since Lilith is in fact Adam’s first wife. He allegedly married Lilith since he became tired of having sexual relations with beasts. However, Lilith refused, as Walker tells us, “to lie beneath him in the ‘missionary position’ favored by male-dominant societies” (541). She only

⁴⁶ Cf. *Judith*, 122-23.

⁴⁷ Cf. Introduction to Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*.

“sneered at Adam’s sexual crudity, cursed him, and flew away” (Walker, 541). By the Red Sea, she spent her days sleeping with demons and had a hundred children each day. Hence, God, unable to persuade Lilith to return, had to make Eve instead, “as Lilith’s more docile replacement” (Walker, 541).

With the name “Emily” (*J*, 124), van Herk seems to remind us of history. Emily Murphy has become famous as one of The Famous Five or The Valiant Five when Canada was discussing the question of woman and whether women were persons. Besides, Emily might as well stand for Emily Carr, the famous Canadian painter and writer.⁴⁸

While the pigs seem very important to Judith, she gradually confides in Mina, who becomes her friend. In the end, she even names one of her sows after Mina – and thus putting her in a row with many renowned figures. Mina herself, however, might be fashioned after the “Roman Goddess of wisdom and the moon” (Walker, 658) – Minerva.

The names Judith gives to the ten sows link fact with fiction. Queens mingle with fictional characters and historical figures with women from classical antiquity. These women seem to indicate various possibilities of what women can do and what they can achieve, and hence present a model for Judith. This also links up with the epigraph of *Judith* and Lewis Carroll’s question “whether pigs have wings.” And flying pigs, as we know, symbolize impossibility. Judith’s sows, well, one would not put anything past them, would one? The pigs, then, seem like a totem to her and “turn Judith into a woman” (Iannucci, 67).

To put it in nutshell, *Judith* is a story of a quest, a journey of escaping, of transformation, of strong women who try to liberate themselves from patriarchal constraints. The myth is not being destroyed, oh no, but re-written and while the ending does not solve all the problems, it concludes with a moment of laughter and peace. Judith is given a voice and presented as a strong character, leaving behind her comfortable life in the city and her lover. She disappears, without a forwarding address, but many backward thoughts. “Abandonment gives us memory,” Kroetsch (“Discovery,” 2) says. In the end, she has made her footprint. Even though still being eyed suspiciously by the community who cannot think outside of the box, she has

⁴⁸ “Annie” (*J*, 148) I could not trace back to a definite figure in history or literature, but I am sure there is a connection as well.

come to stay: ““You out to get a box’,” the man in the post office says. ““What for?’,” Judith replies.

Well, you know General Delivery is for folks just passin’ through who ain’t planni’ on staying very long. Folks that lives here has a box.’ [...] ‘You’ve been here for a while now. You’re not planning on leavin’, are you?’ Her smile broadened. ‘No, I guess not.’ (*J*, 179-80)

Things change, people change, and it is the pigs that seem to be the catalyst for change in *Judith*. Pigs. The novel opens with them and the novel closes with them: ““Pigs,’ she said, ‘you win’” (*J*, 181). What the pigs are to Judith, the bear is to J.L.

4.2. “Hearing the mountain shift” – *The Tent Peg*

I sit behind her, put my hand on her shoulder, but she wants no comfort from me.
She wants the bear.
(Aritha van Herk, *The Tent Peg*, 201)

Nine men, one woman. The Yukon Territories. Mountains and ice. A bear. Gold. Actual and symbolic tent pegs. A female friendship. A biblical story. These are the ingredients of *The Tent Peg*. Put together, they make a novel of the unmapped North – fused with mythological references in a form that is compelling, and a protagonist that transcends the borders of possibilities.

Aritha van Herk moves North in her second novel and she does so in the form of William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*.⁴⁹ Fifteen characters altogether give their version of parts of the story; some events are being told second-hand, from other incidents we are given multiple accounts. Again, we are presented with a “mosaic” (Nischik, 108). Each person is a first-person-narrator, giving his or her personal response to the situation. However, from the fifteen characters only three are given enough space to fully develop a round persona, and that is Mackenzie, J.L., and Thompson. The other characters remain rather flat – from four of them we only hear once.⁵⁰ Besides, there is the landscape and the “landscape too is a character, although a silent one,” as Aritha van Herk (“Retrospective,” 282) reminds us.

⁴⁹ Cf. Aritha van Herk, “*Judith* and *The Tent Peg*: A Retrospective,” 282.

⁵⁰ Nischik divides the fifteen characters up into three groups according to the space allocated in the novel: with Mackenzie, J.L., and Thompson being the first group with 22, 17, and 15 entries respectively. The second group – Jerome, Hudson, Milton, Ivan, Hearne, and Cap – tell their version of the story between five and eight times. The third group is granted one to four entries – Bill, Zeke, and P.Q. only one each; Roy has four entries. See Reingard M. Nischik, “Narrative Technique in Aritha van Herk’s Novels,” 116-17.

Still, we get to know the characters, and they are as diverse as can be. From the helicopter pilots Ivan and Roy, to the religious kid Milton and the technician Cap, to the explorers/artists Franklin, the poet and Hearne, the photographer, to the geologists Mackenzie, Thompson, Jerome and his assistant Hudson. And then there is J.L., the cook. A woman. A woman in the North. A woman that deceives because she longs to escape from the turmoil of city life. A woman, J.L., and nine men.

J.L. is a college-student who wants to escape, get away from her life. For that reason she dresses up as a man in order to get hired as a bush cook – she knows women are hardly ever hired. Having deceived Mackenzie, with her hat low and the initials J.L., he hires her thinking “she” was a “he”; but soon J.L. comes clean to him. Mackenzie agrees to hire her but tells her, “It won’t be easy, they’re not used to it, they won’t like it” (*TP*, 34). And they don’t. The men eye her suspiciously, not expecting a woman up North, and are somewhat taken aback by J.L.’s silence and distance that makes her mysterious. But soon she is the novel’s center, soon everything seems to revolve around her: “She’s like a pillar in the middle of the camp. We all shuffle around her, matrixed” (*TP*, 161); “she has somehow become our center, we all orbit her” (*TP*, 144). Yet, she is *only* the cook and at the same time she is *more* than the cook. The men come to her, want to talk to her, look for answers, when all J.L. wants is silence. During gun-shots, rock slides, an attempted rape, and a dance on fire, J.L. remains their focus. Towards the end, the geologists in fact looking for uranium, find gold on reconnaissance, and give their finding the perfectly unfitting name of “Midas.” When the summer is over, eight men leave the camp transformed. All but one, the “archetypal villain, without any redeeming qualities” who “goes unshriven” (van Herk, “Retrospective,” 282) – Jerome. And J.L., J.L. has talked to the she-bear.

“*The Tent Peg* is likable because its tone is intense, its format is crisp, and the edge of mischievous intrigue in the opening chapter is genuine,” so far Kerr’s (149) first impressions. But then, the critic, and not her alone, go on to pick the central character into pieces: “[T]he woman’s importance becomes unrealistically inflated” (Kerr, 149). Wachtel simply asks, “But just what has J.L. done? Her portentous effect is belied by words that are at most sensible, at worst trite.” Motherwell states, “You believe the Yukon. You believe the men. And you believe a persona so captivating that it could take control of everyone’s lives. You don’t believe it could be J.L.” Finally, Wanner says, “The statements being made are bigger than J.L. As a symbol J.L. fits the bill; as a character, she is a ghost.” Here is the catchword – symbol.

Van Herk repeatedly states that J.L. has to be read as a symbol, not as a real character.⁵¹ In an interview with Hartmut Lutz she says, “J.L. is not so much a real character as she is an emblematic character. [...] She cannot talk to a bear! She cannot call down a mountain! She cannot shoot a gun perfectly the first time or dance on fire!” (Lutz, “Gespräch,” 113-14). As with the pigs in *Judith*, van Herk is exploring impossibilities and thus transcending realities and borders and mythologies alike.

4.2.1. The Diverse Mythological Levels in *The Tent Peg*

“‘I was really named after a person in the Bible. J, A, dash, E, L. [...]’” (*TP*, 10), the main character tells Mackenzie at the beginning, revealing the significance of her name which has been shortened to J.L. in the novel. Mackenzie nods but has not “looked into a Bible for twenty years” (*TP*, 10). We have, if only to decipher the mythical allusions in *The Tent Peg*, which are all pervasive and even indicated in the title itself.⁵²

In the Book of Judges, chapter four and five, we are presented with the story of Jael and Deborah, the judge. Deborah commands Barak to kill Sisera, the general of king Jabin’s troops. Barak would go, but asks Deborah to accompany him. She agrees but informs him that the honor of destroying Sisera will then be a woman’s. Sisera hears about Barak’s plans and pulls all of his men together. Nevertheless, Barak succeeds in destroying his army – only Sisera manages to flee on foot. He is able to escape to Jael’s tent. Jael is a Kenite, Heber’s wife. Since there was peace between king Jabin and the family of Heber, Sisera deems himself safe. Jael welcomes him and when he asks for water, she gives him milk. Eventually, Sisera, covered with a blanket, falls asleep. “Then Jael Heber’s wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and wary. So he died” (Judges, 4, 21). Thus, Jael restores peace for forty years. Jael is praised for her heroic deed by both Barak and Deborah who sing a song for her in which “her violent act becomes larger than

⁵¹ See Aritha van Herk, “*Judith and The Tent Peg: A Retrospective*,” 282; Ingwer Nommensen, “Self-Discovery,” 81.

⁵² The reader who does not want to make the effort to look up the story in the Bible is given Deborah’s song towards the end of the novel, which basically is a recapitulation of the story as well. See *The Tent Peg*, 216.

life. No seduction and deceit here. No ambush of a sleeping giant” (Nolan Fewell, 69):

Blessed above women shall Jael
the wife of Heber the Kenite be,
blessed shall she be above women in the tent

He asked water, *and* she gave *him* milk;
She brought forth butter in a lordly dish.

She put her hand to the nail,
and her right hand to the workmen’s hammer;
and with the hammer she smote Sisera,
she smote off his head,
when she had pierced and stricken through his temples.

At her fee he bowed,
he fell, he lay down:
at her feet he bowed, he fell:
where he bowed, there he fell down dead.
(Judges, 5, 24-27)⁵³

The victory song of Deborah is “one of the oldest texts we have,” Duncker (135) informs us.⁵⁴ Van Herk also notes the importance of this text: It is “one of the few, if not the only poetic outpouring of feeling by a woman” (van Herk, “Imagination,” 115). Walker points out that Deborah was, in fact, a matriarch, and the Bible, in order to disguise this fact, referred to her as prophetess or judge.⁵⁵ Most likely because of its importance, van Herk has included Deborah’s song in her novel *The Tent Peg* almost verbatim, with a few alterations, also remarked on by Lutz:⁵⁶ instead of “nail,” van Herk uses “tent peg”; and “hammer” is replaced by “mallet.”

For Kerr, the story of J.L. is an “intrusive leitmotif,” for Wachtel, there is an “intriguingly subversive side to *The Tent Peg*,” in fact evoked by the biblical story. Supporting Wachtel’s argument, I will translate from Canaan to Canada.⁵⁷

Now, the voyage from Canaan to Canada is not as far as one might expect, mythologically speaking, and neither is the Samaritan territory, where Judith’s story was supposedly set.⁵⁸ Having heard both the story of Jael and Judith, parallels are striking. Both, Jael and Judith, were praised in the Bible for their deeds, yet

⁵³ See *The Holy Bible: The Old and New Testament*; authorized King James Version (Cleveland; World Publishing Company, 1964).

⁵⁴ Also see Susan Niditch, “Judges,” 181.

⁵⁵ Cf. Barbara Walker, *The Woman’s Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, 217.

⁵⁶ Cf. Hartmut Lutz, “‘Meat and Bones Don’t Matter’: Mythology in ‘The Tent Peg,’” 46-47.

⁵⁷ Cf. Eleanor Wachtel, “Barefoot in the kitchen.”

⁵⁸ Cf. W.P. Brown, “Judith,” 647.

condemned by scholars, who, as Duncker stresses, “have taken a predictably negative attitude towards murderous women in the Bible” (136). Furthermore, she claims that they “are happy praising Moses, but become uneasy when faced with Judith decapitating Holophernes, so much so that she is not part of the official version. And so with the story of Jael” (Duncker, 136). The main argument of scholars is the violation of a “cardinal rule” (Knapp, 63) on the part of Jael: “the fact of being a guest is sacred” (Duncker, 136), and an invitation “to a stranger or friend ensured the guest’s safety; default in extending this sacred act of welcome was an offense to society at large” (Knapp, 63). Jael thus broke the rules of hospitality. Van Herk also mentions a scholar who asserts that Jael “only killed Sisera because she was ‘after him’ and he spurned her” (“Imagination,” 116). Other commentators point out Sisera’s change in personality from foremost polite and considerate to then ordering Jael to watch the door and commanding her what to say.⁵⁹ Jael, then feeling humiliated by Sisera, takes the peg and kills him. Some suggest that Jael and Sisera might have had sexual relations and underscore their interpretation by referring to Deborah’s song: “At her feet he sunk, he fell, he lay.” “The metaphor of ‘feet,’” then, some scholars propose “is viewed as a metaphor for sexual organs” (Knapp, 65). In the end, Jael kills a guest while he sleeps, lulled in by her “(motherly) personality and her (vampish) sensuality” (Knapp, 64).

All of these interpretations and ambiguities seem surprising, since as van Herk reminds us, “the story is first told by an omniscient narrator and then re-told by Deborah’s song” (“Imagination,” 116). Besides, Jael’s deed, brutal as it was, brings about peace. Even so, scholars condemn Jael for killing the man. When man kills thousands and thousands of women, he is some kind of hero. Again van Herk draws this parallel to the story of Samson in the Bible, who kills “not for any end but revenge” (“Imagination,” 116).⁶⁰

Women read the story of Jael and Deborah differently, and van Herk’s rendering of the myth in *The Tent Peg* provides such a re-reading. The similarities are obvious: both heroines are called Jael/J.L.; both have a prophet/friend Deborah, who in the end sings a song; in both stories there is a villain Sisera/Jerome; and both Jael/J.L. hammer a tent peg of some sort in the men’s temples.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Cf. Bettina L Kanpp, *Women in Myth*, 64.

⁶⁰ Aritha van Herk is referring to the Book of Judges, 13-16.

⁶¹ In fact, the word “*raqaq*” means “parted lips” but is “often translated misleadingly as “temples,” as Dana Nolan Fewell (69) indicates.

But, besides the biblical story of Jäel, van Herk employs various other mythologies in *The Tent Peg*. Hartmut Lutz, in his excellent essay “‘Meat and Bones Don’t Matter’: Mythology in ‘The Tent Peg,’” distinguishes or filters out five different levels of mythology: Old World mythology, New World mythology, Canadian “mythology,” timeless indigenous mythology, and universal feminine myths.⁶²

The biblical story of Deborah and Jäel, which belongs to Lutz’s first level, has been discussed already. As a footnote, Greek mythology is mentioned, as well as a famous female historic figure, Joan of Arc – also falling into the category of Old World mythology.

The second of Lutz’s levels, “New World mythology,” refers to the “North American literary genre, the Indian captivity story” (Lutz, “Meat,” 62). Lutz is referring to the tale of Hanna Dustan.⁶³

Canadian mythology does not fall short either and is Lutz’s third level. Names of explorers or references to Canadian literature are subsumed into this category. Besides Lutz, Barbara Godard discusses this fusion of Canadian history with the narrative, and those who know their Canadian history will have no difficulty in discovering the parallels – above all, the characters’ names: Mackenzie, Thompson, Cap, Hearne, Franklin, Hudson, and Milton. They all clearly established a map of the North, by being explorers, geologist, mapmakers. Mackenzie and Thompson, as Godard remarks, are most accurately rendered in *The Tent Peg*: “Mackenzie being inclined towards enumeration while Thompson is given to express his sense of wonder in the universe” (Godard, 92). Mackenzie is named after the fur trader and explorer Sir Alexander Mackenzie, after whom a river was named. Thompson, after David Thompson, was one of the finest Canadian map makers in Canada who provided one of the earliest and most comprehensible maps of the Northwest Territories.

“The other explorers move further from their historical analogues,” as Godard (92) tells us, but their names too can be found in history. Cap, who introduces himself as “Capital Kane” (*TP*, 63) is in fact named after Paul Kane, who was an artist and explorer. Hearne, after Samuel Hearne, explored northern Canada extensively. The

⁶² Cf. Hartmut Lutz, “‘Meat and Bones Don’t Matter’: Mythology in ‘The Tent Peg,’” 62-63.

⁶³ For a detailed discussion of Hanna Dustan in connection to *The Tent Peg*, see Hartmut Lutz, “‘Meat and Bones Don’t Matter’: Mythology in ‘The Tent Peg,’” 49-53. Also see the interview Lutz did with van Herk: Hartmut Lutz, “Gespräch,” 114-15.

name Franklin establishes a kinship to Sir John Franklin, who got famous in history books, since he was mysteriously lost searching for the Northwest Passage by sea. Milton then, or more precisely Viscount Milton, searched together with W.B. Cheadle for the Northwest Passage by land. Finally, Hudson got his name from Henry Hudson, an Englishman who explored the eponymous river – the Hudson River.⁶⁴ Ivan and Jerome do not have any namesakes – Ivan probably because he was not a geologist or mapmaker, but a pilot; and Jerome almost certainly did not deserve a historic namesake.

In addition to famous figures in Canadian history, we also get an insight into Canadian Literature, as van Herk thus roots her “novel firmly in Canadian grounds, not only geographically, and historically, but deliberately in the context of Canadian feminist literature” (Lutz, “Meat,” 56). “And once there was a writer who wrote a very strange and beautiful story about a woman who loved a bear” (*TP*, 147), we read in *The Tent Peg*. Van Herk is clearly referring to Marian Engel’s novel *Bear*, which has had a profound influence on her. Before that, Cap tells a story about an Australian farmer’s sodomy with a sheep. “It’s been done,” J.L. “says softly” (*TP*, 146) – hinting at the Greek story of the always-up-for-an-adventure-Zeus and the beautiful Io, who was turned into a Heifer by Zeus, before Hera, his jealous wife, could see her husband’s doings.⁶⁵ Besides, J.L. narrates a story about a man who loved a cow and thus hinting at William Faulkner’s *The Hamlet*.

But in the end, it is the bear that plays a significant role in *The Tent Peg*, and it is “very much an homage to Canadian mythology,” to First Nations traditions, according to van Herk (“Personal Interview,” 131). The she-bear incidents together with Zeke, the bouncer, who is a Dene, links up to Lutz’s fourth level, i.e., “timeless indigenous mythology” (Lutz, “Meat,” 63). When Zeke, who is the bouncer in the bar, sees J.L. he immediately knows that she is a woman: “I’m damned if sure enough it’s not a girl” (*TP*, 17). He is the only native in the story and establishes a link to the bear-scenes, when he says, “Mackenzie’s got himself a bear trap” (*TP*, 17). In *The Tent Peg* the she-bear appears three times, the first and the last time, J.L. and some men see her from the helicopter, once the bear visits J.L. in the camp. The

⁶⁴ Cf. Harmut Lutz, “‘Meat and Bones Don’t Matter’: Mythology in ‘The Tent Peg,’” 55-56.

⁶⁵ In another version, “Hera sent a gadfly to sting Io, to send her wandering all over the world,” as Walker (449) tells us; yet this myth, she adds was an “invented” one. In fact, Hera and Io were one and the same Goddess, “her alleged jealousy of Io was a patriarchal fiction” (Walker, 449).

bear talks to her, and J.L. realizes it is her friend Deborah. She says, “‘Wait. Don’t let them drive you away’” (*TP*, 104). J.L. accepts Deborah’s/the she-bear’s advice.

But the bear is more than that, Lutz informs us: “It is also part of the land itself, the archaic immovable power of nature, both loving and destructive” (“Meat,” 60).⁶⁶ Ultimately, the bear in *The Tent Peg* is a symbol of power for women, J.L.’s totem that reassures her of her strength. The closeness to nature as well as the supernatural air that hovers around J.L. is then Lutz’s final level which he subsumes in “universal feminine myths” (Lutz, “Meat,” 63).

By drawing on all of these mythologies, van Herk creates a new fusion, and while the old myths are still to be deciphered they appear transformed at the same time. Details are adapted, facts are changed, and the woman emerges as heroine.

4.2.2. Transforming Realities

Mythological stories, figures, and animals abound in *The Tent Peg*, but again the question suggests itself, as in *Judith*: Does van Herk succeed in creating something new, something that destabilizes hegemonic structures?

Many critics, as Godard and MacLaren have noticed, read the novel on only one level, that is, the level of the battle of the sexes, men versus women.⁶⁷ But obviously the story is more complex, as all the intricate and interconnected layers of mythology indicate.

Most obvious is the parallel between *The Tent Peg* and the myth of Jäel. The most apparent deviation from this myth, then, is the non-violent resolution in the end. Does this ending place the woman again in the sphere of the fragile, the one that endures, the one that does not speak up? No, since J.L. puts Jerome in the position of the weak one. She has the gun, she is “on top of him,” she could kill him, if she wanted to, she ridicules him and laughs at him, not at last with the trick the whole

⁶⁶ For a thorough and brilliant analysis of the significance of the bear in *The Tent Peg*, see Hartmut Lutz, “‘Meat and Bones Don’t Matter’: Mythology in ‘The Tent Peg,’” 56-62.

⁶⁷ Cf. Barbara Godard, “Review of: *Lunatic Villas* by Marian Engel; *The Charcoal Burners* by Susan Musgrave; *The Tent Peg* by Aritha van Herk,” 92; Ian S. MacLaren, “A Charting of the van Herk Papers,” 9-10.

crew plays on him, egged on by J.L.⁶⁸ Besides the different conclusion, J.L. herself is presented differently. She is by no means the most beautiful woman who can seduce any man – as the biblical Jael is described. On the contrary, she is portrayed as looking like a boy: “I do look somewhat like a boy [...] small and thin and flat” (*TP*, 32). Or in Cap’s rendering, “She’s flat as a board, a nice bum but no boobs at all, and she has those high cheekbones and a wide mouth, you can’t even say she’s sexy, let alone pretty” (*TP*, 100). In the beginning, J.L. does dress up as a boy, as has been mentioned, and this gender reversal sets off a whole other set of transformations – the men in the camp change, J.L. herself is both transformer and transformed, and landscape too presents “herself” as altered, as we shall find out.

These changes occurring in the camp, as MacLaren very perceptively points out, are commented on by Roy, the pilot who flies in once a week to bring supplies. The novel thus sort of framed by Roy’s four entries allows us to trace the alterations within the characters.

Roy’s first entry reads: “It’s a strange camp. It has an air of careful control [...]. There’s tension, but it’s not the same tension that you find in most camps. [...] It’s almost as if they’re afraid of her. [...] [T]hey keep their distance. Yet they like her” (*TP*, 72). The next time he comes in, Roy still seizes the tension: “They like her plenty but they keep their distance. It’s gingerly respect” (*TP*, 97). Roy also notices Jerome’s hatred for J.L. as well as Mackenzie’s restless thoughts. The third time Roy comes in, it is “Fort Chaos. Every week the camp seems less stable” (*TP*, 121) – with the rockslide as its physical indication. And J.L., she “just doesn’t change. She’s as cool, as secretive as ever” (*TP*, 121). Finally, Roy has noticed that there is more to J.L., since “whatever else that girl does, she can cook” (*TP*, 181). Besides, she seems to have lowered her guard, as Roy remarks: “[Y]ou can tell she likes the crew” (*TP*, 181). Still, it is “some strange camp,” but the crew, they are “cheerful as hell” (*TP*, 181).

MacLaren observes that the tension arises from the expectation of the “conventional transformation of virgin or tease into vixen” (12). That does not happen, yet there are other transformations with the tent peg as its most pervasive symbol.

⁶⁸ Right before J.L. has the idea to play a trick on Jerome, she says that she “would like to take him down a peg.” Thus, Jerome’s ridicule and the subsequent laughter again serves as a destabilizing act; a symbolical, non-violent tent peg. See *The Tent Peg*, 132-40.

In accordance with the biblical story, where Jael hammers a peg in Sisera's skull, the men in *The Tent Peg* too are taken down a peg, if only metaphorically, as various critics and van Herk herself point out.⁶⁹ This also symbolizes the last of the three steps of their transformation, as MacLaren stresses: first, "[p]roviding relief," "simultaneously or thereafter follow [sic] a symbolic laying on of hands," and then "the figurative blow of the tent peg in the form of realization" (14).

Thompson has come to realize that Katie, his girlfriend would never "belong" to him, and he says, "There is something *hammering* inside my skull as if she has struck at the one answer I never wanted" (*TP*, 151, my emphasis). Mackenzie comprehends with J.L.'s help that his wife left for herself; it was not his fault: "It is the sound of my own assumption that *hammers* in my temple. I grip the handle of my hammer, try to drive away the hubris I have committed, believing that another life could be at my disposal that I had any right to try and make it so" (*TP*, 195-96, my emphasis). The other men too are allowed their epiphany. Hearne takes his perfect photograph: "For a moment it is as if she is *hammering* that stake into everything I have ever known or photographed, *hammering* the very pulse of life. And then I have it, I have clicked the shutter and caught the perfect picture forever" (*TP*, 203, my emphasis). What the photograph is for Hearne, the poem is for Franklin, and he has written a series of poems about J.L. Cap realizes that a woman is not only a sexual sight/site, and Ivan overcomes his fear of "crashing the helicopter and dying" because "of the one mistake you're certain to make one day" (*TP*, 179).⁷⁰ Hudson, a young geologist from Britain learns to "[s]tick it out" (*TP*, 163) and Milton, the Mennonite, having internalized that "you cannot kiss a girl until after you are married" (*TP*, 141), but convinced that J.L. could show him, sees J.L. in Mackenzie's tent and says, "But I saw it, the terror and joy *hammered* in me. That is how you make a kiss" (*TP*, 205, my emphasis).

They all bring their "bundles" to J.L., and she says: "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" (*TP*, 166). In the end, Mackenzie, speaking for all

⁶⁹ Cf. Hartmut Lutz, "'Meat and Bones Don't Matter': Mythology in 'The Tent Peg,'" 48-49; Aritha van Herk, "*Judith and The Tent Peg: A Retrospective*," 281-82; Eleanor Wachtel, "Barefoot in the kitchen"; Dorothy Jones, "'The Centrique Part': Theme and Image in Aritha van Herk's Novel *The Tent Peg*," 76.

⁷⁰ Also refer to page 155 in *The Tent Peg*, where Ivan states this fear in the exact wording he then repeats later on.

men/mankind, except those of Jerome's kind, says, "I know the peg still lodges in my skull. I will never forget" (*TP*, 220).

But that is not all. J.L. herself, as MacLaren indicates, "also wears a tent peg through her temple" (15). She is an escapee, trying to get away from the men in her life, but then finding the same problems in the camp as well: "[A]ll I wanted to find was silence, a relief from the cacophony of sound, of confession that surrounded, that always impinged on me" (*TP*, 51).⁷¹ But J.L. neither gets silence, nor relief, nor is she permitted to simply be in the camp – but she changes. Her views of men change. In the beginning her dictum is. "All men are equal" (*TP*, 18), and "Their inappropriateness never fails to amaze me" (*TP*, 58). But J.L. later realizes that Mackenzie, for instance, has "been fair, he's given [...] [her] a chance" (*TP*, 129). And later, "I respect him. I could love a man like that, maybe relax enough to let him love me" (*TP*, 184). The others, they are "finally coming clear to [her]" (*TP*, 129). After J.L. had been in Mackenzie's tent she says, "If only for him, I've redeemed myself, [...]. Tonight I'll rest. They're fed and they're confessed and they're redeemed [...] I'll rest my case" (*TP*, 207).

But J.L. is not only the one who is transformed; she works in the sphere of transformation itself. Thompson states, "We look to her as if she has the power to transform" (*TP*, 144) – and she has the power, not only symbolically, but as the cook, she is in the midst of being a transformer. Fire is the one indispensable thing she needs; the "fire has become a ritual, these men worshipping Phoedima's god and never knowing it" (*TP*, 113).⁷² J.L. too is described in metaphors of fire and light: "[H]er body is alight, it reflects a heat and radiance that I never thought bodies could possess. Luminous glass, perfectly turned" (*TP*, 204). And Mackenzie: "[W]ith each movement the porcelain clarity of her skin more luminous, as if my hands could ignite a light within her" (*TP*, 206). In the end, J.L. is dancing on fire but says, "I will not play Joan of Arc [...]. Instead I'll play siren" (*TP*, 218) – echoing her description of Deborah in the beginning – "her siren's face" (*TP*, 33), and she too has described Deborah in metaphors of light: "beautiful and soft and full of light" (*TP*, 52).

⁷¹ Besides J.L. says, "I'll listen but I won't hear. It would be a shame to spoil the silence" (*TP*, 59). Men however, read her right the other way round. Both Thompson and Ivan note their urge to talk to her: "Maybe because it's like she doesn't listen," Ivan (*TP*, 86) concludes in a way similar to Thompson who says, "She never seems to listen, but she hears, she absorbs us through her skin, through the tips of her fingers" (*TP*, 144).

⁷² Phoedima introduced fire worship in Persia, where not the sun itself, but the god behind the sun is being worshipped.

J.L. is no Joan of Arc, being burnt at the stake; instead, she is symbolic of fire, transforming things. She gets rid of her hat and jeans and puts on a gypsy skirt, jumps on the burning table, and decorates it, as Mackenzie describes it, “with the patterns of her bare feet, with the sweep and swish of that impossible skirt” (*TP*, 220). She is all woman now, like a Siren, and says, “For a moment I can pretend I am Deborah celebrating myself, victory, peace regained” (*TP*, 218).

The Sirens, “Homer’s word for the magic women of Cyrene” (Walker, 940), cast spells on passers-by by means of beautiful songs. The use of the Sirens, thus, links up to Deborah, the beautiful singer, but also establishes a connection to *Judith*. The Sirens appear both in Homer’s *Odyssey* and in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* but for now let us have a look at their rendering in the *Odyssey*.

Odysseys, on his way back from the Underworld, passes Circe’s island again and she has yet another piece of advice for Odysseys: “First you will come to the Sirens, who enchant/ All men, whenever anyone comes upon them” (*O*, XII, 39-40). Therefore, on Circe’s advice, the men put wax in their ears – all men, except Odysseys who wants to hear the Sirens sing. Therefore, Odysseys orders his man to bind him to the mast and thus they safely pass the island – and Odysseys hears the Sirens’ songs.

Hence, through the Sirens a link is established from *The Tent Peg* to *Judith*. Like J.L., Judith too puts on a skirt – “the full, rich skirt of midnight-blue velvet” (*J*, 172) – and like the men in the Yukon, Jim is not used to a feminine Judith. But both prove that although being in men’s realms, doing men’s work, in the end both are the most feminine women of all. They “break out of the roles society has prescribed and find power in new roles that they create for themselves which unite images of masculine and feminine power” (Beran, 62-63). J.L. and Judith here are the perfect examples of this union. Beran argues further, “The allusions to Judith, Jael, Circe, and St. Joan require us to see the modern heroines as new incarnations of ancient archetypes of women who reject standard feminine roles in order to accomplish significant social actions” (63).

Both are strong women in their being woman. J.L.’s dance, where she has to keep balance, further indicates this difficult union of male and female powers: “In order to dance she must remain precariously aloft maintaining her poise and balance despite the various hazards which threaten to engulf her” (Jones, “Centrique,” 78). Jones also remarks that the dance is an “image of cosmic order and harmony, but it is also, in

the course of the novel, associated with flying” (“Centrique,” 77).⁷³ J.L. loves to fly: “She wants to fly, I can feel how much she wants to,” Thompson notices (*TP*, 134). Flying symbolizes independence, and more so, mobility and “a mobile woman is a woman who is inevitably more dangerous than a woman who is static,” as van Herk (“Personal Interview,” 128) tells us.

⁷³ Both J.L. and Thompson love to fly, and it is Thompson who establishes the link between flying and dancing through his girlfriend Katie, who is a dancer: “and suddenly the flying turns into Katie dancing” (*TP*, 134).

5. Magic Mountains – Landscape Renderings in *Judith* and *The Tent Peg*

The snow had stopped falling and a late-rising sun glittered the soft whiteness
to icy blue. She stood still, looking around her glowing world.
(Aritha van Herk, *Judith*, 72)

The Yukon is a magic place. I know it [...]. It's a place where reality is inverted,
where you have to take strangeness for granted.
(Aritha van Herk, *The Tent Peg*, 119)

The landscape in Aritha van Herk's novels seems to be a character in its own right and it does its best to appear transformed – most clearly in *The Tent Peg*, but in *Judith* too we can detect notions of its magic influence. Both Judith and J.L. seem to feel a close relationship and a certain “oneness” with nature. Judith, as Fairbanks remarks, senses the changing of the weather,⁷⁴ and Godard identifies a certain exotic atmosphere⁷⁵ that is created in connection with land, weather, woman: “Leaning over, she printed her open and gloveless hand on the unmarked white. [...] She rubbed her hand against her blue-jeaned legs, then against her crotch, feeling the cool wetness lip through the denim into her skin” (*J*, 63). J.L. too is attuned to the land which “wheels in an unending hesitation of sameness. And yet, it is ever-changing” (*TP*, 3). Hence, in both *Judith* and *The Tent Peg*, Annette Kolodny's metaphor of land and woman is being developed further but, as Godard tells us, the “land here refuses to be laid” (92). Placed firmly in the tradition of the Western, *Judith*, at the same time ridicules this tradition. Likewise, *The Tent Peg*, which is a northern novel, subverts this tradition quite clearly.

The West and the Western, tough guys, cowboys and horses, cattle, harsh weather – the frontier has traditionally been seen as a man's realm. But *Judith* seems unimpressed by these implications a traditional western novel supposedly has. As Davidson points out, Judith “is a woman, not a man, at home on the range. The range is a pig barn, not a cattle ranch. Instead of shrinking from the violence of ‘men's work,’ Judith has a happy knack for castrating swine” (105). A structure that traditionally does not make room for a woman in a leading role is, in van Herk's work, predominated by the same. She subverts the clichéd standards and, besides her ingenious use of classical mythology, she does so mostly by ridicule and laughter.

⁷⁴ Cf. Carol Fairbanks, *Prairie Women: Images in American and Canadian Fiction*, 272.

⁷⁵ Cf. Barbara Godard, “Review of: *Lunatic Villas* by Marian Engel; *The Charcoal Burners* by Susan Musgrave; *The Tent Peg* by Aritha van Herk,” 92.

Having illuminated the significance of the Circe-myth, let us have a closer look at Margaret Atwood's "Circe/Mud Poems." In the poem, Atwood renders Circe's perspective and gives us her version of what she thinks of Odysseus's "wanderings." The body there is clearly identified with landscape:

Around me everything is worn
down, the grass, the roots, the soil, nothing is left but the bared rock.

Come away with me, he said, we will live on a desert island.
I said, I am a desert island. It was not what he had in mind. (49)

And Circe/Judith offers what she has, her island, her body:

This is mine, this island, you can have
The rocks, the plants
[...]
You can have this water,
this flesh, I abdicate,

I watch you, you claim
Without noticing it,
You know how to take. (54)

Odysseus knows, just as Judith's former boss knows, how to take, that is. Dorothy Jones gives a more detailed analysis of Atwood's poem and reminds us that the "[i]dentification of the female body with natural landscape is a very ancient literary motif" ("Kingdom," 269) – again echoing Beauvoir and Kolodny. But rather than presenting the landscape and thus woman as passive, we have seen that van Herk actively engages with traditions and set patterns of landscape renderings. Next to the castration scene that clearly marks the "culmination of the largest reversal enacted in the novel," as Davidson (105) puts it, the bar scene is of importance in connection to the tradition of the Western and the landscape.

Van Varseveld remarks that Judith "is ready to stand and fight for her own ground – literally even, as in the pub. There is something irresistible [sic] about the image of a woman tossing glasses of beer in the faces of a bunch of burly loudmouths" (44). When Jim takes her out to the bar, Judith gets in an argument with a few men who are teasing and making fun of her. But Judith is no ninny and not subtle with words either: "'Who the fuck ever told you I was a lady?'" (*J*, 133). Jim tries to calm her down and says, "'I don't want to get in a fight here'" ; whereon Judith most determinedly answers, "'I do'" (*J*, 134). She is her own woman, ready to speak her own mind and fight her own fights. Later, being the talk of the town, Mina declares

her to be “the Amazon woman of Norberg,” and “the fastest woman in the West” (*J*, 140) – a clear pun on the cowboy image.

But bars in western Canada seem to symbolize more than merely bars – at least this is what Robert Kroetsch argues. In an interview van Herk comments on this scene and tells us about an article by Kroetsch she has come across, “in which he said, ‘The beer parlours of the prairies are sacred places, they organize the landscape as the cathedrals organize Europe’” (Batt, 28). Van Herk is “furious” with this statement and says:

When I read that I thought, there’s no way that beer parlours organize the landscape for one thing and, secondly, beer parlours in the prairies as far as I’m concerned are easier to compare with lavatories. In the bar scene I create a ‘tall tale’ [...] and I turn the tables so that the tall tale that comes out of the bar scene is a reversal of that sense of the tavern as a warm lovely place where men can drink beer and talk with their friends. It becomes very hostile and there’s a fight. (Batt, 28)

Judith makes sure that her voice is heard in this archaeology of male conversation and confusion; her voice and her laughter, which has the power to destabilize firmly fixed traditions, and it is again the pigs who know: “Yes, yes, the pigs knew it was what Judith needed – laughter, laughter echoing around her. If they could have laughed, they would have joined in” (*J*, 90). As a reminder, the “laughter,” as Cixous tells us, possesses power to deconstruct, to dismantle; it possesses the power “to break up the ‘truth’” (888), as also Davidson indicates.⁷⁶ *Judith* ends with a note on laughter. When both Mina and Judith watch the boar together with Marie Antoinette, Mina says, “‘It’s crazy, the positions we let them put us in. Having just got rid of eleven babies, that sow is going to let him put his forelegs up on her and stick that thing in her cunt, and god knows whether she will get any joy out of it’” (*J*, 177). But Judith says, “‘She gets to lead him a dance for a while,’ and ‘after all, [...] that’s all he gets to do. Only limited usefulness’” (*J*, 177). Having done what he is there for, Marie Antoinette turns away: “His necessity dispensed with, she wanted no more of him” (*J*, 178).

And together they laughed, those insane women, laughed at everything they could and as hard as they could as they danced about in the melting snow. (*J*, 178)

She danced for us, she seemed to appear on the table from nowhere [...]. She celebrates herself, the table disappearing so that it seems she dances over flames, nothing to separate her from the molten heat and light but her steps,

⁷⁶ Cf. Arnold. E Davidson, *Coyote Country: Fictions of the Canadian West*, 109-10.

her wildly sensual movement to an unheard music [...]. [A]nd then she stands beside me, panting, laughing. (*TP*, 220)

From Judith to J.L.; from the West to the North and from one inhospitable terrain for women to another. The North, as the West, is configured as a frontier discourse, as I have mentioned, where women have no space to plot. This traditional view is also indicated in *The Tent Peg* by Milton who says, “The cook is a girl. They said there weren’t any girls up north” (*TP*, 39). J.L. intrudes into this space and illustrates how this space can be made her place, a woman’s place.

Van Herk’s landscape is clearly feminized: “[T]hat frozen country spreading *herself* under our shadow” (*TP*, 9, my emphasis); “It’s that kind of country, changes *her* mind the minute your back is turned. I like the fickleness; it keeps you guessing” (*TP*, 7, my emphasis). More overtly, Aritha van Herk repeats in her essay “*Judith and The Tent Peg: A Retrospective*” that the “landscape, of course, is distinctively feminine, as changeable and arbitrary as any stereotyped woman” (“Retrospective,” 280). Again, as with *Judith*, we see the metaphor of woman as landscape; landscape as woman continued.

But it is not only the female pronouns that hint at the “identification of landscape and female anatomy,” as Dorothy Jones (“Centrique,” 72) has it, it is also the way J.L. herself is described, “with her flat-chested androgynous body” (Jones, “Centrique,” 74). Jones furthermore claims, “Her bony figures resembles the contours of the bare Yukon landscape and her character proves equally indomitable” (“Centrique,” 72). Van Herk, when depicting J.L. and Deborah, uses metaphors of land as well: “Deborah is the opposite, as lush as I am spare” (*TP*, 33).

Depicting the North is a complex venture and van Herk concedes that her attempt of doing so “is merely a mapping of one microscopic section of an infinite myth and place” (“Retrospective,” 283). J.L., looking out the plane window, is “mesmerized, frozen” and “transfixed by that fatal design. For it is dangerous. Skull teeth gleam through an invitation; the tundra can both restore and maim. No man lives to presume its power” (*TP*, 3). She feels “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” (*TP*, 4). “Not a dot of anyone anywhere,” Mackenzie meditates (*TP*, 6). These, and like descriptions of the North as an unmapped and silent place have given way to criticism, as has been indicated. Especially, the view of the no-man’s-land outside and beyond human control, stirred up criticism: “[U]p here there are no rules, no set

responses everything is new and undefined, we are beyond, outside of the rest of the world. There are no controls here” (*TP*, 79). These portrayals recall the image of the land waiting to be conquered and hence linking up with the staking scene towards the end of the novel, which too excited criticism.

Again, we have the tent peg as symbol, only this time it is the literal driving of the peg “into the temple of the earth” (*TP*, 103). Mackenzie and Thompson have found gold which is already somewhat foreshadowed by Jerome who says, “He’s killing himself, combing these claims like he expects to find gold or something” (*TP*, 90) but also by J.L. who is quick to notice Mackenzie’s and Thompson glowing faces: “‘Hey,’ [...] ‘did you guys find a goldmine or something?’” (*TP*, 157). It is also J.L. who calls Mackenzie “King Midas” (*TP*, 196) and hence it is the “Midas claims.” Again, the name Midas we know from Greek mythology.⁷⁷ In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* we read the story of the king who, granted a gift, says, “‘Make whatever I touch with my body turn to yellow gold’” (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book XI, 102-103).⁷⁸ And it does, but soon the gift turns out to be a curse, since he cannot even eat or drink anymore because everything Midas touches turns to gold. Midas then is delivered from this gift by bathing in the river Pactolus. With the gold then, or rather alchemy, we are again in the sphere of transformation and thus also reminded of Jason’s search of the Golden Fleece.

However, the staking scene has been read critically by various authors. Goldman claims that by “participating in this venture, J.L. becomes complicit with imperialist practices which historically depend on acts of naming and claiming” (“North,” 155). Conversely, Lutz describes the scene as a scene of success, reading the bear as a symbol of all the accomplishments culminating at this point: the staking of the claims; Hearne’s perfect picture, Mackenzie’s ultimate realization.⁷⁹ MacLaren then quotes Hudson who says, watching J.L., “this staking has another importance to her, this is her farewell ritual to the Yukon, an act of reference for her” (*TP*, 203). For MacLaren this act of reference equals “claiming for her a stake in the northern map of a hitherto unitary male discourse” (17). But given the name of Midas, it, at the same time, may “acknowledge the foolishness of the enterprise” (MacLaren, 17). In the end, according to MacLaren, the “act alone costs J.L” (17), referring to the she-

⁷⁷ Midas was also a historical figure – the king of Phrygia.

⁷⁸ All further references toward Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* will be indicated with the letter *M*; the references towards the individual books will be indicated with roman numerals in parenthesis.

⁷⁹ Cf. Hartmut Lutz, “‘Meat and Bones Don’t Matter’: Mythology in ‘The Tent Peg’,” 59-60.

bear who appears. In complete contrast to Lutz, MacLaren reads the bear as a symbol of treachery. MacLaren asks what J.L. is praying for – “is it a prayer of apology for transgression and complicity? Is this the cost to woman of heterosexual community?” (17).

While I agree with Goldman that the staking of the claims does remind one of colonization and with it its problematic implications, I still read the scene as one of success and hence argue along the line of Lutz. The staking, besides claiming a land for oneself, leaves the map of the North altered. A woman is suddenly to be found there and thus dismissing previous renderings of this place. The bear symbolizing success, as Lutz suggests, appears once more to encourage J.L.’s venture in this hostile region.

For Jones, the staking scene has yet another edge to it: “This passage is crucial [...] for staking not only marks ownership, but symbolizes penetration of the underlying depths in order to release what is contained there” (Jones, “Centrique,” 76) – Jones is referring to the metaphorical tent pegs. In the end, van Herk “rejects the image of a passive landscape charted, penetrated and appropriated by male discovery” (Jones, “Centrique,” 78) – after all, the landscape changes.

As has been mentioned, it is particularly J.L. who senses the landscape’s character but also the more receptive men in the camp, Mackenzie and Thompson, are aware of more than human presence in the Yukon, as the following quotations illustrate. Mackenzie, lying in his tent thinks, “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” (*TP*, 55). J.L. is almost echoing Mackenzie’s thought: “I turn on my side, close my eyes against the darkness. And then, under me, I feel the flank of the mountain shift, feel it rumble and groan as if settling the camp in its arms” (*TP*, 59) These thoughts seem to foreshadow the mountain slide later in the novel that J.L. only senses:

“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. [...] That mountain hovers, holding itself against the moment of upthrust time that left it there to wait. We haven’t given it a name. [...] Then through the soles of my feet I feel again that spasm, the earth gathering herself. It shudders deeply once, and far, far above me I hear the splash of a pebble bouncing from a cliff. (*TP*, 113)

The un-named mountain slides; it speaks up so to say and claims its presence quite impressively. The maps are no longer accurate. They have to be re-drawn. As mountains claim their name, women claim their space on a hitherto male-only-map – and with *Judith* and *The Tent Peg*, van Herk takes a first step onto this territory.

6. Dead Reckoning or Map's Myths

Topography displays no favorites; North's as near as West.
(Elizabeth Bishop, "The Map," 3)

I want to get lost. I want to escape into the unknown – away, on the other side of the world. I want to be nowhere. But everywhere I go I find maps telling me: "You are here." I want to get lost, damn it.

Maps. We rely on maps as being the exact rendering of the "real" world – the map as a "unitary and sensible, coherent and factual story" (MacLaren, 1). Being in a country like Canada with its immense spaces, the urge to map is comprehensible, since after all, human beings want to be "somewhere." "Mapping is necessary," as van Herk states ("Mapping," 54), and map she does. But be aware, she warns us at some other point, of "the map's temptation and entrapment" (van Herk, "Temptation," 133).

Michel Foucault claims that the first sign "is not the word, nor the cry, nor the symbol, but the spatial and graphic representation – the drawing as map or picture" (*Order*, 64). But the map has been exposed as the colonist's tool, "a powerful symbol of political control" (Huggan, 25), a "political manipulation" (Huggan, 27) indeed, and in the end as "an inadequate referential guide" (Huggan, 27). Still, the "map as metaphor is not rejected out of hand" (Huggan, 27). Writers continue to use maps in their fiction and employ those maps "as icons, as motifs, and as metaphors" (Huggan, 21).

Graham Huggan, in his remarkable work *Territorial Disputes: Maps and Mapping Strategies in Contemporary Canadian and Australian Fiction*, traces the significance of the map throughout literature. While he offers some great readings of maps as destabilizing hegemonic structures, he falls into the trap of the map's temptation, as van Herk would put it.⁸⁰ At one point, Huggan quotes the South African writer André Brink who says, "'The writer is not concerned only with 'reproducing' the real. What he does is to perceive, below the lines of the map he draws, the contours of another world, somehow a more 'essential' world'" (Huggan, 30). Van Herk remarks: "The writer is configured, in Brink's lego-land, as a god-like architect" ("Temptation," 133), and she challenges Brink's assertions,

⁸⁰ Cf. Aritha van Herk, "The Map's Temptation or the Search for a Secret Book," 132-33.

for they insist, as does the strategy and discourse of cartography, on such fixed emblems as meaning and the real, on an essential world ambivalent and surprising but nevertheless declarable mappable. The mappability is a male project and projection which denies the impossible geographies of dream and passion. (van Herk, "Temptation," 133)

MacLaren claims that maps "usually entice us by their oath of verisimilitude" (2) – but ancient maps indeed, "did not set out to record fact at all" (Huggan, 6), which is "less perfidious," van Herk ("Temptation," 133) argues. In the end, we all are enticed to believe in the map's representation, while at the same time knowing that a map "can never represent what it pretends to represent" (van Herk, "Temptation," 133-34). Here is the essential contradiction, van Herk points out: "The paradox is to endorse the map as possible voyage but to stop at its presentational paradigm" ("Temptation," 134).

Aritha van Herk and other feminist writers, like Marian Engel and Audrey Thomas, have taken on the re-mapping venture and thus, as Huggan asserts, can be seen "both as *mapbreakers* engaged in the dismantling of a patriarchal system of representation and as *mapmakers* involved in the plotting of new coordinates for the articulation of (female) knowledge and experience" (13).

With *Judith*, van Herk takes a first careful step towards breaking the male map by laughing at traditions and ignoring allegedly fixed patterns of conventional Western writings. In *The Tent Peg*, the male-devised map is more overtly challenged since maps are proven to be uncertain guides.⁸¹ Mackenzie knows it, Thompson knows it; J.L. knows it. They all hear the "mountain shift" (*TP*, 59). Mackenzie feels the "rise and push of these mountains"; Jerome, at the same time, "stirs and snores softly, deaf to the keening whisper beyond the tent. Poor bastard. He misses all the best parts" (*TP*, 55). For Jerome, the "only way you find anything is with a scint or a spectrometer" (*TP*, 90) – a map is all he needs, since for "him the map represents immutable truth, providing a set of rules and directions" (Jones, "Centrique," 73).

Van Herk's novels "continue to rely on the topos of the map," as Goldman (*Paths*, 134) suggests. But the author does not pursue the "strict codification, definition, enclosure, exclusion," (Huggan, 12) so characteristic of (male) mapping strategies; the mapping is "a procedure not predicated on the impulse toward mastery" (Goldman, *Paths*, 134) – on the contrary, the novels "work to displace

⁸¹ Cf. Dorothy Jones, "'The Centrique Part': Theme and Image in Aritha van Herk's Novel *The Tent Peg*," 72-73.

representations which claim to offer the eternal and universal Truth” (Goldman, *Paths*, 134). After all, van Herk understands that “[e]arth does not rest easy on paper, does not readily flatten its relief toward two dimensions” (“Longitudinal,” 10).

In her fiction, Aritha van Herk is underscoring the importance of breaking the male maps, of earth-quaking Wiebe’s “black steel lines,” and consequently of producing new maps. Yet, she is perfectly aware of the inherent dangers, temptations and pitfalls of this venture and knows: “Dead reckoning has its own mythologies” (“Longitudinal,” 6).

With *Judith* and *The Tent Peg* van Herk starts to map her region and shape her space with her vocabulary, but it is *No Fixed Address*, *Places Far from Ellesmere*, and *Restlessness* that clearly set new parameters – not only in the realm of mapping. In the end, as Goldman states, the project

is not so much to change the map, as it is to change the process of mapping altogether. What results is not ‘a tracing of shape, but a means of tracing,’ a ‘geografictione’ that instigates a shift from capture and cartography to deterritorialization and nomadology. (*Paths*, 168)

7. “ALL STORIES ND” – Disappearing

Disappearance is the true borderless destination,
one without identity or future, without a past and without a traceable genealogy.
(Aritha van Herk, “The Invisible Borders of Disappearance,” 1)

Disappear. Become invisible. Become imperceptible. Be nowhere. Have no one know where you withdraw to and, more importantly, have no one know where you are going to resurface. For van Herk, disappearance is “fraught territory” (Verduyn, 22). It is “erasure,” yes, but it also is the “ultimate magic act” (Verduyn, 22) – when you are the one in power. And van Herk’s women *are* very powerful women, powerful and restless.

With *Judith* and *The Tent Peg*, the author creates women who embark on a journey – a journey to escape the flat West and the male North. They are looking for answers and by doing that they are transcending boundaries. Both women, Judith and J.L., are “struggling to get themselves born,” van Herk analyses her protagonists (Jones, “Interview,” 10). Whereas Arachne and Dorcas are “struggling to get [...] [themselves] dead, [...] not killed but ‘died’” (Jones, “Interview,” 10). They go beyond known boundaries. With *No Fixed Address* and *Restlessness*, van Herk leads her characters into this true borderless destination – disappearance.

Disappearance, the “notion of imperceptibility or invisibility specifically relates to women’s refusal of traditional forms of representation,” as Goldman (*Paths*, 134) states. However, this refusal, she argues, “is problematic for many feminists” (*Paths*, 134). I, on the other hand, aim to show that disappearance is an act of gaining agency. Van Herk herself regards “disappearance as being utterly empowering” (“Personal Interview,” 128). Because, “if you have the magic to be able to disappear you also have the magic to reappear when you damn want to,” she says in an interview (Pianos et al.).

Both Arachne and Dorcas ultimately aim at disappearance but before we lose track of them, they do extensive traveling. However, for the two heroines it is not the destination that matters. On the contrary, for Arachne and Dorcas it is the way, the process that counts, not the getting there, the product. They are in complete contrast to our contemporary society it seems. “Dem Unterwegssein kommt nach moderner Auffassung keine gewinnbringende Realität zu. Gewinnträchtig im Sinne der Buchhaltung des Lebens sind nur *Ankünfte*,” as Marianne Gronemeyer (114) tells us.

What counts is the arrival, “der Weg dahin ist lediglich Mittel zum Zweck, ein störendes Dazwischen“ (Gronemeyer, 114). Aritha van Herk echoes Gronemeyer’s assertion: “We see travel as a destination, a consumable end. As a culture we are [...] wary about the erotics of travel [...]. Travel is erotic because it is [...] a process, an ongoing discovery that unfolds without being predictable” (Tihanyi, 60).

Neither Arachne’s nor Dorcas’s journeys are predictable; the two of them just go. “Arachne travels to travel. Her only paradox is arriving somewhere, her only solution is to leave for somewhere else” (van Herk, *No Fixed Address*, 132-33)⁸² – a *picara* par excellence. “But I’m a *picara* too,” Dorcas claims, “traveling for the sheer hunger of movement, traveling in order to escape my essential laziness”; “able only to pursue [...] [my] own pursuit” (van Herk, *Restlessness*, 92-93).⁸³ Despite their restless travels, the protagonists always return home, home to Calgary, home to the city. It is as Goldman asks: “If feminists are going to claim a territory, why appropriate a site on the margins? Why not reinvent an urban space?” (“North,” 159). Van Herk is doing just that in *No Fixed Address* and *Restlessness*. Unlike Judith and J.L., Arachne and Dorcas appropriate the city. Hence, van Herk underscores Huggan’s assertion, that is

women writers in Canada and Australia, have rallied against the strictures of patriarchal representation [...] through a shift of emphasis in their writing from rural settings in which women have traditionally played a subordinate role, to urban locations, in which the city is envisaged both as a site of radical instability and as an energizing force in the representation of female sexuality. (Huggan, 98)

Arachne and Dorcas – pursuers of disappearance, claimers of urban space, but, above all, they are travelers with mythological roots. Arachne, of course, we know from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* – the skilled weaver who either commits suicide or is transformed into a spider, depending on records. Either way, she is being silenced. Dorcas, or Tabitha, the saintly woman and weaver of garments for the poor gets sick and eventually dies. But Dorcas has been resurrected and thus critics of the Bible regard her story as a story of success, of God’s glory – however, we do not get Dorcas’s opinion on it. Would she not have been glad to finally be delivered from her restless deeds for the poor? Would she not rather get “died” than get “re-born”?

⁸² All further references will be indicated with *NFA* and the page number in parenthesis.

⁸³ All further references will be indicated with *R* and the page number in parenthesis.

In *No Fixed Address* and *Restlessness*, Aritha van Herk continues to weave her web of fact and fiction, history and mystery. While some towns and cities which the heroines pass on their journey can be traced on a map, others remain cryptic and elusive. While places and geographies with their histories are recognizable, they, at the same time, appear transformed and exotic. Also, in both novels we are introduced to characters with unlikely names and, as Susan Scott points out, “with van Herk, you know that any allusions are an essential part of the fabric of her work.” As in *Judith* and *The Tent Peg*, it is not only that the heroines and other characters receive telling names, the stories of those mythological foremothers and forefathers add depth to van Herk’s novels and, thus, again a mixture of various mythologies is created.

Ultimately, van Herk’s women are restless women. This restlessness is also reflected in the novels as a whole. Both, *No Fixed Address* and *Restlessness* are difficult to be placed within a tradition and Sherie Posesorki, for instance, critiques *No Fixed Address* exactly because of this inability to be positioned within a scheme: “The novel frantically runs in several directions. It simultaneously runs toward satire, the picaresque and realism. Like a child in a candy store, van Herk picks up one genre, only to discard it for the possibility of another.” Yes, but rather than this being a flaw, I believe it to be the novel’s inherent quality. Van Herk engages with various traditions, just as careful or cursory so as to manage to evade a clear-cut classification. This also holds true for *Restlessness*. Definitely no travel narrative, it displays many characteristics of the same; definitely no detective story, a la “whodunit,” it does contain several of its techniques.

Both novels are restless with traditions and refuse to be put in a place. The women too refuse to stay put in the place mythology has assigned for them. Arachne and Dorcas are both on an odyssey, a journey, an adventure and, thus, van Herk reverses Kroetsch’s “basic grammatical pair in the story-line” (“Fear,” 76).⁸⁴ Here, the woman is on the horse/car/plane and in motion but unlike men, women have yet to chart their course; go where no woman has gone before. Campbell claims that “we [i.e. men] have not even to risk the adventure alone, for the heroes of all time have gone before us. The labyrinth is thoroughly known. We have only to follow the thread of the hero path” (Power, 151). Conversely, woman “knows that she must forge new

⁸⁴ This has also been commented on by Linda Hutcheon in *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*, 122-23.

pathways, explore untrodden ground, and take what risks she can,” as Noble (195) tells us. And further, “[W]e must break away and break a new trail, and that is very hard work indeed. What ‘rules of the road’ can guide our steps as we travel the byways of the hero-path?” (Noble, 200).

Arachne and Dorcas – seekers, travelers, adventurers – both terrified and impatient of arriving, of arriving at the end, the end of the story and the end of life. Ultimately, we find out that there is no end – neither to the story nor to their lives – not yet. And Tip continues to scheme plots with a grin...

7.1. “Movement without end” – *No Fixed Address*

[T]he spider had already anchored its first thread diagonally across the window. [...] Lanie saw that the spider had been injured; it had only seven legs. But that did not hinder her design or ambition. [...] Spiders are rogues. (Aritha van Herk, *No Fixed Address*, 64-65)

Have you ever watched a spider weave its web? It is fascinating and the end-result is magnificent. Finished with its work, the spider abandons the web, only to wait, patiently; wait for its prey which is sure to entangle itself in the masterpiece. Spiders, arachnids, rogues.

Arachne, in van Herk’s *No Fixed Address*, is such a spider, a black widow, an arachnid, a rogue. After all, she is named after a spider, after a mythological figure but she herself has no knowledge of ancient stories, much less of the mythological weaver. “She’s sure she could not spell [...] [Arachne] correctly herself” (*NFA*, 102). Arachne does not care. She is a traveler, an adventurer, always on the move, terrified of stasis, always going somewhere, terrified of getting there. “Arachne has managed to get rid of what form and structure there was to her work, if not her life. Arachne’s main difficulty lies in keeping herself amused” (*NFA*, 8).

The word spider can be traced back to the old English word “*spinan*” which means “to spin,” as Buffie Johnson (210) explains. “As a goddess of fate, she weaves her home from her own body and spins the thread of life” (Johnson, 210). Barbara Walker tells us that “the Spider was a totemic form of the Fate-spinner, otherwise known as [...] Athene” (957). Athene, or Athena, is closely associated with Arachne, the virgin who has challenged her to a weaving contest. Arachne wins, but has to pay the prize for daring to weave more magnificently than a goddess. This story,

however, has in fact been mistakenly constructed by classical authors because of their misreading of the representation of Athena and her spider-totem.⁸⁵

Besides, there are various other traditions where the spider is central as a symbol. The tendency “of devouring her mate led to identification of the spider with the death goddess” (Walker, 958). “Medieval Europe,” then tended to associate “spiders with witches” (Walker, 958). Similarly, in the Bible the spider bodes ill. Although we are not really presented with a spider, we can trace her by its web, as Bernd Rieken shows.⁸⁶ The web, and by extension the spider, symbolizes “Gottesferne” (Rieken, 130), “Nichtigkeit” and “Schmutz” (Rieken, 132), and, ultimately, the spider signifies evil.

However, there are other cultures, where the spider represents a more benevolent power. “In Aztec myth,” according to Walker for example, “spiders represented the souls of warrior women from the pre-Aztec-matriarchate, like the Amazonian Fate-spinners” (958). Marta Weigle, in her well-documented study *Spiders and Spinsters: Women and Mythology* analyzes representations of spiders throughout cultures and asks: “Who is the spider and who the spinster? Deity/insect? Female/male? Benevolent/malevolent? Exalted/despicable?” and illustrates that the “answers depend upon culture and time” (Weigle, 2). While some cultures depict spiders as “frightful, cunning and dangerous” (Weigle, 3), others portray them as creator figures. Buffie Johnson mentions that for the Hopi, it was “Spider Woman” who created humankind.⁸⁷ But it is Paula Gunn Allen who deals with Spider Woman in Native American mythology extensively. Among Keres and also many other Native peoples, Spider Woman or Grandmother Spider is their creatrix who thinks creation into being: “In the beginning was thought, and her name was Woman. [...] She is the Old Woman Spider who weaves us together in a fabric of interconnection” (Gunn Allen, 11). In Keres mythology as a whole, woman is in the center:

people believe traditionally that nothing can happen that She does not think into being, and because they believe this they say that the Woman is the Supreme Being, the Great Spirit, the Great Mystery, the All-Being. This WomanGod, Thought/Thinking Woman they call Spider Grandmother, acknowledging her potency as creator, as Dream/Vision being, as She Who

⁸⁵ Cf. Barbara Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, 54, 957-58.

⁸⁶ Cf. Bernd Rieken, *Arachne und ihre Schwestern: eine Motivgeschichte der Spinne von den 'Naturvölkermärchen' bis zu den 'Urban Legends'*, 129-39.

⁸⁷ Cf. Buffie Johnson, *Lady of the Beasts: Ancient Images of the Goddess and Her Sacred Animals*, 211-13.

Weaves existence on all material and supermaterial planes into being. (Gunn Allen, 264)

Consequently, Bloomberg argues that “Arachne is a powerful metaphor for the study of women writers who, like Spider Grandmother, think up new worlds in the stories that they spin, and who, like Arachne, dare to challenge the establishment by comparing themselves to it” (3). Granted, it might be dangerous, since it is forbidden realm; and women are supposed to stay inside the lines, but often something is more enticing on the other side. “Like Spider Grandmother Arachne,” many female writers “foray into realms traditionally forbidden to their sex in order to weave new fictional worlds and create new female and feminist mythologies” (Bloomberg, 3). Aritha van Herk is such a Spider Woman – especially in her novel *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey*, where this metaphor works full circle: as Spider Woman, thinking up a novel which includes a Spider Woman.

In *No Fixed Address*, we follow Arachne Manteia, a sales representative for Ladies’ Comfort Limited on her amorous journeys. Spidering over Alberta and British Columbia in her black Mercedes 1959 Type 300, she sells panties for women to small stores, however, refusing to wear any herself.⁸⁸ On the road, she “makes love with anything that moves (so long as there is a man attached to it),” as Moss (*Guide*, 360) so pointedly indicates. But she always comes home; home to Calgary and home to Thomas Telfer, her “Apocryphal lover” (*NFA*, 89), who, of course, as van Herk says, is “too good to be true” (Lacey).⁸⁹ As in *Judith* we are presented with flashbacks that reveal Arachne’s childhood and near past. So far so good. But then, “two-thirds of the way through the novel, reality itself spins topsy-turvy, and the going gets rough, and reading is like careening over mountain roads, around precarious switch-backs, close to the edge, unsure of what lies ahead” (Moss, *Guide*, 359). Arachne kidnaps Josef, a 90-year-old immigrant; she is imprisoned, but Thomas bails her out and then she runs. She heads to Banff, commits check fraud, is forced to buy a coal mine, robs, picks up her doppelgänger with her bear, eats fugu, suffers from memory loss, finds herself on a ferry, deems herself dead, kills a man

⁸⁸ Debra Dudek, in her interesting analysis “‘No Map for Longing’: The Deceptive Fetish in *No Fixed Address*,” argues that even though “[p]referring to construct herself as the sensuous subject, rather than the displaced object, Arachne refuses to fetishize her body. [...] She is complicit in the production of commodity aesthetics because she sells underwear and drives a Mercedes – both being fetish objects – but it is the process, not the product she loves” (31).

⁸⁹ Van Herk has been criticized on the one hand for Jerome in *The Tent Peg* to be “too bad to be believed” and for Thomas in *No Fixed Address* to be “too good to be true.” Her reply to Thomas’s kindness is: “Well, *of course* he’s too good to be true – that’s how I intended him to be.” See Lacy Liam, “Gods of Literature Smile on van Herk.”

who is trying to rape her, and makes love to the ghost of a dead pilot at Long Beach. Ultimately, Arachne drives North, and further North, where the roads have no end.

No Fixed Address is framed by four sections entitled “Notebook on a missing person” and in fact one of these “notebooks” is the opening of the novel: “*You discover in your search...*” Right from the beginning we are “disconcertingly anticipating the disappearance” of the main character, as Darias-Beautell (86) indicates. Someone is missing and “you” are looking for her – you, who else but we, the readers.⁹⁰ As in *The Tent Peg*, where Roy’s four entries can be seen to chart the changes that are happening throughout the novel, in *No Fixed Address*, the four notebooks help us chart Arachne’s journey. Four, as van Herk knows, “is the perfect literary number” (“Longitudinal,” 12); it represents “stability, wholeness” (Robertson, 270).

In addition the novel is told by an omniscient narrator, but then again this narrator is not as all-knowing as it seems, since he/she questions Arachne’s future actions: “But is she careful enough?” (*NFA*, 141). Also, throughout the novel the tenses, past and present, are mingled. Again, the style reflects the main character’s state of mind. Arachne is trying to escape her past experience; yet at the same time her future is so amorphous, she does not know where she is heading to. Time is both a companion and a fiend; she defies it, and the one tracking down Arachne, we, says: “*It’s the present you’re after, maybe even the future [...] and if eternity is comprised of all moments gathered into one, where can you put Arachne now, at what point in that momentum will she stop?*” (*NFA*, 148).

Critics have found their bait with *No Fixed Address*. While some praise it highly, like Linda Hutcheon – “This is one of those rare combinations of vivacity and humour mixing with serious social and cultural analysis,” and “one of the most entertaining – and challenging – novels to appear in Canada for years” (“Review *NFA*,” 109) – other critics leave no room for further discussion of the novel. Margaret Harry claims that “the novel seems elusive, as insubstantial perhaps as its heroine, refusing to be deciphered, to be pinned down. The problem is that this seems to be the result of shallowness rather than of complexity.” Ann Crosby simply reads the novel as “a

⁹⁰ Carrera Suárez suggests that the author herself peeks into her narrative through these italicized sections. See Isabel Carrera Suárez, “*Caprice and No Fixed Address: Playing with Gender and Genre*,” 433.

case study of nihilism and amorality” and wonders: “So what’s her problem?” and “what is she fighting?” (15).

What *is* Arachne fighting or rather what is van Herk fighting? Above all – male representation of women in Canada’s West and North as well as the biased representation of women in classical mythology by men. Again, the key weapon in this fight is parody, irony, and the transcending of realities towards, no, not closure, but disappearance, or a “to-be-continued state” (Alter, 33) that leaves many readers and critics baffled.

7.1.1. Witty Weavers

Arachne is as Arachne does – above all, audacious. What do we remember about her? Arachne who challenges Athena who turns her into an Arachnid. “Arachne’s story needs retelling,” MacLaren (20) indicates, since, as Miller argues, “To remember Arachne as the spider, or through the dangers of her web alone, is to retain the archetype and dismember, once again, with Athena, the subject of its history” (288). Retelling we need and retold it is.

The classical Arachne, the daughter of Idmon of Colophon in Lydia is skilled at weaving,⁹¹ skilled and presumptuous. When nymphs come to look at her work they are delighted and assume that she must have been taught by Athena. Yet, Arachne denies having needed a teacher and is annoyed by their supposition. In disguise, Athena comes to warn Arachne and urges her to remain humble, but Arachne would not hear of it: “Let her compete with me,” we hear her say in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, “there is nothing I would refuse if defeated” (*M*, VI, 25). So Athena and Arachne engage in a weaving competition. While the former weaves tales of war and peace of the great gods, the latter has more daring images in mind.

Athena, although a female goddess, is a “product of male power,” as Lutz (“Meat,” 44) indicates since many stories tell us that she sprang from Zeus’s head.⁹² For Irigaray Athena represents, as Elizabeth Grosz reminds us “the father’s projection and idealisation of woman” (164).

⁹¹ Cf. Robert E. Bell, *Women of Classical Mythology*, 58.

⁹² Cf. Bell, 84.

Adorned, femininity – manifestation of the father’s idea of feminine power. Appropriating the mother’s power, swallowing it up, introjecting it, he engenders, produces this daughter who (only) gives herself for that which she is not: a simulacrum assumed by the God to help him in his work, to establish his empire. (Irigaray, “Veiled,” 91)

Hence, Athena praises the deeds of the gods, twelve all together – “twice six heavenly ones” (*M*, VI, 72) – and herself, and eventually “[v]ictory ended the work” (*M*, VI, 82). Besides, as a sign of warning, Athena adds four stories in the four corners of her tapestry of those humans who dared, as Arachne does, to challenge the gods. In the end, Athena “surrounded the outermost edges with the olive leaves of peace” (*M*, VI, 102). Arachne, on the contrary, “constructs a feminocentric protest” (Miller, 273). Europa, Asterie, Leda – all have been tricked by gods.⁹³ Through cunning and the changing of their shape, these gods advanced and impregnated many women. When Arachne has finished her fabric of betrayal and seduction, she too surrounds the tapestry, but with “flowers interwoven with twining ivy leaves” (*M*, VI, 128).

Arachne’s fabric is immaculate. “Not Pallas, not Spite could cavil at/ that work” (*M*, VI, 129-30). But reminded through Athena’s warning, we disconcertingly expect that this contest between a goddess and a mortal cannot be won (or lost, depending on whose side you are on). Athena is enraged by the illustration of those “heavenly crimes” (*M*, VI, 131), and even though no flaw can be found, she destroys Arachne’s tapestry. Arachne, humiliated by Athena, hangs herself but Athena pities her, saying: “Live then, but hang, presumptuous girl [...]” (*M*, VI, 136), and so she turns Arachne into a spider where she is thenceforward doomed to weave. Still alive, but silenced nonetheless. All that is left is her body.

Nancy K. Miller reads the story of Arachne in quite an insightful way that can be wonderfully adapted to *No Fixed Address* as well, as various critics have pointed out.⁹⁴ What we usually remember about the myth is Arachne’s transformation into a spider. But Miller redirects our focus towards the tapestries, towards the stories woven by Athena and Arachne. One is the dominant discourse, one the counter-discourse. As usual, the counter-discourse, that is Arachne’s tapestry, is being silenced, together with Arachne. “Arachne is punished for her point of view. For this,

⁹³ The gods that Arachne weaves into her tapestry are: Jupiter or Zeus, Neptune, Phoebus or Apollo, Liber or Dionysos – often associated with Bacchus, as well as Saturn.

⁹⁴ Cf. Eva Darias-Beautell, *Graphies and Grafts*, 223-27; Danielle Schaub, “Refusing Man-Made Maps: Aritha van Herk, *No Fixed Address*”; Ian S. MacLaren, “A Charting of the van Herk Papers,” 20-21.

she is restricted to spinning outside representation, to a reproduction that turns back on itself” (Miller, 274).

Van Herk’s Arachne then, is situated outside of society right from the beginning, as MacLaren indicates.⁹⁵ “She knew where she stood. Outside” (*NFA*, 116). But she knows how to deal with it: “There was nothing she could do about her difference, nothing to do but exploit it, call attention to the fact that she was crossing every boundary. It was a way of declaring herself, of drawing a line” (*NFA*, 116). Thena, on the other hand, is angry. She stands in complete opposition to her mythological foremother. While Athena re-inscribes patriarchal rule, Thena downright hates men. “Thena’s anger has to do with men, their control over the world. [...] ‘Men. *Men*. Always get their own way [...]’” (*NFA*, 115).

Hence, van Herk is doing what Miller suggests and that is ““overreading”” (274) and she calls this “arachnology” (270).

By arachnology, then, I mean a critical positioning which reads against the weave of indifferentiation to discover the embodiment in writing of a gendered subjectivity; to recover within representation the emblems of its construction. [...] Arachnologies, thus, involve more broadly the interpretation and reappropriation of a story. (Miller, 272)

In *No Fixed Address*, the story of Arachne and Athena is certainly undone, but van Herk ensures that links can be established. Clearly, the parallels from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* to van Herk’s *No Fixed Address* can be traced most obviously through the names of Arachne and here her friend (A)Thena. But their names are not just a “superficial statement,” or a “piece of clothing,” as van Herk (“Personal Interview,” 120) says, but the whole story resonates with the characters. Therefore, besides the name, another “connection is the reference to spiders, which is overcoded with references to weaving (textiles) and netting (maps),” as Lutz and Hindersmann (17) argue. However, there are also numerous allusions to other mythologies and mythological characters that are woven within the story of Arachne.

In addition to Arachne, there are two other women portrayed as weavers in Greek mythology, namely Penelope and Philomela.⁹⁶ Penelope, the faithful wife of the adventurer Odysseys appears in Homer’s *Odyssey*. In order to keep suitors at bay during her husband’s absence, she pretends to weave a fabric. Once finished, she

⁹⁵ Cf. Ian S. MacLaren, “A Charting of the van Herk Papers,” 21.

⁹⁶ Karin Beeler has remarked on the image of weavers in her introduction to *No Fixed Address*. See Karin Beeler, Introduction, ii.

promises to choose a suitor. However, Penelope would never be finished, since every night she would unravel part of the fabric.

Another weaving woman appears in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Book VI) in the figure of Philomela. She has been raped by Tereus and threatens him: "I myself shall cast aside/ my shame and tell of your deeds: [...]/ The ether will hear this and whatever god is in it" (*M*, VI, 544-48). Hence, afraid of Philomela's threat, Tereus cuts off her tongue. Philomela can no longer speak; instead, she weaves a tapestry that tells of Tereus's rape, and has it sent to her sister Procne, who is at the same time Tereus's wife.

The story of Philomela is indirectly linked with *No Fixed Address* through the character of Madame Defarge as well. When Arachne and Thena meet a poet, he refers to her⁹⁷ – the villain out of Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*. While Philomela weaves of things past, Madame Defarge encodes in her knitting the names of those who will be killed. In this respect she can be regarded as a Fate Weaver.

"Weaving is an important expression of the Great Goddess's creative power, and the spider is one of her traditional symbols," Dorothy Jones ("Spider," 51) tells us. "[W]eaving has its positive as well as its negative significance," Erich Neumann (228) explains, "and all the Great Mothers – Neith, Netet, and Isis; Eileithyia or Athene [...] – are spinners of destiny" (228). The Great Mother "weaves the web of life and spins the threads of fate" (Neumann, 227). The classical Arachne is thus linked to the Great Mother or the Great Goddess through her weaving skill, but so is van Herk's Arachne, namely through her occupation – selling underwear⁹⁸ – as well as through her body, since after all this is what Arachne/Spider has left. Arachne compares herself to "stray women, who have no abilities except their bodies" (*NFA*, 92). Neumann says: "[F]or the woman must not only provide the clothing of man in the literal sense but also clothes him with the body she spins and weaves" (230).

A weaver of destiny, Arachne definitely is which is also illustrated by a fairly cryptic utterance towards the end of the novel. After Arachne has cashed her check with the help of Dougall McKay – money she has basically stolen, he forces her to buy a coal-mine with half of the money. In the end he says, "'Thanks, sweetie. Stay away from *moonshine* and don't sleep in any strange beds'" (*NFA*, 219, my emphasis). That

⁹⁷ Cf. *No Fixed Address*, 165.

⁹⁸ Cf. Dorothy Jones, "The Spider and the Rose: Aritha Van Herk's *No Fixed Address*," 51.

same night, Arachne waits on McKay outside of a bar in a dark alley. “In the alley there is a *moon*” (*NFA*, 220, my emphasis). McKay is drunk by the time he stumbles out of the back door; Arachne hits him with a wrench, takes back her money and partly echoes McKay: “Thanks, sweetie. Stay out of dark alleys” (*NFA*, 221). Now, Erich Neumann explains that “the Great Mother, adorned with the *moon* and the starry cloak of *night*, is the goddess of destiny, weaving life as she weaves fate” (226, my emphasis). And so does Arachne.

One of the Great Mothers – Net or Neith – is closely associated with weaving also. She is an Egyptian goddess and believed to hold the keys to the entire universe.⁹⁹ Or, as Walker says, “She called herself ‘all that has been, that is, and that will be’” (721). In *No Fixed Address* we too get references to Egyptian mythology in connection with Arachne and Greek mythology. Hence, van Herk seems to establish a link here, as Jones also notes.¹⁰⁰ “Her profile [...] is Egyptian” (*NFA*, 107). “Thena can only imagine the chisels that worked Arachne before she came to Calgary” (*NFA*, 114), and in Banff, one of the women says that she is “going to take up sculpture and chisel a statue of Isis” (*NFA*, 203).¹⁰¹ Now, Walker explains that Isis and Neith – “Asenath” (721) – are associated with each other in the Bible.

However, it is not only weaving that establishes connections across mythologies. Homer’s Penelope evokes an additional link to Greek mythology, but rather than weaving, she bridges the gap by her faithfulness to unfaithful Odysseys. Yet van Herk reverses the roles again. Since Arachne is the adulterous adventurer, Thomas/Odysseys is the one who stays at home and, like Penelope, remains faithful to her, as McGoogan and other critics have observed.¹⁰²

He is the one who hangs clean shirts in her closet, he is the one who does the marketing, who stands with a fork lifted beside the stove [...] he brings her beer in frost-cold glasses, he follows the roar of the vacuum, while Arachne tracks in air and dust, litters the living room with her samples, her order forms, her road life. (*NFA*, 47)

But at the same time, Thomas is “no fool. He isn’t deceived. He knows about the road jockeys, Arachne’s indiscretions. He is not stupid but patient” (*NFA*, 140).

⁹⁹ Cf. Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother*, 220-21.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Dorothy Jones, “The Spider and the Rose: Aritha Van Herk’s *No Fixed Address*,” 51.

¹⁰¹ Just before she says: “I’m painting Nellie McClung on a granite rock face” (*NFA*, 203). Here, van Herk is again establishing a link to history, since Nellie McClung was, like Emily Murphy, one of the Famous Five.

¹⁰² Also see Ian S. MacLaren, “A Charting of the van Herk Papers,” 18; Eva Darias-Beautell, *Graphies and Grafts*, 230-31.

Yet, while Arachne seems to resemble Odysseys and Thomas Penelope, a simple role-reversal does no more than re-inscribe hegemonic discourse, as Peters argues in a different context: a “reversal – as is true of all reversals – only succeeds in reflecting and strengthening the original myths, and continuing the dichotomy of male/female, subject/object relationships” (93). Therefore, Arachne, a female and more aligned with the symbol of the spider and hence with weaving, may rather be read as a “new” Penelope. Tired of her classical portrayal, like Atwood’s Penelope: “That seems to be what I was known for: being smart. That, and my weaving, and my devotion to my husband and my discretion” (Atwood, *Penelopiad*, 21) – Arachne/Penelope breaks out. Done with waiting, done with being passive, done with being faithful, she escapes through her escapades. “Word has it that Penelope the Prissy – was – when it came to sex – no shrinking sissy” (Atwood, *Penelopiad*, 147). In this respect van Herk’s Arachne and Atwood’s Penelope are quite similar. Both break away from their traditional roles. Penelope refuses to wait any longer; Arachne refuses to sit at her wheel and spin – instead she runs, weaves her web across the landscape. “She sometimes woke to look up at the faint gray cobwebs swaying in the ceiling’s corners and imagined what it would be like if she could have everything she wanted. But she knew, that only way to get anything was to go after it herself” (*NFA*, 142).¹⁰³

7.1.2. Arachne’s Odyssey

Arachne’s odyssey begins even before she is born. It is the intangible character Gabriel, reminiscent of the biblical Gabriel, and definitely an allusion to the same, who comes to see Lanie, Arachne’s mother, and in fact names the yet unborn.¹⁰⁴ He “resembles archangel Gabriel in the Bible,” as Beeler reminds us, “who appears before Mary to announce that she is carrying the son of God” (Introduction, ii).

But Lanie is no Mary. She “did not neglect Arachne, she just ignored her” (*NFA*, 66) when she is born, just as “she [had] ignored the child inside her” (*NFA*, 63). It is also Lanie who sees the seven-legged-spider. Weigle informs us of a belief that “six- or

¹⁰³ This might be an allusion to Mateo Alemán’s *Guzmán de Alfarache*, who also, as van Herk reminds us, sees cobwebs on the ceiling thinking “‘if the ceiling were made of more than cobwebs would my life have been different?’” (Kirkwood, 85).

¹⁰⁴ This is a reversal of the classical Arachne myth. Here the spider gives Arachne her name, not vice versa.

eight-legged spiders foretold good news and good luck, [but] those with five or seven legs bad news and bad luck” (21). Now, Lanie “refused to let a baby interfere” (*NFA*, 66) with her life and Arachne knows that “Lanie didn’t want her, she’s always known that” (*NFA*, 44). It is Gabriel who plays with Arachne. Gabriel, which also means “divine husband” (Walker, 332), frequently visits Arachne and “[h]e was the one Arachne smiled for” (*NFA*, 67).¹⁰⁵ It is also from him Arachne gets the Mercedes, the one instrument she needs to be able to move. Gabriel enables her to pursue her quest: “She counts on the car; it is a blessing from the past, one talisman against her uncertain future” (*NFA*, 58). Still, Gabriel “never really enters the novel; he’s all in the past,” as van Herk (Kirkwood, 86) makes us aware.

Another man in Arachne’s past, although near past, is Basilisk, a further significant person in her adventurous travels. Arachne meets the piano player while being a bus driver in Vancouver. “She looks at him. That is her mistake, she looks at him” (*NFA*, 50). The mythological Basilisk is the “king of the serpents” (Bulfinch), whose glance means death. In Greek “basileus” means “König” (Frisk, 222) – “king”; “basiliskos,” then, a diminutive form was used as name for snakes or fish, according to Frisk.¹⁰⁶ When the Basilisk was dead, “its carcass was suspended [...] as a sovereign remedy against spiders” (Bulfinch). Indeed, Basilisk “seems only interested in looking at Arachne” (*NFA*, 52). While “he just looks, as if he gets more pleasure looking at her body,” Arachne “needs to touch” (*NFA*, 52). At Basilisk’s last concert, Arachne feels his gaze, but defies. She is furious at his glance that feels like an “invasion” (*NFA*, 56). “It is unbearable, so thin, so brilliantly cruel, he is skinning her with the razor blades of his damnable breeding, his culture, his learnedness” (*NFA*; 56). After Basilisk has left town, Arachne knows that “she has stepped perilously close to another knowledge. And that it is dangerous” (*NFA*, 57). Arachne does not succumb to Basilisk’s lethal glance. She looks at his hands instead, uses her body since this is all Spider Woman has left.

And curiously, sitting, he opens his palms, lays his hands open and upward on his knees as though to reassure her that he knows nothing of fits, as though asking for a chance. She finds herself staring down at his open, peach-colored palms, one hand as big as both of hers, the map of lines innocent and unrelenting. (*NFA*, 50)

¹⁰⁵ Arachne also suspects that Gabriel is her real father, and when she is nineteen she utters her suspicion out loud whereupon Toto, Lanie’s husband, beaks her arm – an incident after which Arachne leaves home. See *No Fixed Address*, 127-29.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Hjalmar Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 222-23.

As Dudek argues, “The map his hands provide offers a possibility of escape through his body” (35).¹⁰⁷ But Arachne is to follow the maps of another man.

While Basilisk only comes to leave again, Thomas enters Arachne’s life to stay. Again, Arachne meets Thomas on the bus but wonders what it is that makes him so desirable. In the end, it is the maps he collects and draws. “They could lead you into the past so easily, lead you through history to another frame of time. With these maps around, she would be able to transcend her own past, its rude, uneven measure, its gaps and horrors” (*NFA*, 94).

However, while Thomas seems to be Arachne’s guide, providing her with maps, her confidante is Thena: “For what is a traveler without a confidante? It is impossible to fictionalize a life without someone to oversee the journey” (*NFA*, 125). They meet in a garage, of all places, and emerge as friends, contrary to their mythological forebears where they were foes. While Athena represents the patriarchal order in her tapestry, Thena is highly critical of the same, as has been discussed. However, both, as Lutz and Hindersmann indicate, “argue about the same issue which caused Athena to punish the Lydian weaver: lust” (17). Thena warns Arachne about losing Thomas, but all Arachne can say is that “he’s not mine to lose” (*NFA*, 141). “Thena’s reaction is Arachne’s measurement of success” (*NFA*, 7), we are told in the beginning. They are friends. They could talk: “*We lied to the rest of the world but together we were brutally honest,*” Thena (*NFA*, 195) tells us. Thena seems to be the one who is the balancing character against the male ones¹⁰⁸ – Gabriel, Basilisk, Thomas, and not to forget Josef. While these men are very influential, it is Thena whom Arachne trusts.

Thena knows about Arachne’s road jockeys, but when she hears about Josef, she is furious: “Aren’t your road jockeys enough, you’ve got to start picking up old strays?” (*NFA*, 124). But Josef has touched Arachne, “has hooked her sympathy,”

¹⁰⁷ The metaphor of hands appears again and again throughout van Herk’s fiction. In *The Tent Peg*, we have seen a symbolic laying of the hands. In *No Fixed Address* not only Basilisk shows his hands, also Gabriel and Josef do so – hands, palms up, a gesture of non-violence, of vulnerability. Gabriel for instance: “And he held out his two hands in a gesture not of welcome but of knowledge, held both hands parallel and open, without smiling, without asking” (*NFA*, 61). Josef: “Patience is carved in his immobility; he has been there a long time. His clothes seem sifted with dust but his white hair and beard blare light. Arachne goes up the walk and stands in front of him. He looks at her and opens his hands, palm up, in a gesture of submission” (*NFA*, 121). In *Restlessness*, also, the metaphor of the hand is employed: “He does it again, that gesture of turning his palms out, as if to show me that they contain no sinister secret” (*R*, 86). Besides, an early story by van Herk is called “Late Hands” where she makes use of this metaphor as well.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Hilda Kirkwood, “Kiss of the Spider-Lady: An Interview with Aritha van Herk,” 86.

and this sympathy “is more like recognition, an indication of what she might become, a reminder of the ragged child that Raki was” (*NFA*, 160).

When Arachne meets Josef, an almost ninety-year-old immigrant, the journey is on its way. According to Jung, the wise old man appears “immer dann, wenn der Held sich in einer aussichtslosen und verzweifelten Situation befindet” (Jung, 233). But Josef seems an unlikely wise-old-man-figure. Still, through Josef, Arachne becomes whole. “Disorder and dissent make order whole, give it reason” (*NFA*, 152). First, Josef and Arachne are like “broken halves of rebel and assassin whole” then “the two of them one piece of the universe observing itself” (*NFA*, 152).¹⁰⁹ It is also with Josef that we as a reader first find ourselves in a somewhat dubitable world – a graveyard, and a grave with a skull sticking out.

Campbell explains that a “*hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder*” (*Thousand*, 34). With Josef – who at one point “seems giant” (*NFA*, 20) with his “hair, a spun floss of white, thick and wild, with a beard like it” (*NFA*, 10) – Arachne seems to enter such a world. This supernatural world or a world beyond realism is especially apparent in the last third of the novel. After Arachne had “kidnapped” Josef, and after her arrest and ultimate discharge, the journey commences. Her “quest for normalcy, which Thomas represents, is abandoned” as McGoogan notes, “and with it goes all coherent meaning” (34).

Arachne runs. She runs and drives. First she meets a halved woman with different eye colors;¹¹⁰ then she meets her doppelgänger who seems to hold up a mirror toward her own life. But Arachne is preoccupied with herself and “flees” (*NFA*, 228); yet, she remembers her doppelgänger’s bear, a “very inter-textual bear,” as Scobie (40) wittingly remarks, obviously referring to Marian Engel’s *Bear*. The bear is in itself a very powerful symbol of woman’s strength as has been remarked in the discussion of *The Tent Peg* already. Besides, the bear is in fact Iris’s bear. Iris is the “Greek Goddess of the rainbow,” according to Walker and in various mythologies, “she personified the bridge between earth and heaven, The Rainbow Bridge” (450).

And it is no coincidence that only one chapter ahead – after a flashback to fifteen-year-old Arachne and the understanding that “[n]ow there is nowhere to go but on

¹⁰⁹ Becker argues that Josef and Arachne are the “only matching couple in the text” (221) – they are infatuated with motion and share their outsider-status. See Susanne Becker, *Gothic Forms of Feminine Fictions*, 221.

¹¹⁰ This sounds like the author herself peeking into her own narrative. Cf. Petra Wittke, “No Lies this Time: An Interview with Aritha van Herk,” 145-46.

[...]. There is nowhere to hide, no refuge” (*NFA*, 231) – she eats fugu and fugu, Arachne knows “can kill you” (*NFA*, 235). In the chapter entitled “Ferryman,” Arachne finds herself on a ferry crossing the Strait of Georgia. Right then we are reminded of the river Styx that has to be crossed before going to the Underworld and the mythological Charon, the ferryman, who is the one to take the dead over. Arachne thinks she has died after having eaten fugu and she has no memory of how or when she got on the ferry. Besides, a member of staff of the ferry urges the “OWNER OF VEHICLE LICENSE NUMBER DOA 000” (*NFA*, 236) to remove his or her car. Now DOA stands for “Dead on Arrival” in the medical realm but it can also refer to a 1950’s movie with the title “D.O.A.” about a man who is trying to find out who has poisoned him. Arachne thinks she has been poisoned by having eaten fugu; fugu reminiscent of a spider. The chef returns,

holding in his palms a serving plate the blue of eternity, of innocence, of glacial promise [...]. Against the peacock plate, the white transparent flesh is overlain into a spider sitting in the middle of its web. [...] It hangs, trembling in its new-spun web, above the celestial blue. (*NFA*, 233)

Darias-Beautell draws our attention to the etymological roots of the word fugu.¹¹¹

The Latin verb “fugere” means both “fliehen” and in the more metaphorical sense “(ent)schwinden, vergehen” (Stowasser, 219). Lutz and Hindersmann, then, establish a connection to the medical term “fugue” which is defined as follows:

a major dissociative activity characterized by loss of memory and by flight from one’s usual environment. The fugue [...] may represent a drastic and involuntary neurotic escape from intolerable conflict. The victim may wander about, perhaps in a strange city or in other unfamiliar surroundings, sometimes in an aimless or confused fashion for days, weeks or longer. (New Encyclopaedia Britannica, quoted in Lutz and Hindersmann, 20)

Arachne shows just these symptoms and the question “Has she gone mental?” might suggest itself – it might, if it was not a book by van Herk. Arachne is not Gilman’s Nameless who goes crazy, and hence the novel does not present itself “in the tradition of books about women and madness” (Lutz and Hindersmann, 20). Arachne stands up and fights and kills¹¹² and runs and flees and eventually disappears.

¹¹¹ Cf. Eva Darias-Beautell, *Graphies and Grafts*, 97.

¹¹² The stabbing-scene on the ferry obviously establishes the connection to the Black Widow, a “spider with the lethal poisonous bit that eats its male mate after intercourse,” as Lutz and Hindersmann (16) tell us. It too links to Arachne’s teenage gang with the name “Black Widows.” See *No Fixed Address*, 155-57.

7.1.3. Raki, the Rouge

“No art, no novel, no catalogue of infamy has considered the effect of underwear on the lives of petty rogues” (NFA, 3). Rogues and rascals. In *No Fixed Address*, we follow Arachne Manteia, the traveling saleslady. With this name, “parodic possibilities” are to be expected, as Linda Hutcheon (*Canadian*, 123) tells us. While the name Arachne with all its associations has been discussed, allow me to briefly focus on her surname.

Manteia can be traced back to the Greek word, “mantis” which means “Seher, Warhsager, Weissager, Prophet” (Frisk, 172) and thus aligns Arachne again with Spider Woman and The Great Mother. In addition, “mantis” can also mean “Heuschrecke” (Frisk, 172) – also suggested by Linda Hutcheon who underscores her suggestion of Arachne Manteia as “predatory female mantis” (*Canadian*, 123) with her “road jockeys” (NFA, 24). These road jockeys that Arachne meets are like “flies,” as Hilda Kirkwood (86) suggests: “*She uses them, devours them and leaves them*” (Kirkwood, 86) – just like a spider does in its web, just like Arachne, the mantis does with the men, the flies. Coral Ann Howells, however, has yet another suggestion for the word “mantis” and goes back to the word’s Latin root “manticulator” which means “Taschendieb” (Stowasser, 308) – pickpocket – which is perfectly fitting as well.¹¹³

Now, rogues, pickpockets, and sexual affairs along the road, episodic structure, as well as the working title “Who Travels Too,” clearly remind us of a genre that has emerged in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain – The Picaresque – and hopefully the reader will allow a brief, introductory digression. Social instability and the rise of the middle class provided the background for an emergence of an “impoverished rogue,” a picaro, whose “social advancement was always dependent on the success, social status and above all the upward mobility” (Blaber and Gilman, 16). Throughout the centuries and territorial changes, the picaresque traditions have altered and by now, as Blaber and Gilman argue, there is a “wide variation in the definition of the picaresque” (22); or in Alter’s words: “the novel has pursued a career of growing complexity and diversity which at times has bewildered readers and critics as well” (106).

¹¹³ Coral Ann Howells suggests this meaning of the name “Manteia” at a conference at Kiel, 1989. See Felicitas Funke, “Stepping over Boundaries: Untersuchungen zum Phänomen der Grenzen überschreitenden Frau im Romanwerk der kanadischen Autorin Aritha van Herk.“

The most simplistic definition, however, is put forward by Alter, i.e. “any episodic novel-on-the-road” (viii).¹¹⁴ Blaber and Gilman argue for basically three common aspects of a picaresque novel: it is “anti-romance, gives emphasis to the material, and is morally ambiguous” (21). The picaro, then, “appears as a fixed personality who never substantially alters during the course of his varied experiences. He learns, but he does not change”; he is an “anti-heroic hero” (Alter, 30-31). Ulrich Wicks describes the picaro 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” (54).

In the long tradition of the picaresque there were, in fact, women to be found, as Aritha van Herk tells us, but they seemed incomplete:

I hunted for a female picaro, a picara. Tom Jones, Don Quixote, Augie March, Felix Krull, the Ginger Man, and Oskar in *The Tin Drum*. Moll Flanders¹¹⁵ and Fanny Hill dissatisfied me; they were incomplete and repentant, as well as being at the mercy of their very femaleness. I dug deeper and found Mother Courage and Justine. (“Picaros,” 286)

These only made van Herk long for a more unrepentant picara, one that is never sorry, one that does not apologize. As Hutcheon puts it, “It took a feminist and postmodern world to allow” for a picara, “and Arachne Manteia is one possible articulation of it” (*Canadian*, 125).¹¹⁶ In many respects Arachne is a picara, a rogue, a delinquent, an “unheroic protagonist”; she is “like Sisyphus, “continually forced to begin the world anew” – with “no real originary moment, no real telos” (Blaber and Gilman, 23).¹¹⁷

Arachne is described like a quintessential picaro, only that she is a picara. She comes from a working-class background, is “amoral, selfish, dishonest” and feels herself an “impostor” in the “respectable world” (*NFA*, 81). “She is infatuated not with

¹¹⁴ Aritha van Herk echoes Alter’s definition in “Picaros and Priestesses: Repentent Rogues and *No Fixed Address*,” 284.

¹¹⁵ Alter discusses Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* in his *Rogue’s Progress*. At first, he calls her a “quasi-picaresque heroine” (42) and finally comes to the conclusion that “Moll is no picaroon because she is a rogue who does not rejoice in her rogueries” (46). In the end, Alter argues that it would be “more misleading than instructive to call *Moll Flanders* a picaresque novel. It has one general, coincidental similarity with the picaresque narratives – it is the episodic fictional autobiography of a ‘roguish’ figure – but it derives from the English criminal biography” (57). See Robert Alter, *Rogues Progress*.

¹¹⁶ For a brilliant and detailed discussion of *No Fixed Address* with connection to the picaresque and the postmodern, see Linda Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*, 122-32. Also see Stephen Scobie, in his article “Arachne’s Progress,” where he argues that “it is only as a picaresque novel that *No Fixed Address* makes sense” (37).

¹¹⁷ Also refer to Ulrich Wicks, *Picaresque Narrative, Picaresque Fictions: A Theory and Research Guide*, 55-56.

machines but with motion, the illusion that she is going somewhere, getting away” (*NFA*, 52). Even though she has friends like Thena, Arachne is venturing and journeying alone, in solitude, and she knows. She “knows she is working-class. She has never thought of her narrow life as disabled. She is concerned with survival, self-protection” (*NFA*, 59), and she has a history of petty crimes.

“The picaroon, before all else, is an outsider. Granted, he is an outsider who can make and keep friends [...] but the way he chooses is nevertheless a devious and personal way, not the straight, clearly marked, foot-worn-path of society at large” (Alter, 71). Arachne perfectly fits Alter’s description – she “has always hammered against the impossible: fate, birth, life” (*NFA*, 115); she knows “you can pierce yourself on the impossible” while at the same time being aware that “the impossible remains impossible” (*NFA*, 59). “It is part of the picaresque convention that experience should never substantially alter the given character of the hero” (Alter, 69).

Another circumstance undoubtedly puts Arachne in the picaresque tradition – Thomas. “Lanie and Toto credit Thomas with saving her. And maybe he has” (*NFA*, 33). “She loves him” (*NFA*, 90), her “road jockeys” notwithstanding, since after all “[t]hey’re just bodies, you could put a paper bag over their heads” (*NFA*, 24). While Thomas knows about her infidelities, he will stay but it is Arachne who “does not dare believe that this will last” (*NFA*, 145). “She is going to leave him” (*NFA*, 108). Alter argues that love in a picaresque novel is out of place:

Romance, to begin with, is not a picaresque forte. The movement of the picaroon is always toward a variety and abundance of experience, and he is not very adaptable to the single focus of an all-consuming passion. On the technical level, the picaroon does not ordinarily possess enough inner life to enable the author to involve him convincingly in a great love. (Alter, 76)

Aritha van Herk, she may forgive me my sleuthing, also knows “This story isn’t supposed to have a lover,” as she writes in her notes for *No Fixed Address*.¹¹⁸

Furthermore, the picaresque tradition is linked back to mythology since there is an inherent connection between “Greek mythological characters and [...] picaresque characters,” as van Herk (Kirkwood, 85) explains. Jones argues that it is Proteus, the sea god who is associated with the rogue.¹¹⁹ MacLaren on the other hand proposes Prometheus as the mythological “presumptuous and defiant male rogue” (20).

¹¹⁸ Cf. “Notes on *No Fixed Address*.” Special Collections, ACC 441/89.3. Box 10.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Dorothy Jones, “The Spider and the Rose: Aritha Van Herk’s *No Fixed Address*,” 50.

Another link is established through Thomas's description of Arachne: "Thomas thinks of her in scientific terms; like *mercury*, you are never prepared for the weight" (*NFA*, 90, my emphasis). Mercury or Hermes, as Jones points out, is the messenger of the gods.¹²⁰ Also, he is associated with commerce and trade. Etymology then, helps us deepen the claim. The Latin word "merx" means "Ware" but also "weibliche Schmucksachen" (Stowasser, 315) – and Arachne is very much in the realm of commerce.

But despite all its parallels is *No Fixed Address* really quintessentially picaresque? No.¹²¹ It is like the morning sound of the cock-a-doodle-doo to wake us, to make us aware that definitions exist to be altered, negotiated, used and abused, engaged and discarded, played with and parodied.

McGoogan argues in a reproachful voice: "It's as if van Herk started to write a picaresque novel that would stand the traditional male rogue on his head – and then growing bored with the idea, got swept up in the rhetoric of post-modernism" (34). Yes, only that van Herk plays with genres deliberately and, thus, opens up new possibilities. *No Fixed Address* is picaresque and at the same time it is not; it is realist in so far that the novel claims to represent a real character and a real story and real places and at the same it is supernatural; it also draws on the gothic tradition, as Susanne Becker illustrates;¹²² but above all it is postmodern, as Linda Hutcheon shows.

For Hutcheon, "postmodernism is fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political" (*Poetics*, 4). In her study *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, she especially focuses on what she has coined "historiographic metafiction" (Hutcheon, *Poetics*, 5) and, thus, the importance of history in postmodernist fiction, how it is incorporated, yet at the same critically reflected and ironically contested. Aritha van Herk, as has been pointed out repeatedly, integrates historical figures and facts only to adapt them and *No Fixed Address* is no exception. In that sense, the author belongs in the league of postmodernist writers, who, according to Hutcheon, "parodically rewrite the historical events and works of art of the past, thereby questioning the stability of the meaning of both" (*Poetics*, 220). By employing irony and parody, the

¹²⁰ Cf. Jones, 50.

¹²¹ Arachne's murder in the end goes beyond petty crimes conventional picaresque characters commit. Besides, the picaresque novel is traditionally narrated from the picaro or picara him-or herself. See Ulrich Wicks, *Picaresque Narrative, Picaresque Fictions: A Theory and Research Guide*, 56-57.

¹²² Cf. Susanne Becker, *Gothic Forms of Feminine Fictions*, 199-250.

postmodernist author “acknowledges that history is not the transparent record of any sure ‘truth’” (Hutcheon, *Poetics*, 129). This irony can especially be seen in *No Fixed Address* of which van Herk herself says that it “is the funniest book [...] [she has] ever written” (Jones, “Interview,” 10). Irony and humor are important and, as van Herk elsewhere argues, “humour can cut through a lot of concrete” (Beeler, “Shifting,” 83).

Next to this “‘presence of the past’” (Hutcheon, *Poetics*, 4) and the ironic and humoristic rendering, other postmodern elements can be found in *No Fixed Address* as well: fragmentation of both the protagonist and the narrative structure; intertextuality; the active role of the reader, who is trying to track down the heroine, the subversion of the master-narrative – mythology – from within; disunity and an end that is no end.

Ultimately, however, the novel *No Fixed Address* defies categorization, just as the heroine Arachne defies capture. Towards the end, Arachne, as McGoogan argues, “loses reader sympathy” (34). “But by then,” he continues, “we’re not sure what is real and what is not, so it hardly matters. Arachne is no longer a reverse role-model, but has become merely words on a page” (McGoogan, 34). As Goldman claims: “Despite his frustration, McGoogan has hit on a key point. [...] Arachne does not remain a reverse role-model. Instead, she moves beyond the frame of binary thinking, leaves the grid behind her altogether” (*Paths*, 157). Arachne is “a character,” as van Herk analyzes her, “who takes sex, death, and travel into her own hands, who becomes her own magician, the instrument of not death, not repentance, but disappearance” (“Picaros,” 289).

7.1.4. Landscape of Confusion

From Calgary roads spider over the prairie. Arachne pores over Thomas’ maps, the lines enticing her to quest beyond the city’s radius. She gets into the car and sets the bonnet toward the sun. She is learning travel, the pace and progression of journey, the multifarious seduction of movement. She returns to Thomas vibrating at a pitch that he can take into his hands and drink. He is the author of those maps but he has never known their ultimate affirmation, the consummation of the pact between traveler and traveled. He only draws them; she traces them for him, leaving the pen-line of her passing.
(Aritha van Herk, *No Fixed Address*, 132)

Canada and its infatuation with maps and space cannot be disregarded; neither can van Herk's fascination with the same. In *No Fixed Address*, she provides us with yet another edge towards her employment of maps, landscape, and geography.

Coral Ann Howells refers to *No Fixed Address* as a "wonderful novel full of driving and drives and detours and quests" (113). It also is a novel about maps and our position on those, *if* indeed we can position ourselves.

Field, Lake Louise, Banff, Canmore. As the mountains drop behind them and they level down, the sky fills with prairie, the immutable shape of the plain spread out like an embodied mirage. There is nothing Arachne can say, she is caught between her surprise and a sudden wrench to be part of this *undulating* plate of land. (*NFA*, 80, my emphasis)

The realist reader will be able to trace the web of Arachne's journey through "179 places" (MacLaren, 19) of Alberta and British Columbia and eventually up North. But the realist reader will also be baffled, since some towns can no longer be found on the map. I say no longer, because once these now disappeared towns did exist.¹²³ "[T]he roads have potholes, signs are changed, her maps are out of date, towns she remembers from three months ago have vanished, new ones have sprung up in unexpected places, large and ugly" (*NFA*, 23). Maps change, as well as the landscape. Kroetsch knows that "geography is not fixed, it's changing – every journey across it or through it is another reading in a way" (*Labyrinths*, 8). J.L. has experienced that first hand and Arachne has too. "Redland, the sign says. It isn't on the map, it isn't on any map [...]. She's been through here six or seven times and never heard of it, never seen it" (*NFA*, 25). When Arachne tries to find Redland again, she cannot; it is gone.

But which map is Arachne following through this undulating landscape? Thomas's? Thomas Telfer, fashioned after Thomas Telford, the "famous Scottish civil engineer and road builder," as Hutcheon (*Canadian*, 123) suggests, is the creator of those maps. Arachne follows his lines but at the same time, as Howells points out, "she spends the time on her journeys hollowing out other forbidden spaces on the borderlines" (114).

Through the maps, Arachne and Thomas find each other. He can be said to be her guide. He renders landscape in maps; he delineates the three-dimensional world on two-dimensional paper. To Arachne his maps are "treasures": "she has never

¹²³ Cf. Petra Wittke, "No Lies this Time: An Interview with Aritha van Herk," 140-41.

imagined such things exist, simple lines drawing lives, roads, places” (*NFA*, 94). Thomas, conversely, “never imagined a woman would be interested, would touch these maps with reverence and desire, caressing the paper between thumb and forefinger” (*NFA*, 94). There is a world out there, and Arachne is out to experience it, to travel it. “If only she could take Thomas with her, but he is drawn by his maps, outlined by the lines that shape landscape. Arachne wants to sink into it” (*NFA*, 215). Here, van Herk is repeating her assertion she has made in the essay “Women Writers and the Prairie: Spies in an Indifferent Landscape,” where she argues: “They [men] 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 prairie, one has to stop looking at prairie and dive” (“Spies,” 141). Arachne does dive into the landscape, especially when she travels with Josef. “They sink farther and farther into prairie that mirrors the landscape of their confusion” (*NFA*, 187). Until they find “Wild Woman.” Again, the landscape is aligned with femaleness:

On the ridge the fierce wind thrusts at them. Arachne looks at the sky, at the circle of world below them, and begins to dance. Old Dunc was right; up here she can see everything, everything. It is a long way east she has circled and circled, finally come to this nipple of land on the breast of the world, immensely high and windswept. (*NFA*, 189)

Even right at the beginning, we are made aware that landscape in *No Fixed Address* is aligned with the body. Josef’s gaze is described as “following the body of the landscape” (*NFA*, 12). When landscape is the body, it stands to reason that traveling refers to working over this body, as Kroetsch argues: “Travel is possibly the true intercourse in these prairie novels: a frenetic going back and forth, up and down, in and out” (“Fear,” 81). While the metaphor cannot be dismissed easily, Arachne, as Hutcheon argues, “manages to use travel not to evade, but to provoke the sexual” (*Canadian*, 123).

Still Arachne drives. Where – she does not care to know. “How can she explain her inordinate lust to drive, to cover road miles, to use up gas? There is no map for longing” (*NFA*, 138). At first she ventures in a circular motion, like a spider, always coming back to her starting point which is Thomas and Calgary alike. She circles, and thus we are reminded of Josef’s copper disc portraying dancers in motion, “[r]elentless and comically sad” (*NFA*, 82). Arachne’s response, when she sees the present, is laughter, the “figures, primitive, imprisoned in motion, insist on laughter”

(*NFA*, 82). For Becker, the copper disc symbolizes both Josef's and Arachne's infatuation with motion, their "desire for movement," their "fear [of] stasis and death" (221). Darias-Beautell, then, regards Josef's gift initially as embodiment of a "restriction of movement" (93). Arachne's motion, like the figures', is circular but eventually, "the text does break that circular tendency and moves beyond, transcending the very notion of structure itself" (Darias-Beautell, 93).¹²⁴ Arachne herself explains the dancers' significance in accordance to Becker's reading. Even though the figures are not very detailed, they still seem alive and Arachne "moves back to eye it from a distance. Their dance merges and continues, without hesitation, endlessly in step" (*NFA*, 83). It is a dance, and a dance goes ever on and on and again as in *Judith* and *The Tent Peg*, it symbolizes movement, a movement through the prairie landscape.

Arachne's constant movement invites a reading of her as a nomad, with no home, no ties, just free and ever going on and on. Hence, Goldman adopts and adapts Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "nomadology" and analyzes *No Fixed Address* in accordance to it with fascinating results.¹²⁵ In *A Thousand Plateaus*, a densely constructed book, Deleuze and Guattari, refrain from viewing difference in binary pairs. Instead, the State is identified as adopting binary logic, whereas the forces working in opposition to it are "a multiplicity of decentred, 'molecular' entities"; these entities then are organized to a "rhizomatic structure" (Goldman, "Deleuzian," 24). Deleuze and Guattari explain that "any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be" (7). Also, a "rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines" (Deleuze and Guattari, 9). These rhizomatic structures, then, "have the capacity to function as 'nomadic war machines'" (Goldman, "Deleuzian," 24). With all its difficulties inherent in this metaphor for feminists, Goldman still applies it and argues that "Arachne is educated to become a nomadic war machine" and thus aims at "destabiliz[ing] State-thought in a variety of ways" ("Deleuzian," 28). Goldman mentions her atypical jobs – a bus driver and an underwear sales representative,

¹²⁴ Barbara Leckie, however, reads the image of the dancers as an arresting, imprisoning one. "In the end the structure strains," Leckie argues, "and [...] the image of women presented between the lines is too close to the pathetic copper figures for comfort: relentless and comically sad" (279). Still, Leckie concludes: "Nevertheless, Arachne's response is still tempting: laughter and irreverence" (280). See Barbara Leckie, "Circle Games."

¹²⁵ Cf. Marlene Goldman, "Earth-Quaking the Kingdom of the Male Virgin: A Deleuzian Analysis of Aritha van Herk's 'No Fixed Address' and 'Places Far From Ellesmere'"; Marlene Goldman, *Paths of Desire*.

which are quite unusual occupations for women, but also Arachne's indispensable lust to drive.¹²⁶ Arachne's infatuation both with driving and her maps is especially interesting in connection to Deleuze's and Guattari's depiction of the nomad's travels, which Goldman also refers to:

The nomad has a territory; he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points (water points, dwelling points, assembly points, etc.). But the question is what in nomad life is a principle and what is only a consequence. To begin with, although the points determine paths, they are strictly subordinated to the paths they determine, the reverse of what happens with the sedentary. The water point is reached only in order to be left behind; every point is a relay and exists only as a relay. A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own. The life of the nomad is the *intermezzo*. Even the elements of his dwelling are conceived in terms of the trajectory that is forever mobilizing them. (Deleuze and Guattari, 380)

Arachne is portrayed quite similarly. She is on the move, constantly going, going somewhere, anywhere, it does not matter where; what matters is that she is not arriving. "Arachne cannot remember leaving [or arriving for that matter]. Her life has become movement without end" (*NFA*, 249).

Deleuze and Guattari argue further that "the nomad goes from point to point only as a consequence and as a factual necessity" (380) – again like Arachne who goes from one town to another, an endless "litany of small towns" (*NFA*, 23): "Rumsey, Rowley, Craigmyle, Delia, Michichi, Munson, Morrin Bridge, Ghost Pine Creek, towns like their names, isolated, hopeful, doomed" (*NFA*, 89).¹²⁷

Trails and routes, then, fulfill different purposes for nomads and sedentary, according to Deleuze and Guattari. For the latter, the trails and routes "*parcel out a closed space to people*, assigning each person a share and regulating the communication between shares" (Deleuze and Guattari, 380); for nomads, it does just the opposite: "*it distributes people [...] in an open space*, one that is indefinite and noncommunicating" (Deleuze and Guattari, 380). This is what Arachne longs for – "tawdriness." The accidental (or not so accidental) meeting with Dougall McKay and Frank and 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" (*NFA*, 214). Arachne

¹²⁶ Cf. Marlene Goldman, "Earth-Quaking the Kingdom of the Male Virgin: A Deleuzian Analysis of Aritha van Herk's 'No Fixed Address' and 'Places Far From Ellesmere'," 28-29.

¹²⁷ Also see for example *No Fixed Address*, 23, 80, 229, 239.

runs, “she realizes, [...] that she is escaping again. No, running toward anonymity, absorption, relief from expectation” (*NFA*, 214). This she can only find in the North and “to go North, you almost always have to come West,” van Herk (“Personal Interview,” 123) tell us. While Arachne “refuses to drive west” (*NFA*, 35) in the beginning, she ultimately “turns west, her inevitable direction” (*NFA*, 237). To go West, as we all know, is another way of saying to die, to disappear. Is this what Arachne aims for? “This is the edge of the world. If only it were easier to fall off” (*NFA*, 240), she muses. As we are told, “She has been back to Vancouver and died there, one of her lives certainly over” (*NFA*, 247).

At Long Beach, she tastes the edge: “This is the edge; not end but edge, the border, the brink, the selvage of the world. She can no longer go west” (*NFA*, 239). Stephen Scobie points out the various meanings of selvage which reveal remarkable insights. “Figuratively, ‘selvage’ means, according to the OED, ‘a marginal tract, border, edge,’” but “the word’s primary sense comes from sewing or weaving” (39). In the latter sense selvage is defined as “‘the edge of a piece of woven material finished in such a manner as to prevent the ravelling out of the weft’” (Scobie, 39). For Arachne, the spider woman, obviously very appropriate, but there is even more to it: “Selvage is also, the OED continues, ‘a narrow strip ... at the edge of a web of cloth, which is not finished like the rest of the cloth [...]’” (Scobie, 39).¹²⁸ Like a selvage, Arachne’s story is not finished: “*Then she looks smug. ‘The story’s not over yet’*” (*NFA*, 196).

Arachne turns North. “She is steeling herself to enter the blank, the dislocated world of the North”; “she will be going nowhere, into a lost and limitless world she might not emerge from” (*NFA*, 247). As has been indicated in chapter three, the portrayal of the North as a blank space has been championed. Even though Aritha van Herk is so highly perceptive and sensitive of conventional and stereotypical representations, in this part of the novel, as Goldman indicates, she “maintain[s] significant links with traditional discourses” (“North,” 155). “Arachne,” Goldman notes further, “behaves like any other westerner. Searching for a frontier that can be colonized, she is both fearful and hopeful” (“North,” 155).

Afraid, she is afraid. After this there is nothing. What happens when the road comes to an end? After this there is no turning back. What she finds at the end

¹²⁸ Scobie points out even more meanings of selvage. “In mining, [...], ‘selvage refers to a thin layer of clayey or earthy matter surrounding a metalliferous vein’” (39) Further, he mentions the link between “selvage” and “self” which also can be found in Dutch. See Stephen Scobie, “Arachne’s Progress,” 39.

will have to be enough, will have to be enough. Perhaps she will be able to find a place to settle in, *colonize*. (*NFA*, 247-48, my emphasis)

Certainly, the North here is portrayed as the ultimate frontier; certainly, van Herk can be and has been criticized for it; but certainly one also has to continue to read. Arachne wonders what she will find in the North, what the place has to offer her, but in return she also asks: “But what has she to offer to a raw place?” (*NFA*, 248). Besides, if only marginally, she mentions the presence of indigenous people right after that.¹²⁹

Then, “she will go north, north, north” (*NFA*, 248). On her way she meets geologists, who then take her up in the mountains in a helicopter.¹³⁰ There, she wanders around and finds a “bronze marker pin” which “is stamped with an indelible insignia,” “the double initial she knows so well. T.T.” (*NFA*, 253). Back in the helicopter, “[s]he watches the roadless world below her, knowing she has arrived” (*NFA*, 253) No period, no end, no death?

Much ink has been spilled contemplating the significance of the end of the novel. Many critics argue for Arachne’s death, as Verhoeven, for instance, who states that the author “seems to merely relegate her heroine to a realm of non-being, thereby leaving the existing ideological hegemony untouched” (39). Hence, van Herk “places her heroine (and herself) outside any engagement whatsoever with the masculine terrain” (Verhoeven, 39). Yet, the essential point is that Arachne does not die. She disappears. Deliberate disappearance is a very powerful position to find oneself in. While we, the readers, are still trying to hunt down Arachne, trying to trace her journey like lines of a web, she is no longer in the same text that we are searching for her. We will never be able to track her down, since she will always be one and a half steps ahead of us. She is the one in power. She knows where she goes to. She knows where she is. She knows where she comes back. All we can do is watch for her; what we cannot do is pin her down.

Van Herk undermines the traditional endings, where women either die or marry. Arachne disappears, and in Goldman’s words borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari, she “resist[s] ‘capture’ in favor of ‘deterritorialization’” (“Deleuzian,” 36) –

¹²⁹ Cf. *No Fixed Address*, 248.

¹³⁰ This is the second time Arachne travels the world in the air. The first time, Thomas takes Arachne to go on a hot air balloon ride. “‘I wanted to find you a map,’ says Thomas, ‘but I thought this ariel would be better.’ Arachne looks down at the slow ground and thinks of traveling, spidering her own map over the intricate roads of the world” (*NFA*, 182).

deterritorialization being at its most basic the disruption of traditional representations. In fact, Arachne is portrayed “as the creator of her own story,” as Carrera Suárez argues, “erasing when convenient, refusing to be tied down” and “having “no wish to reach the last stanza” (“Gender,” 438). In this respect she resembles a very prototypical Maverick, as does Dorcas, as does Tip.

7.2. Tip, the Disappearing Maverick

Leaving becomes an act/ive grace, how it’s done that is;
 belonging only a question of luck
 (Aritha van Herk, *Places Far from Ellesmere*, 57)

Arachne has disappeared, disappeared off the map, disappeared out of the story. But anyone who can disappear also has the ability to reappear, as we have already established. The question that remains is the “when” and the “how.” Aritha van Herk even said, “I think I’ll bring her back as a character; she deserves a reprise” (Tihanyi, 50). And she has brought her back, only with a different name. No, not Dorcas, as I have assumed, although at a quick glance the two heroines do share a whole set of characteristics – both travel, both are picaras of some sort, both refuse time, both are on a search for some something. Yet, when scrutinizing the novels carefully, various features portray their difference. While “Arachne travels light” (*NFA*, 6), Dorcas “overpack[s] gleefully” (*R*, 36); while Arachne “wears nothing at all” (*NFA*, 6) – underwear, that is, Dorcas finds it “necessary to have with [...] [her] clean underwear” (*R*, 49); while Arachne is not aware of her mythological foremother, Dorcas is. Consequently, my assumption must be wrong.

Where or who, then, is Arachne, the maverick?¹³¹ She reappears only to disappear again in various stories which van Herk calls the “Tip-Stories,” knowing “she’s Arachne” (Wittke, 142). Tip, the magician’s assistant in “Waiting for the Rodeo”; the professional balloonist, in “Mining Darkness”; the embalmer’s apprentice in “Corpus Delecti”; and as office assistant, formerly known as secretary, in “Hide and Seek.” Tip, as with all of van Herk’s heroines, takes on unusual occupations for a woman, but in all of her jobs, she is merely the assistant, the “teased and patronized

¹³¹ Maverick, to clarify the term, is “applicable to Albertans, especially appropriate for a collective resistance to being caught, owned, herded, taxed, or identified” (van Herk, *Mavericks*, 394). Even though Arachne/Tip is no “real” Albertan, being born and raised in B.C., the term still seems appropriate.

apprentice” (van Herk, “Corpus,” 3). However, as the stories evolve, Tip usurps her masters’ powers, seizes their skill, acquires their knowledge, absorbs their wisdom, and eventually moves on.

In “Waiting for the Rodeo,” Tip moves to Calgary, having escaped her former job as the magician’s apprentice. When her former master does find her, she manages to perform his best trick, that is, to disappear. “When apprentice becomes magician history hesitates. It’s a rare occasion; most apprentices never dare to try” (van Herk, “Rodeo,” 238). Tip does and succeeds, and we hear that she is interested in becoming a hot air balloon pilot. Hence, we find her again in “Mining Darkness” as a balloonist. But “she neglects her job to pursue absolute darkness” (Carrera Suárez, “Professions,” 92); to become “a researcher of the dark” (van Herk, “Corpus,” 3). Thus, we are in the midst of “Corpus Delecti” exploring death and its elusive infinity. Having been “granted a strange reprieve” (van Herk, “Corpus,” 14) after her “death” in Vienna, she works for a funeral home in Canada. She “has taken this job because of her own deaths and disappearances, the way it is plausible for women to die, often and repeatedly, occasions for remorse, but still delightfully compliant, willing to assist” (van Herk, “Corpus,” 6-7). Then Tip finds herself again as secretary in “Hide and Seek” who is contemplating the temptations of disappearance. “Disappearance is the nirvana of those who mistrust their own intentions” (van Herk, “Hide,” 120). Tip is “[r]eady to become a cipher, a memory, as if she had gotten her hands on an invisibility cloak” (van Herk, “Hide,” 130). Tip has made it to Spain, but feels herself as an imposter; deems herself more visible than ever – so much for disappearance. Eventually, she heads back to Canada; heads further west, until the realization that one cannot simply erase oneself. Finally, however, Tip urges us to “never pity those who disappear by choice” (van Herk, “Hide,” 154).

Tip – as Arachne, as Dorcas – is always on the move. She seeks to “evade plot” (van Herk, “Rodeo,” 228), escape the base realities, and elude the notion of normalcy. Fascinated by death and disappearance alike, “Tip lives her own mythology, overwhelmed with a crazy need to confront destiny through the absoluteness of death and its beauties” (van Herk, “Corpus,” 2). But “[d]espite a seemingly morbid attraction to death,” as Isabel Carrera Suárez argues, “her final choice is always (another) life: disappearance, escape and a reinvention of self” (“Professions,” 91). Hence, the inauspicious name of the gun shop “All Stories End” turns in “Waiting for the Rodeo” into the partly effaced “ALL STORIES ND” (239) – leading to the

suspicion that van Herk's stories are not over so soon. Even though her characters tend to disappear towards the end, they are not dead; there is always the possibility of resurgence.

7.3. "I want to become a ghost story" – *Restlessness*

I cannot escape myself. I have tried, tried and tried.
And trying, I discovered I was infected with a terrible suspicion of myself
and my inability to stay still, my dreadful insomnia of place.
(Aritha van Herk, *Restlessness*, 17)

You travel the world. Traveling is your job; after all you are a courier. And you have seen it all: Amsterdam, London, Trieste, Sydney, Cairo (how exotic), Sarajevo, Tübingen (not so exotic), Madrid, Jakarta, Vienna (please don't say Freud), Brussels, Paris (city of love and all), San Francisco, the Black Forest, Las Vegas, Tofino (the selva of the world). Not necessarily in that order. You never take pictures on your trips. You do not believe in fitting the world inside a picture frame. You remember, and you forget. And you travel. And you are restless. And you travel. You even lose the ability of formulating well-constructed utterances. Reduced to a word followed by a question mark. You use travel to erase, to become invisible, but somehow you always manage to wear the wrong gesture, the wrong expression in your face and you are more visible than anyone around you. Homesick? You don't know any more what homesickness is. Although you do have a home and you are more homesick when you are there than when you are away (and you are well aware of this inherent contradiction). Your home is Calgary, of all places. But it is somehow appropriate. Calgary is a city in motion and you have a favorite building there, even though you call it a self-conscious one. Not to forget the chinook. Chinook, say it, it is such a beautiful word. Then, one night, you go out for dinner and a walk with a man. There is no curfew, no "deadline." Even though for you there is. You finally want to arrive. No longer restless, you will be alone in a room with the man you have asked to kill you. And the narrative unfolds itself.

"It's not much of a story," Wilcox (45) argues. Dorcas and her chosen assassin Derrick Atman meet in a hotel room at the Palliser Hotel. Even though Dorcas has "entered this room with finality" (*R*, 71), they go out for dinner and subsequently take a tour around Calgary. Were it not for Dorcas, no one would have imagined that Calgary could be this strikingly exotic and full of history. Their walk is embellished

by Dorcas's travel tales and it seems "like some reverse Scheherazade telling stories towards death instead of away from it" (Wilcox, 45). *Restlessness*.

Restlessness is Aritha van Herk's most philosophical and most carefully constructed novel so far. Robinson argues that "much of it reads as though each word were picked up, examined, then polished before being placed carefully in exactly the right spot." The language used is "heavily stylized, exquisite" (Mayr, 44) and certainly adds depth to Dorcas's meditations. But the questions addressed necessitate sensitive words. Death. Love. Home.

As has been indicated, the novel refuses to be categorized. "Is this a murder mystery? No – that would require suspense. Is this Realism, then? No. There is too much ungiven, too little in terms of character, of plot. What is this book, then? It's difficult to say" (Robinson). It is a travel-anti-travel book; a murder-mystery that is no murder-mystery, a narrative about wanting to die that pretends to be a narrative about wanting to be loved, and vice versa with postmodern elements abound.¹³²

Dorcas, "insist[ing] on speaking in the present tense" (Kroetsch, "Wagons," 60), tells us her stories of restless travels, of restless homes, of restless hearts. "Restless everything. Restless restlessness" (*R*, 77). "Even the form of *Restlessness* is ever changing," Thea Bowering (27) indicates. "At times it imitates the private mind of the traveler [...]; at others it becomes a long narrative conversation between storyteller and killer" (Bowering, 27). The suspense of the novel is created with the first sentence. Dorcas is in a room with her chosen assassin. But will she do it? If so, when and how? But why does she want to get "died" at all? Then again, why not? In the end, we are not sure whether Atman is really chosen to kill or rather make love to her. Is he her assassin or her lover?

I wanted to love. My wanting to love was part of a conversation that I never had with that particular lover or with any of the lovers that followed him. None of them asked, not one noticed or registered any passion beyond the usual ampersand of bodies, as if genital conjunction should be enough to still all tears. Unprofessional lovers want to believe that decisions of desire are accidental, unplanned, not their responsibility. They believe a woman makes herself available because she's there. Unprofessional lovers believe that

¹³² Intertextual references range from mythology and literature to music and famous or not so famous historical figures: Ariadne, Job, Monty Reid, James Joyce, Robert Barr, Franz Kafka, Anne Tyler, T.S. Eliot, Marcel Proust, Jann Arden, Nellie McClung, Christina Rossetti, Gavrilo Princip, Johann Winckelmann, Sir Sandford Fleming, Carl Gustav Jung, Gustav Klimt and Sigmund Freud.

women need them, and they are remarkably obvious to what our bodies crave.¹³³

Substitute love with death, lover with assassin, and you will find this passage in *Restlessness*. And it works both ways. Ultimately, we “never do find out whether this is just ghoulish foreplay, or a real suicide in progress” (Clemence). And who the hell is that woman in the other hotel room? Ambiguities are inherent in the plot of *Restlessness* but mind-boggling as they are, they create a novel full of possibilities and suspense unparalleled elsewhere.

7.3.1. The Color of the Chinook

Dorcas hopscotches from continent to continent, from one arrival to the next departure and while we “would kill for it” (*R*, 49), she is “feeling sorry” for herself and her “footloose life” (*R*, 44) and literally tries to kill herself. Dorcas is a courier, spinning around the globe, “travel[ing] everywhere and belong[ing] nowhere” (Tefs, 141). She is tracing maps with her “sin” of restlessness and, hence, van Herk is yet again weaving a web combining global and local history, mystery, fact and fiction.

Traveling is something we desire: an enumeration of city names, a map of the world full of thumbtacks indicating where we have been. Dorcas, needless to say, does not belong into this category of travelers but knows that this is what traveling is often reduced to. “The art of travel, its passion, is passé,” Dorcas tells us, “which reduces travel to tourism, a destinational itinerary, an achievement list of geographies” (*R*, 93). Conversely, Dorcas wants to travel “erratically” (*R*, 100), reminiscent of a picara, and a picara she is, she claims.

The picaresque tradition historically argues for travel as a self-conscious activity, metadestinational, wickedly aware that it seeks its own extinction. Picaresque travelers long to behave badly, and while they see themselves as unmaskers of a hypocritical world, they also know themselves to be cowards with a failed cause. (*R*, 92-93)

So, Dorcas travels, not by choice but out of necessity. But what does she do? Dorcas readily answers: “I run away. I play hide and seek. I practice kinematics” (*R*, 44), and “I travel in order to entertain quiescence” (*R*, 45).

For van Herk, traveling is an articulation “of melancholia, an expression of intellectual discontent that wants to find in the world an answer to unanswerable

¹³³ Cf. Aritha van Herk, *Restlessness*, 29, adapted.

questions. All we discover when we travel is who we are not and where we are not; traveling itself provides no discoveries” (Tihanyi, 46). Arachne just runs, oblivious to the quest she is in fact on. Dorcas, on the contrary, is well aware of her restlessness, her melancholia that she seeks to evade: “I’ve been using distance to meddle with the plot of my life, to alter my course, to escape, plunge headlong into a denial that I have always known I should confront” (R, 90). This denial sounds like a very familiar one in our contemporary world: “My own disaffection, my inability to deal with mundane cruelties. I want to destroy the day-to-day abrasion of life’s oblivious plot” (R, 90). And so it goes...

Dorcas goes from place to place, like “a nomad, [...], a transformative ghost that moves in and out of countries” (Budde, 52), similar to Arachne. Deleuze and Guattari say that “only nomads have absolute movement, in other words, speed; vortical or swirling movement” (381). Dorcas ventures out to find the perfect place to die/love, to find out *where* she really is. On all of her travels, she gets clues but no answers. Paris, she hardly remembers having been there: “All I learned was that Paris was the wrong stage for discovery, too mythologized, too adamantly romantic” (R, 125). In Cairo, Dorcas goes inside a pyramid and faints – “a direct gesture toward *Passage to India*” (“Personal Interview,” 126). Las Vegas then, “in a mythological way, [...] seemed like a good place [to commit suicide], so shallow, so desperately gullible” (R, 130) but she cannot do it. In Germany, she stays at a monastery and a monk is trying to choke her but he “was an inexperienced killer” (R, 154). Further, he “didn’t seem dangerous, only strangely compassionate. But weak. He only killed one night, instead of a lifetime” (R, 155). But out of all places with their strange and gothic episodes, it is Vienna, Dorcas likes best, not because of the music, not because of the *palais*, but because of death – death in all its grotesque forms: “Underneath the waltzes and *Sachertorte* is a whole spectrum of gloriously elaborate death” (R, 112). The streets are plastered with history; buildings are framed with faces of dead people; and then there are the cemeteries: from the catacombs to *Kaisergruft* to the Undertaking Museum to the *Friedhof der Namenlosen*. Atman wants to know if there is anything happy in Vienna. “‘Sure’,” Dorcas says, “‘[t]here’s a Circus and Clown Museum, but it’s sad’” (R, 121).¹³⁴

¹³⁴ The episode about Vienna in *Restlessness*, seems to build on an essay van Herk has written some years earlier, where she too is “in search of, not waltzes or *Sachertorte*, but death” (326). See Aritha van Herk, “Death in Vienna,” 326-34.

Dorcas has traveled the world, “sought famous places for their suicides, [...] looked for a city that would open its arms” (*R*, 127), but there she is, back in Calgary. “Home again” (*R*, 127). *Restlessness* travels the whole world without leaving Calgary and thus juxtaposes the local and the global, or rather tries to detect the global in the local. Calgary indeed appears in a transfigured glow. ““That’s Calgary,” Dorcas says: ““The assumed identity that becomes real. Be careful how you dress up”” (*R*, 78-79). From Cow-town to Culture-town – Calgary appears full of history and unprepared for anecdotes, like horses in hotels.¹³⁵ Ultimately, we realize that they too have their ghosts.

As has been mentioned, Huggan claims that there has been a shift from depicting rural places to urban geographies in women’s writing.¹³⁶ These urban geographies, cities, are presented both as a place that is unsafe, ever changing and thus unstable, and a space that is erotically charged. Jane Augustine, then, argues that although “cities engender many opportunities for sexual activities, [...] [t]he erotic itself [...] comes from within” (85). The city is “inherently anarchic, ungovernable and private. It arouses subjectivity, concentrating the attention of individuals upon themselves and their emotions” (Augustine, 85). Dorcas is in fact echoing this assertion: “I wait for a city to seduce me, to sidle up in a bar and suggest assignation” (*R*, 10).

Besides, the city lends itself for employment of Foucault’s concept of archaeological layering, since as van Herk argues, “There is life fossilized within these hewn stone walls, life accidentally revealed and never noticed by those who walk past, who enter the walls, who stare out of the golden windows across a scape of repeated and reflected mirrors of themselves” (“Stranded,” 76). Here too, hi/stories are piled on top of each other – “unnoticed but permanent” (van Herk, “Stranded,” 76). Dorcas does nothing but notice, perceive thoroughly, and observe meticulously the town’s secrets.

In accordance with Deleuze and Guattari then,

[t]he town exists only as a function of circulation, and of circuits; it is a remarkable point on the circuits that create it, and which it creates. It is defined by entries and exits; something must enter it and exit from it. It imposes a frequency. [...] It is a phenomenon of *transconsistency*, a *network*, because it is fundamentally in contact with other towns. It represents a threshold of deterritorialization. (Deleuze and Guattari, 432)

¹³⁵ Cf. *Restlessness*, 73. This incident came not out of van Herk’s imagination, although it well could have, but it really is true.

¹³⁶ Cf. Graham Huggan, *Territorial Disputes*, 98.

Again, as in *No Fixed Address*, where Arachne drives in a circular motion from city to city and back to her home in Calgary, Dorcas sees her travels as “circular arrivals” (*R*, 9) – ever returning to the city. Ultimately, while Arachne drives off the map and, thus, in deterritorialized terrain, Dorcas, aims to drive off the map of life – again deterritorialized space. In both cases, the city is their point of circulation, and both their hiding place and their point of departure.

Previously, cities in western Canada had been somewhat hidden in fiction, as Guy Vanderhaeghe argues.¹³⁷ When they did appear, “the representation was usually an uneasy compromise between what had to be said [...], and the desire to divulge where you were really talking about” (Vanderhaeghe, 128). What it comes down to, “the root cause of this was a lack of confidence, confidence of every kind” (Vanderhaeghe, 128). Not so in van Herk’s fiction.

We’re brash, delighted with our own ability to break rules, to wear blue jeans to work, to ride horses into hotels. We always bounce back from down times, blossom at the oddest moments. Calgary swings between the wild wind of a chinook like this and the solid heat of a late autumn day. If unreality is the hallmark of modern cities, then Calgary insist on hyper-reality, those glass canyons, the mirage of mountains, the awkward foothills. (*R*, 79)

Neither faceless nor nameless,¹³⁸ Calgary emerges as a place that refuses any impression of idleness. Ever changing, ever evolving, and growing ever more confident. While Calgary is said to “dream of cattle and oil, of money and women” (Kroetsch, *Alberta*, 176), in *Restlessness* it appears magically transformed. Maybe it is because Dorcas is talking of Calgary as her home: “‘This is the only home I ever knew as home’” (*R*, 128). *Restlessness* is in many respects “a meditation on ‘home’,” as Wilcox (45) claims, “in both a geographical and spiritual sense.”

While traveling and its significance are difficult to pin down, the notion of home is ever so elusive. While Judith and J.L. escape from home and Arachne in effect has no home, Dorcas cannot find home on all her travels, until she finally realizes it is Calgary. In *Places Far from Ellesmere*, van Herk gives us her definition of home:

Home: what you visit and abandon: too much forgotten/too much remembered. An asylum for your origins, your launchings and departures, the derivations of your dream geographies. Where you invented destinations. Always and unrelentingly (home) even after it is too late to be or to revert to (home), even after it pre/occupies the past tense. (*PFFE*, 13)

¹³⁷ Cf. Guy Vanderhaeghe, “‘Brand Name’ vs. ‘No-Name’: A Half-Century of the Representation of Western Canadian Cities in Fiction.”

¹³⁸ Cf. Vanderhaeghe, 120.

In *Restlessness*, Kroetsch argues, “Home is a kind of hideout, tended by My Dear One. This figure recurs, as Tom in *No Fixed Address*, as Bob in *Places Far from Ellesmere*” (“Wagons,” 66). Still, her home is “Calgary, this growing graveyard,”¹³⁹ and van Herk is being complementary. Like Dorcas, she loves this town and “to live here you must move, although the stones command stillness, and the grass demands its own growing. Home is a movement a quick tug at itself and it packs up” (*PFFE*, 69). Hence, home, for van Herk, seems to go beyond the typical nuclear family with a house and white picket fence around it. Instead, in van Herk’s opinion, “home should be transportable” (Pianos, et al.). In the end, she argues, “Calgary’s citizens remember the future, forget the myopic past” and what it comes down to is that Calgary is a “good place to invent a suicide” (van Herk “Cousinage,” 590).

7.3.2. Chosen Erasure or the Search for Something that Matters

I wanted to die, and not one of those assassins ever noticed.
Although, of course, they all wanted to kill me.
(Aritha van Herk, *Restlessness*, 30)

Dorcas, after all her departures, wants to arrive, finally. But, as Kroetsch argues, “[s]he cannot quite know why she wants to die; if she did, this efficient woman would do the job herself, and in a hurry. Its very unnameability is what vexes her towards death, but not quite into it” (“Wagons,” 64). She has tried to commit suicide but she “had to admit defeat and hire a professional” (*R*, 49).

Derrick Atman. “He is one day older than time, but he is also that new place, Calgary; [...] he at once reaches for the sky and penetrates the earth” (Kroetsch, “Wagons,” 64). And he is sexy, portrayed as having sprung right out of a commercial for hair shampoo, although his hair has started to thin. He can afford it. “His strength is in his flexibility, his attentiveness” (*R*, 39); he “hasn’t got the deafness follicle, the oblivion gene” (*R*, 46); he is the “perfect assassin” (*R*, 46). Dorcas “should not be surprised at the raspy sexiness of his voice. After all, he is a version of seducer” (*R*, 39). Atman is a Quaker, from Winnipeg, he says. Dorcas is puzzled. “Dallas or New York maybe – surely professional assassins come from cities with a gun permit” (*R*,

¹³⁹ The title refers to the third chapter in *Places Far from Ellesmere*, 57-74. However, this whole section had previously been published as a poem and originally appeared in *NeWest Review* 13.4 (December 1987): 5-11.

46). “A peaceful man from that violent city” (Kroetsch, “Wagons,” 64). (I know, makes you laugh, ey). Killer, assassin, seducer, lover – with Dupuytren’s disease.¹⁴⁰

The word “atman” has dubious etymological origins but is usually traced back to Greek and Teutonic roots meaning either “breath,” “go,” or “blow.” Hence, the word developed from “breath” to “soul” to “self.”¹⁴¹ Deussen, then, shows that even though “atman” may have meant “‘this ego’” or “‘this my own self’,” the word “‘came very early to signify ‘the self in contrast with that which is not self’” (195).

When Derrick Atman is the essence of things, the self, is he then a projection of Dorcas’s restlessness, as Kroetsch suggests.¹⁴² Hired for a job that he is both willing and hesitant to carry out, since he cannot pin down why Dorcas wants to leave – this portrayal of Atman underscores Kroetsch’s assertion. And Derrick, Atman’s first name? Derrick appears as a famous and highly skilled detective-figure in a German TV-show, refraining from using guns and bloodshed instead engaging suspects in conversations.¹⁴³ Someone not familiar with Derrick might imagine Columbo but with lachrymal sacs. In *Derrick* (and *Columbo*), as in *Restlessness* the killer is known and thus instead of a “‘Was-’ oder besser ‘Wer-Spannung’” it is a “‘Wie-Spannung’” (Liessmann, 138-39) which is generated. But Dorcas rejects being “a character in a cheap thriller” (*R*, 8). “[M]y body,” she says, will not be

at the center of a mystery eventually solved by a slick loner with a penchant for cigarettes and superlative powers of deduction. [...] No. I am engaged in an act of hunger, a ravenous plan of escape that I have been working toward for more than a decade. I’m impatient now, more impatient than before, when I pretended to be ready. (*R*, 8)

Her wanting to die is lustful, she speaks of “delicious dying” (*R*, 101) and reminds us of Anne Sexton’s speaker in “Wanting to Die”: “the almost unnamable *lust* returns” and death “all by itself, becomes a *passion*” (142-43, my emphasis). Dorcas is not afraid. She has “waited, listened for the deep gong of a moment’s well-tempered agreement, and hesitated. Like Prufrock. Do I dare to eat a peach? Shall I wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled?” (*R*, 8). Eliot’s Prufrock is insecure, hesitant – but Dorcas knows what she wants. She longs for death as if it was a passion, describes her assassins in words typically used for lovers, and talks about her “dear one” who

¹⁴⁰ Dupuytren’s disease is a contracture of the hand, where fingers cannot be fully extended. Makes one wonder how he planned to assassinate Dorcas.

¹⁴¹ Cf. P. Deussen, “Atman,” 195-97.

¹⁴² Cf. Robert Kroetsch, “Circle the Wagons, Girls, Here the Bastards Come,” 63-64.

¹⁴³ Aritha van Herk gave me the clue during a walk around Calgary.

loves her but refuses to kill her. And Atman watches her with “absolute delight,” as if she had “seduced him” (*R*, 118). She is even comfortable with him and “almost happy” (*R*, 49).

Here is a narrator who “has a curious habit of using the word ‘assassin’ in the place of ‘lover’” (Press, 24). “Lover” and “assassin” appear interchangeable throughout the novel, and so do “sex” or “love” (depending on how cynical you are) and “death.” The Greeks know. “In their eyes, ‘love and death were two aspects of the same power [...]’” (Vernant, 59). For the Greek, it is Thanatos, the masculine figure who represents death. He is not a frightful character; his “role is not to kill but to welcome the dead” (Vernant, 54). Gorgo and Ker, then, are the female characters embodying death, but this time, in its terrifying aspect. However, the dichotomy, male/welcoming and female/terrifying is not that clear-cut, as Vernant further explains. In between there are figures like the Sirens and Sphinxes “in whom attraction, pleasure, and seduction are combined with anguish and frightfulness; there are zones in which Thanatos interfaces with Eros” (Vernant, 55). This goes to show that love and death are but two versions or faces of one and the same, ambiguous power. These comparisons are “creepy” (Mayr, 43) but the ambiguities do not stop here. While Dorcas uses lover and assassin interchangeably, she argues that “[t]here is no similarity between sex and death” (*R*, 190), only to contradict herself a few lines later: “Of course, the paths of lovers and killers are remarkably alike” (*R*, 190).

Since *Restlessness* is such a carefully constructed novel, the word portmanteau does not appear by mere chance either. “Portmanteau could be the name of a perfume, a book, even an hourglass. It lurks suggestively, a mantle, a portal. But closed” (*R*, 35). Portmanteau – two words with one meaning, which can be inherently paradoxical and endlessly oxymoronic. Like love and death, the alleged dichotomy, becomes, in fact, merged in the end, as in portmanteau. Van Herk tells us that “we search in many ways for the perfect lover, which is the same as the perfect death” (“Personal Interview,” 125). The perfect assassin is the perfect lover; the perfect lover is the perfect assassin. Discomforting.

Still, Dorcas has made up her mind, and Atman is going to do his job, after all she has paid the “kill fee” (*R*, 9). Their wandering around town is nothing else than a delay, a stopover for the inevitable, but inevitable nonetheless. At the Palliser everything merges. Tante Katje, who appears on the very first page as a memory,

enters the narrative in person, as the wise old woman. “[S]he presides all the way through as invisible witness to invisible events” (Kroetsch, “Wagons,” 61). Dorcas is nervous, worried about Tante Katje “pickpocketing [...] [her] carefully planned death” (R, 169). But after a lesson in Calgary history, triggered by a painting of “The Big Four,” she leaves, as unexpectedly as she has arrived. But then, there comes the woman, the woman Dorcas has been watching from her room, from the Divino’s, and here she is, saying, “I’ve been watching you” (R, 172).

When Dorcas enters her hotel room, she can see into another room, due to the hotel’s architecture, the Chicago-E-style wings. She sees a woman, watches her write, leave, return, pace, stop, resume her pacing, until the lights go out, and she sees her again in front of the restaurant. Dorcas even talks to Atman about her. ““She’s waiting for her lover”” (R, 71), he says. Dorcas ponders, ““Is that why she’s so restless?”” (R, 71); only later to conclude that ““[s]he’s waiting for something that matters”” (R, 90). Besides, she even acknowledges their similarity: ““I’m interested in her restlessness because it reminds me of my own”” (R, 103).

Consider, Dorcas is watching a woman who in turn claims to be watching her. Who is watching who? And who is the woman but Dorcas herself, her double, her doppelgänger. A double corresponds, as Walker indicates, “to the Egyptian *ka*, or a reflection-soul” (252). This double is the “antiassassin” (R, 173), claiming that ““[t]here’s no sin to restlessness”” since ““[w]e all have it. We learn to live with it”” (R, 173). She is Dorcas’s “resilient double” (R, 177), who is worried about her because of the “restless light” (R, 172) surrounding her. She is “expose[ing] Dorcas’s careful construction and editing of her travels and her memories” (Mayr, 43). On the elevator, the doppelgänger is telling stories of hotels and people, travelers and places, and in the end she says: “You see [...] how easy it is to sound like a tour guide, a travel agent, a guidebook, an authority. You see how tempting it is to become the lead character in Anne Tyler’s *Accidental Tourist*”¹⁴⁴ (R, 184). She is Dorcas’s Lacanian mirror in person, mirroring her life, her travels, her restlessness.

In the mirror stage, according to Lacan, the infant begins to understand itself as the subject it sees in the mirror; it begins to recognize its whole body, its “Gestalt” and understands itself as autonomous. However, this autonomy and unity is “only an

¹⁴⁴ Macon Leary, the lead character in *Accidental Tourist*, finds himself all alone in the world. His son was shot and his wife then left him. He starts traveling and writes a series of guidebooks entitled “Accidental Tourist.”

illusion,” as Benvenuto and Kennedy explain Lacan’s concept, and “the subject moves from fragmentation and insufficiency to illusory unity” (56). Hence, there will always be a gap from the perceived wholeness in the mirror, the image, and our “real” self. Even though it is an illusion, Dorcas is able to see herself in her double. Long before meeting her double, she says: “The woman standing there, face tilted slightly away, hair shading her eyes, will be me, finally apprehended, and willing to be found. Eager to recognize herself. At last” (*R*, 37). Eventually, they head back to their room. As Bowering argues, the “hotel room [...] becomes an ambiguous sort of limbo where our narrator waits for death or for something that matters” (27). Will he do it? Will she die? And “Derrick Atman is pulling on his gloves” (*R*, 184).

“All too much has been said and written about death,” van Herk (“Death,” 192) notes. “We romance dying, rush it into our writing, make virtue out of death’s enunciations and titter through its undoing, thinking, oh what a lovely effect” (van Herk, “Death,” 192). With that being said, let us not “die” her, let us “disappear” her. “Disappearance, they say, is a substitute for dying, a version of living death and resurrection, eloquent and nose-thumbing. Disappearance, the world is reminded, is an erotic adventure” (van Herk, “Disappearance,” 1). In effect, a “planned and chosen oblivion” (*R*, 14) is what Dorcas longs for. Being erased, being invisible, being unrecognizable.

Avoiding recognition is one of travel’s seductions. Travel enables that shift to an anonymous world, where you can kiss publicly and never be observed, where you can faint and not wake humiliated, where you can sit at a café table and read without fear of recognition or interruption, having escaped the density of a place that harbors the habits worn into days and weeks, time spun inward. That is why I traveled, to compose a private self and give her the space to breathe. (*R*, 32)

But Dorcas is not naïve. She knows the difficulty with anonymity: “The trouble is, I thought I was anonymous, but someone always recognized me [...]. So much for the privacies of restlessness. Found out” (*R*, 32). Anonymity goes hand in hand with invisibility. Dorcas states furthermore, “To be present but invisible is every traveler’s desire, and yet that very invisibility is the crux of traveling’s voyeurism” (*R*, 33). Again, she knows of invisibility’s impossibility. When Atman asks her, ““You want to be invisible?”,” she responds, ““Of course, even if it’s impossible. Every country I travel to proves me visible – my clothes are wrong my accent is wrong, the very cut of my hair is asymmetrical, out of culture”” (*R*, 91).

Women are ever so much more visible “by virtue of our bodies,” van Herk (Verduyn, 22) claims – visible but not audible; “[s]een but not heard” (Verduyn, 22). In the end, she wants to be “erased” (*R*, 13). But of course, she cannot simply erase herself. “You can’t completely leave no trace” (“Personal Interview,” 129). Dorcas knows, “I cannot escape myself” (*R*, 17); just as Tip knows, “Adults cannot disappear” (van Herk, “Hide,” 153).

Still, Dorcas is tired, restless and tired. “I’m tired of eyes watching my face, I’m exhausted by outsiders trying to imagine my dreams, dictating my desires” (*R*, 66). This is our world, Dorcas is describing, a contemporary, restless world but she is done with it. However, she also knows, uncomfortably, that she is named after “that oddly Biblical apparition” (*R*, 150) – Dorcas: “Now there was in Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did” (Acts 9, 36) – primarily weaving garments for the poor. (Yet, another spider/weaver-figure). The woman gets sick, dies and is being risen from the dead – “on no request of her own,” as Kroetsch (“Wagons,” 72) adds.

So, is Dorcas killed or rather loved? Aritha van Herk leaves it up to the reader to decide and critics have various opinions on it. Shane Rhodes argues, “I found Dorcas so endlessly chatty at times that I wanted to strangle her myself, and yet, when she was silent, I wished she would speak. At times, I felt that I would have to [...] save Dorcas myself, just so I could kill her in my own special way.” For Suzette Mayr it is clear that Dorcas will not survive: “Dorcas decides to die, but on her own terms and with the gentle killer of her choice” (44). K.I. Press, then, argues, “Personally, I can’t imagine any other fate for this miserable woman, and am only too happy to believe she dies” (24). Robert Budde, being a former student of van Herk, is more hopeful. “Death,” he argues, “is one more destination in her travels away from conventional living” (52) but “[d]eath is not death. The restless narrator approaches her death with the implacable and contemplate reserve of an aesthetic martyr. She is not just killing time or resolved into a dead metaphor; she is beginning again, elsewhere” (56). But it is Kroetsch who is “willing to bet that Dorcas has more living yet to do” (“Wagons,” 71). I agree.

Dorcas will live; she will have a future; she will step out of the elevator and walk into her room; she will go to bed and she will wake up tomorrow, because there is a

tomorrow for her. Like her double, “[s]he’ll get along, she’ll find a way to make do” (*R*, 185). She will maintain her restless travel itinerary, “take a cab to the airport, on to the next hotel, to another delivery, another imaginary city” (*R*, 185). She will continue to collect maps which “spill their tenacious names across a web of lines” (*R*, 187), like Arachne. Maps – “[t]hey suggest that I will be able to find myself, to discover a destination. So far they have not helped at all. But here I am” (*R*, 187), Dorcas muses. Here she will be, here she will be remembering the “taste of a madeleine,” (*R*, 193) and the things past, and here she will be claiming, rather unpersuasively, that in the end, it “was just a cookie” (*R*, 193).¹⁴⁵

The last nine pages of *Restlessness* are written in future tense, clearly suggesting that Dorcas will have a future. She might disappear, but she will not die. In the end, *Restlessness* is “a brave novel,” as Wilcox (45) argues, which “tackles an unpalatable subject, and instead of succumbing to sensationalism, it explores it with grace and aplomb and remarkable intelligence.” Van Herk’s achievement is remarkable, since she dares to ask the “hard questions:” “what is love and what is home; where is love and where is home” (“Personal Interview,” 130). While the author admits that she does not “have any answer” she self-confidently asserts that despite having no solution, she “can sure ask the question” (“Personal Interview,” 130). She can and hopefully she will continue to do so and lead us in deterritorialized terrain where women regain their power with dis- and re-appearances. Ultimately, *Restlessness* is, as Wilcox wonderfully concludes,

an indelible record of a planned erasure, a homage to life written in the vocabulary of death. It is about contraction, and it is contradictory; it is restless without being relentless. It is disquietingly beautiful and hauntingly articulate about belonging and love, and about the connectedness of stories and writing and life and death. (Wilcox, 45)

¹⁴⁵ Van Herk is here clearly referring to Marcel Proust’s *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, or *In Search of Lost Time*.

8. Malleable Myths

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 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.
(van Herk, *The Tent Peg*, 165-66)

Aritha van Herk calls it the “search for something we can have no memory of” (*TP*, 166); Luce Irigaray refers to it as the “forgotten mystery of female ancestry” (*Difference*, 91) – myths and their erased, obliterated origins – ignorant of what was, oblivious to what could have been. But van Herk, as has been shown, aims to recover ancient stories and figures and strives to portray their interconnectedness since, as she says, “They all, it seems to me, work together, because there’s a texture of women’s stories that is eminently malleable and interchangeable in quite a wonderful way” (“Personal Interview,” 121).

Indeed, when scrutinizing van Herk’s novels, numerous links and connections to various mythologies – Greek, Asian, Biblical, Indigenous – can be detected, as has been indicated. But moreover, the myths among themselves allow for an abundance of associations. Particularly, Greek mythology lends itself for bridging the gap from one story to another, as I will portray in this section. Considering van Herk’s fiction, it is especially one myth that seems to connect her stories; it is the one myth that has attracted so many writers; or, as Hayes phrases it, it is “one of the most emotionally charged narratives ever told” (1) – the myth of Demeter and Persephone. This myth, as Dorothy Jones argues, runs as an undercurrent throughout van Herk’s novels.¹⁴⁶

We all know the story of Persephone who goes off by herself, picks a flower and is taken to the Underworld by Hades. Her mother, Demeter, is thereafter on a search for her but her daughter is nowhere to be found. Hecate has heard Persephone’s screams, and together with Demeter they visit Helios who informs them that Persephone has been abducted by Hades – by her father Zeus’s permission. Demeter is miserable, refusing to go home to the Olympus and refusing to let anything grow on earth. She stays at Eleusis, and Zeus’s efforts to persuade Demeter to come back home seem futile. Eventually, he orders Hades to release Demeter; Hades has to obey but he secretly gives Persephone a pomegranate seed, which she eats. Having accepted a

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Dorothy Jones, “Restoring the Temples: The Fiction of Aritha van Herk.”

gift from Hades, she is forever doomed to return to the Underworld. Demeter agrees that Persephone would remain at her side two thirds of the year; and spend one third in the Underworld.¹⁴⁷

For Irigaray, Persephone is an interesting character as well, due to the position she finds herself in. She is either daughter or wife – “divided between two worlds, two loves, to places” (Grosz, 165).

The daughter stolen away from her mother, from herself, by her father, the brother, the father's other, who takes her against/without her consent. The *Koré* is given by the heavenly god to the infernal god, who only takes possession of her in ravishing her. Stolen, violated, veiled (*Volée, violée, violée*), a second time. (Irigaray, “Veiled,” 101-102)

Jones indicates that the myth of Demeter and Persephone is vital since it “celebrates the relationship between two women, the desolation of its disruption and joy of reunion” (“Restoring,” 417). In *Judith*, *The Tent Peg*, and *No Fixed Address* it is not so much the mother who is vital for Judith, J.L., and Arachne, but it is the heroines’ friends who are central for the characters’ development: Mina, Deborah, and Thena. Jones, then, continues to analyze the three novels individually and establishes quite interesting allusions, even though also contradicting ones.

Judith, because of her occupation, is similar to Demeter, since pigs “were images both of female sexuality and of the mother goddess,” Jones (“Restoring,” 418) asserts. But then she continues to compare Judith to Persephone. While Persephone is released from the Underworld because of her mother, Judith “must discover in herself the determination to escape her captivity” (Jones, “Restoring,” 419). In *The Tent Peg* Jones argues that “[i]n van Herk’s use of the Greek myth, Demeter and Persephone are interchangeable. Although J.L. is associated with Demeter, especially in her yearning to see Deborah again, she has, like Persephone, emerged from an underworld captivity” (“Restoring,” 424). Subsequently, in *No Fixed Address*, according to Jones, the author “while still asserting the image of female divinity, breaks the myth wide open to release her heroine from a situation where achievement and loss alternate so remorselessly” (“Restoring,” 424). Despite having illustrated the difficulty of a clear-cut allocation of van Herk’s characters, Jones ultimately concludes,

¹⁴⁷ The source for this short summary is the Homeric “Hymn to Demeter.” See Helene P. Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 2-27.

If Judith represents Kore [Persephone], the maiden abducted by Pluto [Hades], and J.L. signifies Demeter, goddess of growth and fruition, then Arachne is Persephone, queen of the dead, for the dyad of mother and daughter forms part of the more ancient triad of the Great Goddess. (“Restoring,” 428)

Even though Jones’s illustration of the similarities between this myth and van Herk’s novels is superb, I have my difficulties with Jones’s essay, not because I disagree with the parallels, which are unquestionably to be found, but because Jones does not mention the underlying myth of Demeter and Persephone.

Both Barbara Walker and Elizabeth T. Hayes remark that the story of Demeter and Persephone is older than the renderings in the Homeric “Hymn to Demeter” or Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, i.e. the tale that many of us are familiar with.¹⁴⁸ Persephone and Demeter are in fact one Goddess appearing as a Triple Goddess – Maiden; Mother, Crone.¹⁴⁹ Demeter, “[l]ike all the oldest forms of the basic Asiatic Goddess [...] appeared as Virgin, Mother, and Crone, or Creator, Preserver, Destroyer” (Walker, 218). Demeter is the mother-figure or Preserver; her “Virgin form was Kore, the Maiden, sometimes called her ‘daughter’” (Walker, 218) – or Persephone. But, Persephone is also the “‘Destroyer,’ the Crone form of the Triple Goddess Demeter” (Walker, 786). Moreover, Persephone “was really another name for Hecate, or Hel, and had ruled the underworld as Destroying Mother” (Walker, 786).¹⁵⁰

Despite this somewhat complicated representation, the important point is that Persephone was in fact “Queen of the Underworld long before there was a masculinized Pluto” (Walker, 786). The tale about Persephone’s descent into the Underworld “was a late, artificial myth. The original Pluto was female,” as Walker (218) indicates. Hence, we see that the fable is in effect “another instance of a god’s usurpation of the Goddess’s power” (Walker, 514-15) or in Hayes’s words:

Persephone’s story is of course an encoding of patriarchal violence. Her abduction and rape by Hades in the myth supposedly explain her presence as an underworld deity, but because the underworld was her original realm in preclassical mythology, we are really seeing a local Goddess’s power usurped by an Olympian god and then partially restored to her, but as derivative of the male god’s power. (Hayes, 9)

¹⁴⁸ See Barbara Walker, *The Woman’s Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, 219 and Elizabeth T. Hayes, “The Persephone Myth in Western Literature,” 12-13.

¹⁴⁹ Barbara Walker, *The Woman’s Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, 218-20, 786.

¹⁵⁰ Also see Elizabeth T. Hayes, “The Persephone Myth in Western Literature,” 10.

In this respect, one can argue, and I will that the employment of this myth is indeed a way of rediscovering the origins of forgotten female power. Therefore, the tale of Kore/Demeter/Persephone/Hecate is perfectly applicable to van Herk's novels – particularly, and at the same time most obliquely, perhaps to *Restlessness*. But let us first consider the interconnectedness of the myths in van Herk's novels under consideration through the classical story of Demeter and Persephone.

In *Judith*, it is the pigs that establish an association with Demeter because “the pig, particularly the sow, was considered a chthonic animal [...] and therefore sacred to Demeter and vitally important to her rites” (Hayes, 8). Also, “during the Thesmophoria, a three-day sowing ceremonial at which only women were permitted, suckling pigs, animals sacred to the Mother, were thrown into clefts in the earth” (Hayes, 6). Persephone's name, then, “means ‘killer of suckling pigs’” (Hayes, 9) – associating her neatly with Demeter. Hence, in *Judith*, the reference to the pigs and Circe are not the only link towards Greek mythology, as we can see. But Circe does have her share. Walker illustrates that the “white corpse-eating Sow-goddess represented the death aspect of the Great Mother in cults of Astarte, Demeter” (956) – among others. Demeter, then, was sometimes referred to as “mother of the Phorcids or Fatal Women” (Walker, 956). One of these “Fatal Women” was Circe. Her island “Aeaea meant literally ‘Wailing,’ a reference to the ritual laments accompanying sacrifices of the god in pig form” (Walker, 956). Therefore, the pigs in *Judith* do deserve the attention that is being given to them in various interpretations, because they play an important role in mythology.

When Persephone is abducted by Hades, the Sirens help Demeter look for her, as Ovid tells us.¹⁵¹ Hence, we are in the midst of van Herk's *The Tent Peg*, since there van Herk employs the word “siren” to describe both Deborah and J.L. Besides, another link between *Judith* and *The Tent Peg* is established through Circe who warns Odysseys about the Sirens, as has been indicated. Deborah, the siren-singer is also aligned with Artemis, as MacLaren points out.¹⁵² Thus, via the detour over

¹⁵¹ Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book V, 551-63.

¹⁵² Cf. Ian S. MacLaren. “A Charting of the van Herk Papers,” 12.

When Zeus sees the nymph Callisto he is enchanted and forces himself on her; Callisto is pregnant. Zeus, trying to hide his infidelity, turns Callisto into a bear. But Hera does find out and has Artemis arrange for Callisto to be killed in a hunt. Other sources have Artemis turn Callisto into a bear, to then hunt her. Others again see Callisto's son, Arcas, as the hunter. However, before Arcas can kill his mother, Zeus turns both into the Ursa Major and Ursa Minor constellation. See Robert E. Bell, *Women of Classical Antiquity*, 104.

Artemis, Callisto, and Zeus, indigenous mythology links up as well. In addition, Deborah, is referred to as “wife of Lappidoth” and “[l]inguistically, the phrase ‘wife of Lappidoth’ could also be translated ‘woman of fire’,” according to Nolan Fewell (69). Hence, through Deborah, or more precisely through the metaphor of light, a link is established to the myth of Demeter and Persephone, once again, since both are represented with images of light.

In *No Fixed Address* complex interconnections towards various mythologies can be identified, as has been illustrated. Yet, this novel links up with the others as well, not only to *The Tent Peg* via the she-bear, but also via the female friendship to *Judith*. In both novels, the heroines’ friends are vital – Mina/Minerva and Thena/Athena. When Mina is fashioned after Minerva and Thena after Athena, both have one and the same mythological forebear. Minerva is a Roman Goddess and, as Walker informs us, “a Latinized Athene” (658). Thus, another link is established across the novels.

By and large, it becomes apparent that the myth of Demeter and Persephone does in fact, as Dorothy Jones suggests, present itself like Ariadne’s thread, connecting Aritha van Herk’s novels. *Restlessness* is no exception. “As the darkness travels west across the continent, the journey of the heroine becomes epic. It is the classic journey into the underworld with the hope of returning with knowledge that will benefit the world” (Kroetsch, “Wagons,” 66). Kroetsch, perhaps not even contemplating the myth of Demeter and Persephone in particular, has captured its significance in connection to *Restlessness* quite impressively.

Dorcas, on her last night on earth, delays her deliberate walk across the river Styx, the journey into the Underworld, to the West, or the North – all metaphoric symbols of death. But there is a light up ahead. While I have argued, agreeing with Kroetsch again, that Dorcas will not die, she might, in fact, be really going home. Dorcas, in that sense, symbolizes Persephone, the original ruler of the Underworld. Where then is the light? This is where Hecate comes in, who, according to Hayes, “lit the pathway to the underworld for the newly dead, helping them cross over from the upper world to the world of shadows, just as she helped newborns cross over from the dark world into the light at birth” (11). However, her light was understood in a metaphorical sense. Hecate, as Hayes again indicates, “was given the epithet *phosphoros*, ‘bringer of light,’ implying that her torch was figurative; the light of understanding was her gift” (11). Ultimately, then, the “enlightenment she brought

was a knowledge of mortality, an understanding that death is always a part of life” (Hayes, 11). Dorcas, on all her travels may have looked for just that piece of information, necessary for her to continue her life; comprehend death as a part of life and love as part of home.

Besides, Hecate, “was one of the many names for the original feminine trinity, ruling heaven, earth, and the underworld” (Walker, 378). This representation of a Goddess as a trinity appears in *Restlessness* as well. Kroetsch remarks on the triangle which “shifts and forms” throughout the novel, “but in one version it is made up of Dorcas and her Dear One and Atman” (“Wagons,” 67). Kroetsch further: “The triangle is the very stuff of the love narrative: the impossible and necessary choice” (“Wagons,” 67). However, *Restlessness* is no narrative version of a soap opera but a novel about a woman’s longing to belong. Dorcas says, “The job of a courier is to bring together disjointed parts, to triangulate the previously unconnected. Whatever I carry – [...] – that item becomes the transition point of a triangle between sender and receiver” (*R*, 46). If the Triple Goddess consists of Maiden, Mother, and Crone, we can translate this structure to Dorcas in the following way: Dorcas’s double would be the Maiden; Tante Katje or Atman the Mother, or Preserver; and Dorcas herself the Crone. Dorcas, with her passion for death, is clearly linked to the Crone-aspect, the Goddess of the Underworld; both Tante Katje and Atman are like Persephone, the Mother-form, trying to bring their Demeter/Dorcas back to life; and the Maiden-form would be Dorcas’s double, her other self, who underscores the life-affirming aspect.

Ultimately, Dorcas is, for Kroetsch, the “true melancholic” who is “forever journeying and never arriving” (“Wagons,” 62) and whose life is comprised of “a set (not a sequence) of hotel rooms” (“Wagons,” 69). Dorcas’s last question, “Is death a happy ending?” (*R*, 193) is answered by van Herk herself elsewhere: “Yes, death is a happy ending (Kroetsch, *Figures in a Ground* 206) goddamn it, the one ending we know but cannot know, the loveliest of endings because it is utterly imaginary and mysterious” (“Death,” 194). Hence, with her novels, van Herk has achieved a remarkable fusion of myths, connected by the tale of Demeter and Persephone that, in the end, give back women’s original powers and Dorcas a chance for another life. Happy ending.

9. “Then heroes are not all men?” – Conclusion

It is only traveling takes us home.
(Robert Kroetsch, *The Studhorse Man*, 154)

Weaving new realities and webs of unknown and effaced mythology is what Aritha van Herk sets out to do with her fiction. By employing mythological forebears, she subverts this grand master narrative from within. Similarly, by actively engaging with prairie literature and literature about the North, van Herk “earth-quakes” this landscape and at the same time proves it open and accessible for all kinds of narratives.

While her earlier novels *Judith* and *The Tent Peg* explore realms of the supernatural only cursorily and tentatively, *No Fixed Address* and *Restlessness* engage more daringly with the subject of transgression of boundaries and realities. Also, while all of her fiction is concerned with movement and motion, it is especially her later novels *No Fixed Address* and *Restlessness* that exploit the topos of traveling most notably. By extension, this traveling goes hand in hand with van Herk’s other fascination and that is the traveling off the map into a destination without borders – disappearance. Van Herk, as Marcienne Rocard argues, is “granting her female protagonists total liberty and unpredictability, at the expense of the plotline and the ending” (“Frontier,” 328). Comfortable endings are indeed lacking, due to the heroine’s enigmatic disappearances.

Deleuze and Guattari, as has been illustrated, provide a remarkable framework for van Herk’s disappearing motions. “Movement,” they say, “has an essential relation to the imperceptible; it is by nature imperceptible. Perception can grasp movement only as the displacement of a moving body or the development of a form” (Deleuze and Guattari, 280-81). Van Herk proves just that with her fiction. Just when we think we have captured Arachne, we have understood her intentions, off she goes again. Arachne’s reprise, Tip, is infatuated with motion also, only even more so. She disappears at the end of each story, waiting her turn for the next, unforeseen and unexpected re-appearance. “Movements, [...], pure relations of speed and slowness, pure affects, are below and above the threshold of perception,” Deleuze and Guattari (281) explain further. Dorcas, then, is tired of this game of dis- and re-appearance and tries to erase herself – in vain, as she has to admit. Thus, “movement also ‘must’ be perceived, it cannot but be perceived, the imperceptible is also the *percipiendum*.”

There is no contradiction in this. If movement is imperceptible by nature, it is so always in relation to a given threshold of perception” (Deleuze and Guattari, 281), and in the end, movement, according to Deleuze and Guattari, becomes “the process of absolute deterritorialization” (282).

For Aritha van Herk, “the geography of Canada is connected to its fiction, its history, its future, its politics, its region” (McCance, 8). Consequently, we understand her preoccupation with landscape and maps alike and, moreover, her unrelenting effort to undo the fixed structures and grids that have been proposed as so essential by men. The author succeeds in doing so by sending her heroines on various quests in Canada, as has been portrayed. Kroetsch, quoted out of context, encapsulates van Herk’s fascination with geography as follows: “At times van Herk is her own landscape. [...] From chinook arch to Freud’s Vienna, from her beloved Trieste to Tofino, she wears landscape as a veil of knowing. She does not look at landscape. She performs it” (“Wagons,” 68).

As she infiltrates the prairie and northern landscape of Canada, van Herk undermines the mythological hero’s quest as well, and proves that women too have the nerve to undertake such an adventure. They are by no means “the totality of what can be known,” as Campbell (*Thousand*, 116) asserts. Aritha van Herk emphasizes that the “true measure of human beings is not what they know, but what they long for, what they strive to attain despite its inaccessibility” (“Desire,” 84-85). And van Herk’s heroines strive for the impossible:

My heroines are heroines of the open road, escapees, detainees, runaways, adventuresses, rogues. They refuse to be confined. Yes, they are unfaithful, dangerous, sometimes even repugnant. Yes, they seek to evade and pursue at the same time, and they are never contented with the stasis of a good house and a happy family. (Tihanyi, 45)

Hence, Bill Moyers’s astonished question, “Then heroes are not all men?” (Campbell, *Power*, 153) – can certainly be answered with “Oh, no. Not at all” – referring to van Herk’s heroines.

In the end, van Herk portrays female figures that are not satisfied with the roles classical mythology has imprisoned them in. There are still more female characters waiting to be liberated from the dust that has accumulated above and around them. Therefore, mythologies, “given their rich ambiguity and openness to re-interpretation, [...] are always,” as Elizabeth Grosz remarks, “capable of being read *otherwise*” (163). Aritha van Herk is one of those authors who makes the effort to do

so, and we are waiting for more Judiths and J.L.s to prove the impossible possible; and for more Arachnes and Dorcases to transgress boundaries through elusive disappearances.

10. Appendix

A Web of Mythologies

Interview with Aritha van Herk, Wednesday, March 19, 2008 2-4 pm

Mythology in General

K.F. Since I am interested in mythology in your fiction, let us begin to talk about myths. In your novels, we can find Greek, Biblical, First Nations and Egyptian mythology but there is also a mythologizing of the region, of landscape – everything seems to be fused and merged together, like a hybrid entity. But before we go *in medias res*, I would like to ask you how you define, or understand mythology in general?

A.vH. That's a very hard question. [laughs] Mythology to me is not just all the forerunners of the stories that we live with, but a kind of template for the way that we imagine the story of living. When we undertake our individual lives, whether that's in "real life," which I would put in quotes, or whether that's in a novelistic or a fictional life that I invent for my characters, there is a mythology that applies to how we build that life and there is a mythology that we find relevant to that. Now, that doesn't mean we have to know that but for me mythology is part of the texture of both everyday ritual and part of the history that accompanies us in our life.

And that is why it is, as you point out, such a *mélange*. Because I think there are so many different and competing mythologies now that are available to us, especially, because we live in a world with such a global awareness that we never, for example, would have been aware of the mythologies of the Muslim religion. But now it's becoming mixed in with all the other information that we have. So, I think that humans are interested in mythology as a version of story of how people made sense of the world and that we continue to be attracted to that in a contemporary way.

K.F. How do you employ this in your fiction?

A.vH. Well, it becomes very much a part of, first of all, how I locate my characters in their worlds. I think of the world as being global but I also think of the world as being very particular and by particular I don't mean fuzzy, I mean very specific. That each character that I invent occupies a certain kind of place, geography, region, a family, a family history and all of the mythologies that cluster those elements become then germane to them.

For example, Judith really has not much of an idea that her name is related to the name of Judith and Holofernes in the Bible. J.L. certainly doesn't have any idea that she is related to Jael, the woman who is so triumphant over the tribes. Dorcas, because she is a more thoughtful character, probably would be aware. And she is also of course aware of lineage in a very particular way because she is so aware of her Dutch family even though she has said to them, "I am not going back to Holland, I am staying here in Canada, because this is where I wanna stay." And the same with Arachne. I mean, she thinks of herself as Raki, she certainly doesn't think of herself as a Greek woman who is turned into a spider, because she makes Athena mad.

So, my employment of those names isn't just intended to be a superficial statement on the characters. It's not just a piece of clothing that I give them; it's intended to resonate with what happens to them, of course, but it's also intended to resonate with their awareness or their lack of awareness of who they are and where they are.

Arachne's working class background is so much a part of what she doesn't know. If you said to her, "You're on an odyssey," which is what she is in many ways, a version of odyssey, she would look at you and say, "What are you talking about," right. But that doesn't mean that the ordinary person, as we learned from James Joyce and *Ulysses*, cannot be on an odyssey.

So, I have literary allusions that play in, of course, the mythical allusions, the mythological allusions, and then the allusion that is the characters' own lives and their own awareness of the extent to which they are living within a mythology as every person does.

K.F. It seems that you are especially interested in the representation of women in mythology. You said that you wanted to give those women a voice; have them tell their story. Could you comment on this appropriation of myths a bit more, because you change these "old" stories...

A.vH. One of the concerns that I've had and I don't know if you found that paper on "Women and Faith: The Reach of the Imagination." In that I talk about the extent to which there are all kinds of women in the Bible, but they very seldom occupy central positions. Even though the myths that I have chosen – Judith, Jael, particularly, and Dorcas too – are part of biblical stories. It's just that the stories always seem to be about the men.

I mean, Judith is famous for killing Holophernes in this rather nasty, seductive way, okay. Jael is famous for driving a tent peg through Sisera's skull. And everyone talks about those two, even though one is in the Apocrypha, as being vicious characters in biblical mythology, which was very distressing to me. Because, in fact, Judith brings about a kind of rapprochement in terms of what happens to her people. Jael, because of her killing of Sisera, brings about the perfect period of peace. It says at the end of the story, "And the land had peace for 60 years," which is two generations or 40 years, for two generations of time. Now, I cannot imagine a woman in Israel or Palestine now who would not happily put a tent peg through somebody's skull in order to have peace for 40 years. Because it is that ineffable desire to bring to a halt the kind of horrible energy of combat and war and battle and displacement.

In my world of course they are not undergoing actual battles, their battles are interior, their battles are with their community, their battles are with a social structure that says that they can only do this and that this is what women are supposed to do. So I have displaced them into a contemporary, feminist context. But at the same time, it seems to me that the difficulties of identifying what is heroic for women then in mythological words and what is heroic now is very similar. So even though we might think that the position of women has become much more equalized, I am not so sure that's always the case. So it was useful for me to use that myth as an allusion.

Now, I am not sure if you have found the paper about the way that *Judith* echoes the myth of Circe. You know the myth of Circe when Odysseus stops on the island and he sends his men out and she turns them all into pigs. And he comes and says, "What have you done." And she says, "They became but what they were; I made them but what they were." They were pigs. So that's an undercurrent that's present in that novel as well. So, you have the myth of Circe, myths of transformation, Judith and Holophernes. They all, it seems to me, work together, because there's a texture of women's stories that is eminently malleable and interchangeable in quite a wonderful way. And that's of course what I am interested in, especially myths of transformation because all of these women work in elements of that.

Mythology of Landscape

K.F. We'll come back to transformation but let us go on to talk about mythology of the landscape. Canada as a country seems to lend itself perfectly for a creation of new mythologies, since it is such vast country and as you said, I quote, it is so "clear and clean of story." How do you integrate or employ Canada, Canada's landscape, or the mythology of Canada's landscape in your fiction-writing?

A.vH. Well, the greatest mythology about Canada is that it's a clear and clean story because as you can tell from having come to the classes it's not so clear and not so clean. That snow is sometimes pretty mucky. But there is a sense that because of the distance, there is room to accommodate stories. Whereas if you go to – I am just trying to think of the smallest possible country in Europe – Lichtenstein, can you imagine how the stories have built up on one another, they are so accreted that I think sometimes then there is not much room for stories to breathe.

Whereas in Canada, there is a profound sense... well, it is a nation of story tellers, especially in Alberta. Tall tales have gotten us much farther than anything else ever did. We are completely structured on tall tales. There is still a sense that there is room for more stories, that we can accommodate more stories. And maybe it isn't just space and landscape, maybe I am putting that on that space implies room but there seems to be a suggestion that there is room for multiplicities stories, disagreeing stories, the bricolage of many different tales of origin, many different tales of contact, many different stories. Because, of course, everyone who has come to Canada has brought their own stories, just as the people who have always been here have their own stories. I think the challenge to Canadians is to configure them so that they work together, because stories speak to one another as well and, I think, in very interesting ways.

K.F. You said that the "impact of landscape on artist or artist on landscape is unavoidable" and in Canadian literature we do find a preoccupation with landscape, with regions, with the West and the North. Now, the West was figured as a male terrain, but with your fiction you infiltrate this male West. Do you see yourself as being part of those contemporary Canadian female writers who create a new mythology in this region?

A.vH. I hope I do. It's true, the West, as often happens with the frontier, is largely, at first, I think, read as a male country. I don't know did I write a book called "The Kingdom of the Male Virgin," no a paper, – where I am making fun of it. These are the men of the West: Rudy Wiebe, Robert Kroetsch – these big guys – *Vertical Man/Horizontal World*, right. That becomes then its own challenge, because they have imported with them this kind of structural intensity which you see present in Rudy Wiebe's valorization of the railway's great black lines; which you see present in Laurence Ricou's *Vertical Man/Horizontal World*; which you see present in this architectural representations of the landscape like the grain elevators. If you go out in the country how they stick up because you're looking at a world that seems flat, it's not, of course, but it seems flat.

So the intervention of the female voice in that what was figured as a frontier discourse is quite unusual. Even though my argument is that the landscape is inevitably more aligned with female consciousness. But even that could play into the whole notion of settlement and ownership because as – do you know Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land* – because that suggests that if you turn the landscape

into a woman, she is available to be taken. Yet, I'd like to go one step farther from that and say that if the landscape can harbor women's stories then it offers a competing discourse to the male structures that would impose themselves on it. Those structures can be everything from the way the land is surveyed into the square miles out here, to the great black lines, to the grain elevators. All of them extremely phallic and extremely, I think, deconstructable for that very reason. They can be taken apart, they can be killed, they can be destroyed. The landscape will always win over a structure, always.

K.F. Because it's been here from the beginning.

A.vH. It's been there from the beginning but it's also, nature is a powerful force in Canada, as we've talked about in Margaret Atwood's survival theory. It is a powerful force. It is the result of powerful forces.

When you live in a world where the geological formation is so recent, I mean, these mountains are brand new, the alps are very old by comparison, these are baby mountains. But the plain itself, the great glaciations that shoved all of the soil down to where the east is. It's fascinating because you realize that you are very close to geological moments that make our archaeology much thinner. That does suggest that male structures can be dismantled very readily.

K.F. Let's go where very few people have gone before – the North. The North of Canada is a part of the country that no one really knows much about; very few people have been there and the unknown always excites or initiates a mythology – myths that explain; take away fear of the unknown.

You send your characters up North – J.L. is a bush cook in the Yukon territories; Arachne drives up North only to disappear off the map; Anna Karenina is venturing in *Places Far from Ellesmere*, and Dorcas is on her way to death, or, the North, as a metaphor of death. Can you explain your fascination with the North and why you use the North as a setting for your novels?

A.vH. Well, I think the first thing that happens to Canadians is that when we become aware that we are pseudo-Americans, living along the southern edge of the country because we are so close to the American border, we almost always decide to look for ourselves. One of the places where we look is North, because it is the last frontier. The West is no longer a frontier, the North is a frontier. And it is a frontier not in that it needs to be exploited, but because it is such a strange and wonderful landscape that it is very difficult to live there. And it seems like anywhere that is difficult for humans, is where they yearn to conquer it. But it is also so immense, so beautiful, and so poetic that it's very hard to escape, especially if you live in the West. Because to go North, you almost always have to come West and then go North, right.

So, for me that shaping of the North, which I lived and worked in quite a while – and it had a profound effect on my imagination. I wrote *Judith* when I was living in Yellowknife, I wrote parts of these other books when I was living way, way up at Resolute Bay. So, I really have spent time up there in ways that many Canadians have not. You begin to understand that there is a sensibility there that is both mythological and yet beyond human definition that is really about the reach of the imagination. If Canada has an imaginative grail of sorts, it is the North. And I mean there are very strange ways that we acknowledge that: we talk about being in the arctic; you notice how much we talk about snow; our valorization of ice hockey as

the national sport even though now it's become an utterly kind of suburban and civilized activity; and our sense of space again. I do not think that Canada would have that sense of space, of boundless space, if the margins of the country were exactly where we lived. But because we have above us hovering like a kind of geographical angel, this enormous territory that is full of promise, it's full of wealth, it's full of minerals that is full of richness in terms of ecological richness that I think it inhabits the imaginations of even Canadians who have never been there.

We're not even in the North, we're in the south, right. And then you keep going and then you'll hit the Boreal forest, which is northern Alberta. And then you keep going and you'll hit the near North, which is Yellowknife. And then you keep going and you'll hit far North, which is the North up to the coast. And then you keep going and you hit what is called the extreme arctic, which is the arctic island straight up to the north pole which isn't on any island; you can't even stand on it, you're usually standing on an ice float. Even the language of that: the near North, the far North, the extreme North, *the extreme North*. Just think, I mean, this is where Frankenstein goes, when he runs away, he runs toward the arctic, right. This is the land where beasts and humans who are perhaps shunned or rejected by every other place can go. So there is a kind of wonderful recognition that that possibility is always there. It's not nirvana, it's not warm and lovely and lush and hot, but it is the nirvana of the imagination.

K.F. The North is also said to be characterized by silence. Are you trying to give this North, this silence a voice through your characters?

A.vH. I don't think I could. The silence of the North is a silence that is rich with whispers and echoes. And it isn't a silence that harbors a kind of defensiveness or fear. But what I am trying to do is enter that silence so that I can find a voice for my words. Because I think words that are born in Canada are different than words that are born in the United States, or in Mexico, or in Holland, where my family came from, or in Norway. I think that words are related to landscape and geography and in that silence I can find a unique vocabulary of what I experience in this nation. So I see it as a suggestive, inspiring silence.

And it has its own voice and I can live within that or I can from that try to find a space for inspiration. You read the beginning piece in *In Visible Ink*, right, where I talk about the Inuits saying to me you speak good Inuktitut. It's just because you can do the "ch," right.

But again then my thinking that I can't just enter his language; you can't just enter or appropriate that language. But if you want to be there and listen it will give you I think oral experience, that is really quite amazing.

From *Mavericks*, to *Restlessness*, and Back to the Roots

K.F. Since we have been talking about the landscape and the country let us go from here and move chronologically backwards. With *Mavericks*, a non-fiction book about the history of Alberta you weave mythological aspects with history – similar techniques can also be seen in *The Tent Peg*, and *No Fixed Address*.

There is this fusion of fact and fiction; of history and mystery; of truth and myth; of the witnessed and the invented; of realism and post-modernism – and the sensation

that one can never tell apart the one from the other. Can you elaborate on this web or mixture of mythology, fiction, and history?

A.vH. Well, your use of the metaphor of the web is perfect. And I think that I was never so happy as that moment where I have Lanie sitting in her chair watching the spider weaving its web. [laughs] Because, I think that the story is exactly that. It's a web of history, geography, human narrative, detail, mythology, metaphor. And you can't tell the story, for example, of Alberta without talking about the history, but also talking about the mythology, talking about the earliest writing, the stone writings, as well as the contemporary writings. Alberta wouldn't be the same place without that web all of which has shaped it just as much as the geography, and the economics, and the politics have.

In the same way, I see each story not as linear – this happens and then this happens – I see it as a kind of web that turns and turns on itself. But that is in many ways endless. So that there is never a closure to the mythology; it is continually reinventing itself, or looking at itself, or seeing in a new story a possibility for a direction. So, yeah, the idea of the web is why that works.

Included in all of these books [points to her novels] are politics, agriculture, globalization. *Restlessness* is very much a book about how easy it is for us to move from one part of the world to the other and yet never to be at home. So, there is a sense, and I do have very restless women in these books, I acknowledge that quite freely. They are all in search of a story even at the same time as they are building the story, where they will live.

K.F. Talking about *Restlessness*. *Restlessness* seems to defy all categorization; it poses more questions than answers; and one can never be sure whether Dorcas is talking about death or love; about her assassin or her lover. References to sex and death appear to be interchangeable, even though Dorcas asserts towards the end that “there is no similarity between sex and death” only to contradict herself a few lines later: “of course, the paths of lovers and killers are remarkably alike.” How would describe or explain these inherent contradictions within your novel?

A.vH. I don't think I was the one who said sex and death are the same. Who was it? It was some famous critic. Oh I'm sure it was somebody. Well it's been repeated many times since. Well, and of course the whole metaphor of the *petite mort*, the orgasm is the same as death is true.

When I brought out that book I had a very funny experience. She was a famous CBC book reviewer who interviewed me, who said to me. “You know I really related this book. If you find the perfect lover you might as well have him kill you because you'll never find another one.” [laughs] Of course I just started laughing because it was so literal an answer but indeed, it seems to me that in extreme situations – and both the experience of death and the experience of love are fairly extreme experiences between which we have many, kind of, more mundane meadows. And we search in many ways for the perfect lover, which is the same as the perfect death. We all think we're gonna die happily in our sleep I mean not that we're gonna die in our car or something. But...

That representation of Derrick Atman – he is the kind of man that you would want to be with you at the end of your life but that also means that the killer/lover dichotomy becomes merged. Because indeed he is both and you are exactly right, I am talking about both of them. Dorcas's quest for death is very much a quest for love. Even

though it seems as if she has people who love her but that is not the same as the quest for fulfillment of love.

The dear one who is so patient; he is a doctor; he is a person who helps people steer away from death and yet he cannot help her. Because her determination to encounter love is very different, is much more – I think it's more demanding, which goes to show that we can be loved and yet not necessarily know love. That's a complex part of the novel, because it does raise a lot of questions about: how do we differentiate love; how do we define home. I think home and love are very tightly linked together. Our home is what teaches us what love is about, and that we look always to recreate what we imagine the ideal home would be. And here she has been looking for home all over the world and discovers that home is where she came from, where she started, not where she expected to end up. So, her discoveries are quite discomfoting. It's a very discomfoting novel and it's intended to be because it is a response to the way – and it is even more now than when I finished the book – that we are living in a world, where we can't even focus for one minute. The phone is ringing, or we're answering this and working on our BlackBerrys. Our sense of a continuum and of any kind of sort of peace is very much interrupted and I think that is going to have a terrible effect on our ability to love. I really do and on our ability to know love, because we're living in such a terrible restless urgent age that we can't know ourselves.

One of the quests in the novel is very much for Dorcas to know herself. And she can go all over the world and she gets all kinds of clues in every place whether it's the clown in Las Vegas, or the strange experience in the pyramids which is of course a direct gesture toward *Passage to India*. But she still can't quite put the pieces together until she brings them all to that hotel room and the killer who says to her, "But, look at your life," and he holds up for her a kind of Lacanian mirror. Of course there is a real double which suggests the Lacanian mirror as well. Now you know this, I'm sure, better than I do. And it was really fascinating for me to work on this because I think our contemporary *malaise* is restlessness. I think we really are gonna have to grapple with them.

K.F. You also use the word Portmanteau. Is that also a kind of hint for this two words in one - Love and Death.

A.vH. Yes. Absolutely. Good for you. You're a good critic. [laughs]

K.F. In a review, Karen Press, says, and I quote, that "many things in this book give [her] the sneaking suspicion you [van Herk] are making fun of [her]: the grand themes, flirtations with allegory, an undeveloped lesbian encounter, [...], the use of the words 'Canadian identity' [...] and then the reference to eating Alberta beef for her last meal." And she ends with "Oh, Aritha! Is nothing sacred?" So, is nothing sacred in writing fiction?

A.vH. [laughs] No, nothing is sacred. Fiction is a world of play; fiction is a world of invention; fiction is a world of the carnivalesque, where you can put on a mask and you can pretend to be something you are not or someone you are not; fiction is a world where we can ask hard questions; fiction is a world where people can suffer, in ways that we would never allow them to suffer if we could help it in real life; and fiction is a world where people can experience happiness that perhaps we can't. So, the notion of the story as a place where we can explore difficult questions is, I think,

really important. It's a way of transcending that base reality that insists that we have to get up and brush our teeth and go to school. Of course, these are rituals that we learn to manage and we learn to do them and we become socialized human beings. But, nevertheless, in the world of fiction there is an opportunity to break those rules and to laugh at ourselves for our reliance on them. I think that that's really key to every one of my characters: whether it's a women raising pigs, or a woman selling underwear, or a woman cooking for a bunch of guys and talking to bears, or a woman traveling all over the world as a courier. These women are saying, "You do not have to be this mousy little heroine who gets up and makes pancakes. You can ask big questions."

It probably goes back to a very traumatic moment I had as a student where a professor told me that women could never write about great themes. I think I wrote about that. He said, "Men write about war and peace but women, they just write about their viscera." Well, there have been many theories of the body that have been addressed and developed since then but in fact what else do we have but the body. These bodies that we live in, and sometimes we can put them on a plane and fly to Venice and sometimes we just have to live within this body and maybe just what Judith does: getting up every morning and going and shoveling out the manure from the pens. There is a body in there and at the same time of course you have to be able to laugh at that body. If you take that body too seriously you become a hypochondriac, right, and you don't wanna do that.

But that's all coded in there as well. Okay, if women write out of their viscera then I write out of my viscera and I make fun of this abstract grand notion of the world that it seems that the master-narrative insists we be engaged in. I am very mistrustful of master-narratives.

K.F. That's why you use and appropriate mythology as well...

A.vH. And it isn't that women aren't present in that master-narrative. But they are there as bit parts, right. Oh, they are here to, you know, do a dance and chop of a head or two. But then we'll get rid of them because they are all bad girls. Well, hello, they too can bring down kings and princes – and not just as bit parts.

K.F. When looking at *Judith*, *The Tent Peg*, *No Fixed Address*, and *Restlessness*, you started out in the rural area, moved to the Yukon, then into small cities in Canada's western regions, and with *Restlessness* you reached the city, Calgary. Now, Graham Huggan (in *Territorial Disputes*) argues that women writers in Canada and Australia, and I quote, have "rallied against the strictures of patriarchal representation [...] through a shift of emphasis in their writing from rural settings in which women have traditionally played a subordinate role, to urban locations, in which the city is envisaged both as a site of radical instability and as an energizing force in the representation of female sexuality." Can you see Dorcas as one of those characters in this urban location?

A.vH. Very much. That's a really good encapsulation. He is a good critic. And it's true too in *No Fixed Address*, where she is the bus driver, this job that she kind of hates.

That is actually true, because the urban space is contradictorily both one of tremendous freedom for women and yet there is *angst*, isn't there, because of the way that we perceive our contact with a lot of different people as possibly dangerous.

Women are always warned that they shouldn't be in the dangerous parts of town and in fact if there are a lot of women there, they are safe, because they are there. It's that occupation of a space. But it does suggest contact and interesting freedom to interact with different people. It also suggests an opportunity for the displacement of the woman's role so that the woman who can drive a bus and be a courier and rent a hotel room, is a woman with a car, a mobile woman. And a mobile woman is a woman who is inevitably more dangerous than a woman who is static. That's very clear, I think you're quite right, it's clearly traced in the novels.

K.F. Let us now take a closer look at your female heroines. I see Judith and J.L. as allies, on the one hand as well as Arachne and Dorcas, on the other hand. Judith and J.L. are trying to escape in order to find something fixed in their lives again – Judith more so than J.L. But then Arachne and Dorcas move from one foreign territory to the next, in search for some something, however, they cannot pin down what this something is. Ultimately, they only long for disappearance – either off the map, or out of this life. "Disappearance," you say and I quote this, "is the true borderless destination, one without identity or future, without a past and without a traceable genealogy" – a mythological notion all over again. Is disappearance the ultimate ending in 21st century Canadian fiction, and if so, why, and why Dorcas, and why Arachne?

A.vH. I love disappearance, partly because I see disappearance as being utterly empowering. You know how many times you've been in a room and, I do it all the time, you say something and then, "Oh my God, if I could just disappear." If you had control over your own disappearance, you would actually have an enormous amount of power.

Do you know the story "Waiting for the Rodeo" – where she works for the magician. When she figures out how he made her disappear then she has won her power back from him. If you're the magician's assistant, you're always the girl that gets sawn in half right, but if you could make yourself disappear, it's not him making you disappear, then you have accrued. It's from "Leda and the Swan": "Did she put on his knowledge with his power/ Before the indifferent beak could let her drop." It's a great poem and I kind of butchered it, but that's ok. But that's the point. If you can put on the knowledge and the power of the man who is pulling the strings; or the gods who are pulling the strings, or the circumstances that are pulling the strings. For me that ultimate act is one of disappearance of choosing to be where you want to be and when you want to be there.

You're quite right, Judith decides she is going to leave. So, for her the act of leaving is sufficient. She goes and she does something completely different from what she has done in the city. She takes over a farm and effectively becomes an agricultural business woman, which is quite different from becoming a secretary in an office. And J.L. too, she goes from the city to a remote camp in order to find out what she wants to do, and when she says, "I'm gonna be a helicopter pilot," she too is interested in mobility, right.

But it is in essence the way that these women can see themselves managing to transgress all the borders and the boundaries – which means driving off the map for Arachne, which means driving off the map of life for Dorcas. Although I don't think she is dead, but that's my reading of the book I wrote. [laughs] So, disappearance becomes a kind of enabling act for them to choose how they will make themselves, how they gain agency over their lives, how they gain agency over their futures. I

confess, I continue to be fascinated with disappearance and I'm probably going to be writing more books about it because I see it as such an interesting trope.

You know, sorry this is a total digression. You know the number of people who were in the World Trade Center at 9/11 and no trace has showed up. There are quite a few, not that many but a couple. You could see that they thought, "Oh I'm supposed to be in that building and that building came down but I'm alive but I'll disappear" – who used the occasion to disappear.

K.F. Is that true?

A.vH. There are quite a few they haven't found a trace of. So, they don't know, right. I mean that's a perfect opportunity but you also have to be a person who would be ready and who would want to take advantage of that which implies a certain kind of dual character – not necessarily a very nice character, because of course, your family would be bereft, if you have a family. It's a fascinating trope to me and I have been following this, the number of people who disappear themselves. And then of course there is the terrible act of political disappearance, people who are disappeared by the state.

So I'm just interested in the extent to which we rely so much on our appearance to be a part of our identities and that our existence is so coded to us being there.

K.F. Being somewhere...

A.vH. Yeah, and how you relate that as a fiction writer to women for whom identities are always malleable. We have to be more malleable than men. Still, no matter what they say about the 21st century. And we have to be willing to take advantage of moments when they occur to us, so I'm fascinated with it.

It's not that I wanna disappear. But I love putting my characters in situations where they have the choice. Arachne's disappearing into the North, off the map, is a kind of homage to the North, too. For years, that's where people went when they wanted to live an alternative life. It's quite a bit harder now, because there are more people. And the same with Dorcas, thinking, "I can just erase myself and disappear," and of course she can't. You can't completely leave no trace.

I am really interested in it. And then I think of the things that have disappeared. Dial telephones. Start thinking about what has disappeared. That of course then takes you back to the whole issue of archaeology. How do we find out our relationship to the greater story, to the greater mythology. There is an archaeology of story and an archaeology of things, as Foucault tells us.

K.F. It's a whole circle again... Now, Dorcas and Arachne appear as very similar characters to me. For a long time I thought Dorcas is Arachne coming back but then she is wearing underwear, so it can't be her.

A.vH. [laughs] Maybe she's taken it up. Maybe she likes it. [laughs]

K.F. Let me read a quote from each novel. "Arachne travels to travel. Her only paradox is arriving somewhere, her only solution is to leave for somewhere else" (*NFA*, 132-33). Dorcas says: "But I'm a picara too, traveling for the sheer hunger of movement [...] While they see themselves as unmaskers of a hypocritical world, they

also know themselves to be cowards with a failed cause, able only to pursue their own pursuit.” (R, 92-93).

Arachne is traveling to travel, Dorcas is pursuing her own pursuit. So, did you fashion Dorcas after Arachne?

A.vH. Very much so, I mean it’s obvious to you and you’re a really good reader. I think it is a more contemporaneous version. First of all, she is doing what is a contemporary job. There are couriers who carry important documents, organs. This is what I discovered. Do you know that if someone dies that has a kidney and it is supposed to be given to a transplanted person – that organ must be carried by a person, because it’s precious cargo. So, the real human couriers of the world are fascinating. Because there is this sense that you can’t quite trust machines. We know you can’t trust the Canada Post, right. [laughs] So, there is the sense that human still has to be the one who carries the most important part of whatever. DNA is carried by humans, right. It’s fascinating to me.

The traveling that the two of them do – Arachne is of course much more of a rogue. Arachne is interested in getting other people into trouble as much as she gets herself into trouble; whereas Dorcas is more trying to flee herself, trying to evade her own restlessness.

Dorcas is an interesting character in the critics. She has been quite pathologized. This book has been read by doctors who said to me, “I could just give her a prescription for Prozac and she would be fine.” Well, then I wouldn’t have a novel, would I. [laughs] But there is a sense that her anxiety is a manifestation of depression. Now, I don’t buy that. She is not a depressed character. She is just a contemporary character in the sense that we are disaffected; we are restless; we do stay home; we are constantly interrupted. And we don’t know what love or home is and one of the big contemporary quests for us is that: what is love and what is home, where is love and where is home. I don’t have any answer but I can sure ask the question.

K.F. In *No Fixed Address* and *Restlessness*, you also use the symbol of the hand. In *No Fixed Address* it is Basilisk who is playing the piano and Arachne looks at his hands; Joseph shows his hands to her, palms up. In *Restlessness*, Derrick Atman again performs this gesture of showing his hands, palms up. And also, he is wearing gloves because of this disease.

A.vH. Because he has Dupuytren’s, where he has this contracture and he can’t extend his fingers. And it happens more to men than to women. But also, did you notice and this surprised me, that book of juvenilia I gave you, the really early stories, which is about hands. I couldn’t believe it. I looked at it and thought I must be obsessed. Have a look at it. I think it’s called “Late Hands.”

You know what you are always surprised by your own repetitiveness. Because you think why are all my women like this and then somebody smart like you comes along and says, “You did this and you did this,” and I am like, I guess I did, wow. It’s fascinating to me because I think every writer has a certain set of metaphors that they are quite interested in, and that they continue to be interested in and that show up at different points in their writing, in different ways, but developed.

One of the parts, when we were going through “Mavericks,” I didn’t really point it out to you, but what to me some of the most touching parts are the suitcases.

Suitcases and what do suitcases mean – traveling. Valises. Portmanteau. What do you call them?

K.F. Koffer

A.vH. Koffer, yeah.

K.F. Alright, let us look at *Judith*, *The Tent Peg*, and *No Fixed Address*. All three characters seem to undergo some kind of transformation that we have been talking about before. Also, in all these novels animals play an important role. Judith is being transformed by pigs; J.L. is being transformed by the landscape and the she-bear and she herself acts as transformer; Arachne is herself a personified transformation of the spider. And...

A.vH. There is a bear in *No Fixed Address* too. [laughs]

K.F. Oh, yes. It's Marian Engel's bear coming back.

A.vH. I couldn't resist. [laughs]

K.F. But in *Restlessness* I couldn't find any animals, though.

A.vH. No, no animals.

K.F. So let's just do these three novels then. Could you comment on this importance of transformation via magical powers, via animals, via mythology?

A.vH. That's very much an homage to Canadian mythology. For First Nations people the animal offers you the power of transformation and when you get your animal spirit or your animal totem that that is what confers on you the powers that you will have as an adult. It is very much an homage to that part of my world, which – I am not First Nations, but it still colors the way we read.

The pigs. When I wanted to make Judith a farm-person, farm-worker, I don't wanna call her a farm-wife because she is not a wife – I wanted her to be raising the most unlikely animals and all of the stuff with Odysseus, and Circe, and the pigs was just marvelous. Because in fact pigs are very, very smart animals. They are smart; they have similar brains to humans; they have recognition abilities that are quite interesting. And of course in terms of not just the transformation, the turning men into pigs – they just were comic as well. Here's this woman with a bunch of pigs. If you are up to your neck in something awful, it might as well be pig shit. So the pigs are her totem in that particular text.

In *The Tent Peg* they are really key because you cannot go up North without impinging on some animal territory. For her, it is the grizzly bear, the bear which is so iconic for Canadian literature, so iconic for Canada. I don't, I do know why our symbol is the beaver, because of the fur-trade but in fact the most magnificent animals that we are home to are bears, whether they be black bears, grizzly bears, or polar bears. Because we see them as powerful animals, they are very mythologically connected, and they are so strong, they are so overwhelming, they are so - humans are puny compared to them and I wanted to work with that in a very precise way.

I do confess that I very much loved Marian Engel's novel. I very much loved Marian Engel, when she was alive. She was a tremendous help to me when I had a lot of male mentors, but she was really a female mentor. She continues to be a kind of presence in my life. Every once in a while I'll dream about her, something that happened with her. Oddly she didn't have a terribly successful writing life aside from that novel. Her other novels met with relative interest but she was never wildly successful. But she was a really wise woman inside that and she gave that gift to me, in a way that was really, really wonderful.

And then of course in *No Fixed Address* the spider that is associated with rogues. If you read *Don Quixote* or any of the picaresque novels. Was it Guzmán who says, "Spiders are like rogues. They eat one another, when there is nothing else to eat." And Lazarillo de Tormes, he grows up in a room and it's hung by spider webs. So there's a constant association of the picaresque with the spider. And the spider as a symbol of carrying her home on her back was interesting to me. So, although there are no animals in *Restlessness* in a sense she is still a kind of spider figure.

I have got the brief moment of the bear in there [in *No Fixed Address*] as well. When she picks up the woman and the woman has, she thinks it's a dog, and it's a bear. And the bear snores...

K.F. So, let us talk about the final bear-scene in *The Tent Peg*, when J.L. has staked her claims and the she-bear appears. Thompson says, "[T]he bear rises, monstrous, unforgiving, filling the frame of the sky between the mountain slopes, her silhouette like a huge, ragged omen against the light" (TP, 202). Now, Hartmut Lutz sees this scene as a positive one, a scene of success, whereas I.S. MacLaren asks himself if the act of staking a claim in the unmapped land costs J.L. When she is praying as the helicopter lifts away, is she apologizing? How are we to read this scene?

A.vH. I see it as positive that the bear is a kind of blessing. Again the animal totem appears to you at a moment that gives you power. It is a very interesting difference between Hartmut Lutz who knows First Nations mythology well. He is very nice and very smart. Whereas Ian MacLaren is an eco, I call him an eco-terrorist. But he is kind of, 'What are these women doing up North,' kind of "Good question," right. So he would see that as a negative reading, I think that would be his bent. And for me, it's interesting; let me look at that... Here it is: "the bear rises [...] She fills our eyes and then, just as quickly, drops to all fours and is gone, once more the ridge between the mountains swept empty" (TP, 202).

She's praying to the bear not for anything. She's praying to the bear. For women, that kind of totemic animal mythology I think is a much more satisfying religious inspiration than funny gods that are telling us what we can't do. I hope that doesn't shock your catholic upbringing. [both laugh] She's had a conversation with the bear. It's a kind of mythological figure of power to her.

Outlook

K.F. Now that we have been talking about past projects would you give us an insight of some of your future projects? Your characters were moving from a fixed address in *Judith*; to a temporarily fixed one in *The Tent Peg*; to a circular motion only to drive off the map at the end of *No Fixed Address*, to a supposedly final departure in *Restlessness*. What is next in store for us –back to the prairies?

A.vH. I think actually you're quite right, I am moving in a strange circle. I am probably going to work on... who knows what the next book will be. I am always working on three at once. I always have eccentric stories and you read the "Death in Vienna"-story which I found so much fun to write. So that's a traveling story; that fits into the whole travel mythology that I continue to play with because I am fascinated with it.

One of the great – and we are living in a very lucky time – advantages of being in this world at this time is that we can travel everywhere: more than our grandmothers could, because they couldn't move so easily and less than our grandchildren will be able to, although I don't have children, but because they won't be able to afford the fuel. So we are living in this time when we are probably more mobile than anyone will ever be. We can afford to go, we are able to go, we have the technology. Maybe I'm predicting the future wrong and people will be able to travel but I can see a future where traveling will become almost impossible, unless you are extremely wealthy. So in this sense, this is a moment of mobility for women and they talk about women's mobility as being economic. But I think it's a moment where we can see and know and change the world and I love that. I love that idea. So yes, the world is always there and I am always writing stories about the world.

But I think you are quite right that I am returning to Alberta. All the work I did on the history and on the exhibition gave me some tremendous stories. They are twiggling me to do more with them and they are suggesting that the global is right in the local. I don't need to travel as far a field but that it's present there. So I am doing both as a matter of fact.

And then I'm working on a huge project which will probably be a non-fiction book. We've been talking about that a little bit. This goes back to women and work: You will notice that all of these books in some way address women and work: what do women do, how do women have to work to get by. The work that women have done is its own amazing mythology that we don't even have scratched the surface of. To some extent there is now, with the fetishization of cooking and the way you have celebrity chefs, of course they are all men. But nevertheless it's a kind of incredible recognition of the mythology of food: people going on food vacation. So, that's were you see that that has infected the world.

To me, laundry is the same because it's a about cleanliness, about keeping away disease, about ritual cleanliness. Also, its partner is water and water is what we are going to have to begin to take care of in the future. It is the resource that we have been most profligate with. And it is the resource that we do not know what we will do without. They are all tied together in an interesting way. Women were the ones who fetched water, women were the ones who washed clothes with water, washed kids with water. Women and water is a very precise accommodation. So that's what that book is about. But I am always interested in women's work.

When I was in Germany, I went to see a bell factory, it was owned by a woman and they made bells. I mean, how archaic is that? They made bells for churches. And you think, my god, these are ancient things and in contemporary terms there now are women who run vineyards and women who run bell-factories and women who run... but it's fascinating to me how women work and the work of women is something that we haven't quite figured out how valuable it is.

And laundry, it's that quotidian activity. Everybody has to do it. I'm sure that 90 percent of the time it's done by women. Yet it's a satisfying activity because once you've done it, you actually have a result, a pile of clean clothes. Whereas, I can

work on 300 reports and feel like I am never gonna be finished. It's interesting to me and it's also about clothing. And you can tell I am quite interested in clothing: how we dress or don't dress ourselves; what do clothes mean and what freedom do they confer or not. It's fascinating to me. The stuff I found is wonderful. Domestic metaphors.

K.F. Allow me one final question. It's actually Sky Lee's character Hermia who poses this question: Would you rather live a great novel or write one?

A.vH. [laughs] Both, both, I want it all. I want it all. It's a great question and that's a great book. It's a terrific book. [*A Student of Weather*] Would you rather live a great novel or write a great one. Well, the trick is to live a great novel first and then write one. [laughs] What would you rather do?

K.F. I would rather live one and have someone write about it.

A.vH. Fair enough.

K.F. Thank you so much.

A.vH. Katrin, it's been a pleasure.

11. References

- Alcott, Louisa May. *Little Women*. 1868. London: Penguin Popular Classic, 1994.
- Alter, Robert. *Rogue's Progress: Studies in the Picaresque Novel*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1964.
- Atwood, Margaret. "Circe/Mud Poems." *You are Happy*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1974. 45-70.
- , *Penelopiad: The Myth of Penelope and Odysseus*. Edinburgh: Canongate, 2005.
- Augustine, Jane. "Character and Poetry in the City." *City Images: Perspectives from Literature, Philosophy, and Film*. Ed. Mary Ann Caws. New York: Gordon and Breach, 1991. 73-86.
- Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. Trans. Annette Lavers. New York: Hill and Wang, 1972.
- Batt, Sharon. "Aritha van Herk: Her Time and Place." *Branching Out* 5.2 (1978): 26-29.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Trans. and Ed. H. M. Parshley. London: Pan Books, 1988.
- Becker, Susanne. *Gothic Forms of Feminine Fictions*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1999.
- Beeler, Karin E. Introduction. *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey*. Red Deer: Red Deer College Press, 1998. i-iv.
- , "Shifting Form: An Interview with Aritha van Herk." *Canadian Literature* 157 (Summer 1998): 80-96.
- Bell, Robert E. *Women of Classical Mythology: A Biographical Dictionary*. Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 1992.
- Benvenuto, Bice, and Roger Kennedy. *The Works of Jacques Lacan: An Introduction*. London: Free Association Books, 1986.
- Beran, Carol L. "Images of Women's Power in Contemporary Canadian Fiction by Women." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 15.2 (1990): 55-76.
- The New English Bible: The Apocrypha*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1970.
- The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testament: Authorized King James Version. Self-pronouncing Edition*. Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1964.

- Bishop, Elizabeth, ed. "The Map." *The Complete Poems 1927-1979*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983. 3.
- Blaber, Ronald, and Marvin Gilman. *Roguary: The Picaresque Tradition in Australian, Canadian and Indian Fiction*. Springwood, NSW: Butterfly Books, 1990.
- Bloomberg, Kristin M. Mapel. *Tracing Arachne's Web: Myth and Feminist Fiction*. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2001.
- Blumenberg, Hans. *Arbeit am Mythos*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979.
- Boland, Viga. "... such an excellent novel." Rev. of *Judith*, by Aritha van Herk. *Canadian Author and Bookman* 54.3 (1979, Issue 2): 34-35.
- Bone, Robert M. *The Regional Geography of Canada*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005.
- Bowering, Thea. "Untitled." Rev. of *Restlessness*, by Aritha van Herk. *The New Reader* 4.2 (Spring 1999): 26-28.
- Brown, W.P. "Book of Judith." *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*. A-J. Ed. John H. Hayes. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999. 647-50.
- Budde, Robert. "The Aesthetics of Annihilation: The Restless Text and the Reader as Assassin in Aritha van Herk's *Restlessness*." *Aritha van Herk: Essays on Her Works*. Ed. Christl Verduyn. Toronto: Guernica, 2001. 45-59.
- Bulfinch, Thomas. *Bulfinch's Mythology: The Age of Fable or Stories of Gods and Heroes*. 1855. 07 April 2008
<<http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/bulf/bulf35.htm>>.
- Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1968.
- . *The Power of Myth*. Ed. Bill Moyers and Betty Sue Flowers. New York: Doubleday, 1991.
- Carrera Suárez, Isabel. "Caprice and No Fixed Address: Playing with Gender and Genre." *Kunapipi: Special Issue: Postcolonial Women's Writing* 16.1 (1994): 432-39.
- . "Professions for Women: Un/Classified Stories by Aritha van Herk." *Aritha van Herk: Essays on Her Works*. Ed. Christl Verduyn Toronto: Guernica, 2001. 87-108.
- Cixous Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." Trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. *Signs* 1.4 (Summer 1976): 875-93.
- Clayton, Cherry. "'Restless Western Women': Aritha van Herk Interviewed by Cherry Clayton." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 35.1 (2000): 163-78.

- Clemence, Verne. "Ironic van Herk Presses Beyond Conventions." Rev. of *Restlessness*, by Aritha van Herk. *The Star Phoenix* (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan) 06 February, 1999: C 16.
- Crosby, Ann. "Neither Here Nor There." Rev. of *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey*, by Aritha van Herk. *Books in Canada* 15.6 (August/September 1986): 15-16.
- Darias-Beautell, Eva. *Graphies and Grafts: (Con)texts and (Inter)texts in the Fiction of Four Contemporary Canadian Women*. Wien: Lang, 2001.
- Davidson, Arnold E. *Coyote Country: Fictions of the Canadian West*. Durham: Duke UP, 1994.
- De Jon, Irene J.F. *A Narratological Commentary on the Odyssey*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. London: Athlone Press, 1988.
- Deussen, P. "Atman." *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*. Vol. II. Ed. James Hastings. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994. 195-97.
- Dudek, Debra. "'No Map for Longing': The Deceptive Fetish in *No Fixed Address*." *Open Letter* 10.2 (Spring 1998): 31-38.
- Duffy, Carol Ann. "Eurydice." *The World's Wife: Poems*. London: Picador, 1999. 58-62.
- Duncker, Patricia. *Sisters and Strangers: An Introduction to Contemporary Feminist Fiction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.
- DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985.
- Fairbanks, Carol. *Prairie Women: Images in American and Canadian Fiction*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1986.
- Fennesz, Katrin M. "Personal Interview with Aritha van Herk: A Web of Mythologies." 19 March 2008. 120-34.
- Foley, Helene P., ed. *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.
- , "Of Other Spaces." Trans. Jay Miskowiec. *Diacritics: A Review of Contemporary Criticism* 16.1 (Spring 1986): 22-27.

- French, William. "The highlight of this prize winning Judith-and-the-pigs novel is enough to make a man cross his legs." Rev. of *Judith*, by Aritha van Herk. *Globe and Mail* (Toronto) 07 October 1978.
- Frisk, Hjalmar. *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. A-Ko. Heidelberg: Winter, 1960.
- . *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Kr-Ö [Omega]. Heidelberg: Winter, 1970.
- Frye, Northrop. "Canadian and Colonial Painting." *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination*. Toronto: Anansi, 1971. 199-202.
- . "Conclusion to a *Literary History of Canada*." *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination*. Toronto: Anansi, 1971. 213-51.
- . "The *Koine* of Myth: Myth as a Universally Intelligible Language." *Myth and Metaphor: Selected Essays 1974-1988*. Ed. Robert D. Denham. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1990. 3-17.
- Funke, Felicitas. "Stepping over Boundaries: Untersuchungen zum Phänomen der Grenzen überschreitenden Frau im Romanwerk der kanadischen Autorin Aritha van Herk." Hamburg, Master-Thesis, 1990.
- Godard, Barbara. "Untitled." Rev. of *Lunatic Villas* by Marian Engel; *The Charcoal Burners* by Susan Musgrave; *The Tent Peg* by Aritha Herk." *The Fiddlehead* 133 (April 1982): 90-95.
- Goldman, Marlene. "Earth-Quaking the Kingdom of the Male Virgin: A Deleuzian Analysis of Aritha van Herk's 'No Fixed Address' and 'Places Far From Ellesmere'." *Canadian Literature* 137 (Summer 1993): 21-38.
- . "Go North Young Woman: Representations of the Arctic in the Writings of Aritha van Herk." *Echoing Silence: Essays on Arctic Narrative*. Ed. John Moss. Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 1997. 153-62.
- . *Paths of Desire: Images of Exploration and Mapping in Canadian Women's Writing*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1997.
- Goodman, Martin. "Introduction to the Apocrypha." *The Oxford Bible Commentary*. Ed. John Barton and John Muddiman. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. 617-26.
- Grace, Sherrill E. *Canada and the Idea of North*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2002.
- . "The Canadian North." *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada*. Ed. William H. New. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2002. 818-22.
- . "Comparing Mythologies: Ideas of West and North." *Borderlands: Essays in Canadian-American Relations*. Ed. Robert Lecker. Toronto: ECW Press, 1991. 243-62.

- . "Gendering Northern Narrative." *Echoing Silence: Essays on Arctic Narrative*. Ed. John Moss. Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 1997. 163-81.
- . "Representing North (or, Greetings from Nelvana)." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 59 (Fall 1996). 07 March 2008, from CBCA Reference database. <<http://ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca:2048/login?url=http://proquest.umi.com/pqdw eb?did=631589411&sid=1&Fmt=3&clientId=12303&RQT=309&VName=P QD>>.
- Gronemeyer, Marianne. *Das Leben als letzte Gelegenheit: Sicherheitsbedürfnisse und Zeitknappheit*. Darmstadt: Primus, 1996.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1989.
- Grove, Frederick P. *In Search of Myself*. 1947. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974.
- Gubar, Susan. "Mother, Maiden and the Marriage of Death: Women Writers and an Ancient Myth." *Women's Studies* 6.3 (1979): 301-15.
- Gunn Allen, Paula. *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1991.
- Hamelin, Louis Edmond. *Canadian Nordicity: It's Your North, Too*. Trans. William Barr. Montreal: Harvest House, 1979.
- Harrison, Dick. *Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction*. Edmonton: U of Alberta P, 1977.
- Harry, Margaret. "Aritha van Herk's Third Novel." Rev. of *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey*, by Aritha van Herk. *Dartmouth This Week* October 16, 1986.
- Hayes, Elizabeth T. "The Persephone Myth in Western Literature." *Images of Persephone: Feminist Readings in Western Literature*. Ed. Elizabeth T. Hayes. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 1994. 1-19.
- Homer. *The Odyssey: A Verse Translation, Backgrounds, Criticism*. Trans. and Ed. Albert Cook. New York: Norton, 1993.
- Howells, Coral Ann. "No Transcendental Image: Canadianness in Contemporary Women's Fictions in English." *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 6.1 (1991): 110-17.
- Huggan, Graham. *Territorial Disputes: Maps and Mapping Strategies in Contemporary Canadian and Australian Fiction*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1994.

- Hulan, Renée. "‘A Brave Boy’s Story for Brave Boys’: Adventure Narrative Engendering." *Echoing Silence: Essays on Arctic Narrative*. Ed. John Moss. Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 1997. 183-90.
- . *Northern Experience and the Myths of Canadian Culture*. Montreal: MacGill-Queen’s U P, 2002.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*. Toronto: Oxford U P, 1988.
- . *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- . "Untitled." Rev. of *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey*, by Aritha van Herk. *Dandelion* V 15.1 (1988): 106-09.
- Iannucci, Susan. "The Place of Myth in Literature." *Waves* 7.2 (Winter 1979): 65-67.
- Irigaray, Luce. *Thinking the Difference: For a Peaceful Revolution*. Trans. Karin Montin. London: Athlone Press, 1994.
- . "Veiled Lips." Trans. Sara Speidel. *Feminist Interpretations of Friedrich Nietzsche*. Ed. Kelly Oliver and Marilyn Pearsall. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 1998. 81-118.
- Jerve, Gyrid. "Aritha van Herk: Interview." *Kunapipi* 8.3 (1986): 68-76.
- Johnson, Buffie. *Lady of the Beasts: Ancient Images of the Goddess and Her Sacred Animals*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988.
- Jones, Dorothy. "‘The Centrique Part’: Theme and Image in Aritha van Herk’s Novel *The Tent Peg*." *Kunapipi* 5.2 (1983): 70-78.
- . "Interview with Aritha van Herk." *SPAN: Journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies* 25 (October, 1987): 1-15.
- . "‘A Kingdom and a Place of Exile’: Women Writers and the World of Nature." *World Literature Written in English* 24.2 (1984): 257-73.
- . "Restoring the Temples: The Fiction of Aritha van Herk" *Kunapipi* 16.1 (1994): 416-31.
- . "The Spider and the Rose: Aritha Van Herk’s *No Fixed Address*." *World Literature Written in English* 27.1 (Spring, 1987): 39-56.
- Jung, Carl G. *Die Archetypen und das Kollektive Unbewusste*. Düsseldorf: Walter, 1995.
- Kerr, Catherine. "Suburbs and Shamans." *Canadian Literature* 92 (Spring 1982): 149-50.

Kirkwood, Hilda. "Kiss of the Spider-Lady. An Interview with Aritha van Herk." *Canadian Woman Studies* 8.3 (Fall 1987): 85-89.

Knapp, Bettina L. *Women in Myth*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1997.

Kolodny, Annette. *The Land Before Her*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1984.

------. *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1994.

Kreisel, Henry. "The Prairie: A State of Mind." *Trace: Prairie Writers on Writing*. Ed. Birk Sproxton. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1986. 3-17.

Kroetsch, Robert. *Alberta*. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1993.

------. "The Canadian Writer and the American Literary Tradition." *The Lovely Treachery of Words: Essays Selected and New*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1989. 53-57.

------. "Circle the Wagons, Girls, Here the Bastards Come." *Aritha van Herk: Essays on Her Works*. Ed. Christl Verduyn Toronto: Guernica, 2001. 60-72.

------. "The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction: An Erotics of Space." *The Lovely Treachery of Words: Essays Selected and New*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1989. 73-83.

------. *Labyrinths of Voice: Conversations with Robert Kroetsch*. Ed. Shirley Neuman and Robert Wilson. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1982.

------. *A Likely Story: The Writing Life*. Red Deer: Red Deer College Press, 1995.

------. "The Moment of the Discovery of America Continues." *The Lovely Treachery of Words: Essays Selected and New*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1989. 1-20.

------. "No Name Is My Name." *The Lovely Treachery of Words: Essays Selected and New*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1989. 41-52.

------. *The Studhorse Man*. Markham: Paperjacks LTD, 1980.

------. "Unhiding the Hidden." *The Lovely Treachery of Words: Essays Selected and New*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1989. 58-63.

Kroetsch, Robert, ed. *Creation*. Toronto: New Press, 1970.

Lacey, Liam. "Gods of Literature Smile on van Herk." *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto) 22 September, 1986: C11.

Leacock, Stephen. "I'll Stay in Canada." *On the Front Line of Life: Stephen Leacock: Memories and Reflections 1935-1944*. Ed. Alan Bowker. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2004. 175-80.

- Leckie, Barbara. "Circle Games." Rev. of *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey*, by Aritha van Herk. *Canadian Literature* 115 (Winter 1987): 278-80.
- Lefkowitz, Mary R. *Heroines and Hysterics*. London: Duckworth, 1981.
- Lewis, Peter. "Untitled." Rev. of *Judith*, by Aritha van Herk. *The Standard*. June 1979.
- Liessmann, Konrad Paul. *Reiz und Rührung: Über ästhetische Empfindungen*. Wien: Facultas, 2004.
- Lutz, Hartmut, and Joost Hindersmann. "Uses of Mythology in Aritha van Herk's *No Fixed Address*." *The International Fiction Review* 18.1 (1991): 15-20.
- Lutz, Hartmut. "Aritha van Herk im Gespräch mit Hartmut Lutz." *Zeitschrift für Kanada Studien* 16 (1989): 109-15.
- , "'Meat and Bones don't Matter': Mythology in 'The Tent Peg'." *Ariel* 20.2 (April 1989): 41-67.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997.
- MacLaren, Ian S. "A Charting of the van Herk Papers." 1987. 1-28. 07 March 2008 <<http://www.ucalgary.ca/lib-old/SpecColl/vanherkbloc.htm>>.
- Mayr, Suzette. "The She-Monsters Who Just Gotta Be Killed." Rev. of *Restlessness*, by Aritha van Herk. *Canadian Forum* 78.884 (December, 1999): 42-44.
- McCance, Dawne. "Crossings: An Interview with Aritha van Herk." *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 36.1 (March 2003): 1-19.
- McCourt, Edward. *The Canadian West in Fiction*. Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1970.
- McGoogan, Kenneth. "Naughty New Heroine Proves van Herk Still Refusing to Conform." *Quill and Quire* 52 (June 1986): 34.
- McMullen, Lorraine. "Circe in Canada." *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 28/29 (1980): 253-56.
- Miller, Nancy K. "Arachnologies: The Woman, the Text, and the Critic." *The Poetics of Gender*. Ed. Nancy K. Miller. New York: Columbia UP, 1986. 270-95.
- Morely, Patricia. "Advocate of Rural Pragmatism: Judith and the Pigs." Rev. of *Judith*, by Aritha van Herk. *Ottawa Journal* (Ontario) October 14, 1978.
- Moss, John. *A Reader's Guide to the Canadian Novel*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987.

- . "Echoing Silence: Preface." *Echoing Silence: Essays on Arctic Narrative*. Ed. John Moss. Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 1997. 1-5.
- Motherwell, Cathy. "'Peg' Good – Could be better." Rev. of *The Tent Peg*, by Aritha van Herk. *Calgary Sunday Sun* 15 March 1981: 20.
- Mott, Asta. "Aritha van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere*: The Wild and Adventurous North?" *Canadian Literature* 157 (Summer 1998): 99-111.
- Neumann, Erich. *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*. Trans. Ralph Manheim. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991.
- Niditch, Susan. "Judges." *The Oxford Bible Commentary*. Ed. John Barton and John Muddiman. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. 176-91.
- Nischick, Reingard M. "Narrative Technique in Aritha van Herk's Novels." *Gaining Ground: European Critics on Canadian Literature*. Ed. Robert Kroetsch. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1985. 107-20.
- Noble, Kathleen Diane. *The Sound of a Silver Horn: Reclaiming the Heroism in Contemporary Women's Lives*. New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1994.
- Nolan Fewell, Danna. "Judges." *The Women's Bible Commentary*. Ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe. London: SPCK, 1992. 67-77.
- Nommensen, Ingwer. "Das Thema der Verwandlung in dem Romanwerk Aritha van Herks." MA-Thesis. University of Kiel, Germany, 1984. (Written in German, with an interview in English. English title: "Self-discovery in the Novels of Aritha van Herk." Interview 04 September 1983 in Kiel, 75-92.
- O'Hagan, Howard. *Tay John*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974.
- Ostriker, Alicia. "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking." *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*. Ed. Elaine Showalter. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985. 314-38.
- Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Book V-VIII. Trans. and Ed. D.E. Hill. Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1992.
- . *Metamorphoses*. Book IX-XII. Trans. and Ed. D.E. Hill. Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1999.
- Peters, Renate. "Subversion or Sub/Version: The Judith Myth in the Apocrypha and in van Herk's Novel." Photocopy of article from unidentified publication [199-]. 81-85. Special Collections: University of Calgary, ACC 827/ 07.17b. Box 15.2.
- Pianos, Tamara. *Geografiktionen in der anglo-kanadischen Literatur: Perzeptionen und Kreationen nördlicher Landschaften*. Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2000.

- Pianos, Tamara et al. "Interview with Aritha van Herk." 1994. 07 April 2008
<http://www.arithavanherk.de/texts/avh_interview.pdf>.
- Pomeroy, Sarah B. *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*. New York: Schocken, 1975.
- Posesorki, Sherie. "Context Fails to Support Premise: Amorous Journey Ends up Going Nowhere." *London Free Press* 18 July 1986.
- Press, Karen I. "Death by Foot Massage: How do you find a credible assassin with a good bedside manner?" Rev. of *Restlessness*, by Aritha van Herk. *NeWest Review* (April/May 1999): 24.
- Purkiss, Diane. "Women's Rewriting of Myth." *The Feminist Companion to Mythology*. Ed. Carolyne Larrington. London: Pandora Press, 1992. 441-57.
- Rhodes, Shane. "A Day in the Life of a Suicide: Aritha van Herk's new novel looks death and Calgary straight in the face." Rev. of *Restlessness*, by Aritha van Herk. *The Calgary Straight* 15-21 October 1998.
- Ricou, Laurence. *Vertical Man/Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction*. Vancouver: U of British Columbia P, 1973.
- Rieken, Bernd. *Arachne und ihre Schwestern: Eine Motivgeschichte der Spinne von den 'Naturvölkermärchen' bis zu den 'Urban Legends.'* Wien, Dissertation, 2001.
- Robertson, Robin. *Jungian Archetypes: Jung, Gödel, and the History of Archetypes*. York Beach, Maine: Nicolas-Hays, 1995.
- Robinson, J Jill. "Restlessness Grabs van Herk's Readers: Author delivers the unexpected in gorgeous prose." Rev. of *Restlessness*, by Aritha van Herk. *Calgary Herald* 03 October 1998.
- Rocard, Marcienne. "Canadian Woman's 'Ultimate Frontier' in Aritha van Herk's Fictional World: A Search for Self-Definition and Self-Assertion." *Canada On the Threshold of the 21st Century: European Reflections upon the Future of Canada: Selected Papers of the First All-European Canadian Studies Conference, The Hague, The Netherlands, 24-27 October 1990*. Ed. Cornelius H.W. Remie and J.-M. Lacroix. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1991. 325-31.
- , "Unreading the World of Aritha van Herk: An Interview." *Études Canadiennes/ Canadian Studies: Revue Interdisciplinaire des Études Canadiennes en France* 38 (1995): 85-93.
- Rukeyser, Muriel. "Myth." *The Collected Poems*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978. 498.
- Russel, Ford. *Northrop Frye on Myth: An Introduction*. New York: Garland, 1998.

- Ryle, John. "Of Pigs and Men." Rev. of *Judith*, by Aritha van Herk. *Times* 27 October 1978: 125.
- Schaub, Danielle. "Refusing Man-Made Maps: Aritha van Herk's *No Fixed Address*." *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 10.2 (1995): 295-305.
- Schuller, Eileen M. "The Apocrypha." *The Women's Bible Commentary*. Ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe. London: SPCK, 1992. 235-43.
- Scobie, Stephen. "Arachne's Progress." Rev. of *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey*, by Aritha van Herk. *Brick* 29 (Winter 1987): 37-40.
- Scott, Susan. "Calgary Novelist Seeks to Bring Death to Life." Rev. of *Restlessness*, by Aritha van Herk. *Calgary Herald* 10 October 1998: 11.
- Senkpiel, Aron E. "Canadian North." *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*. Ed. Eugene Benson. London: Routledge, 2005. 192-93.
- , "Places of Spirit, Spirits of Place: The Northern Contemplations of Rudy Wiebe, Aritha van Herk, and John Moss." *Echoing Silence: Essays on Arctic Narrative*. Ed. John Moss. Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 1997. 123-36.
- Sexton, Anne. "Wanting to Die." *The Complete Poems*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981. 142-43.
- Shields, Rob. *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Simonis, Annette. "Mythos." *Grundbegriffe der Kulturtheorie und Kulturwissenschaften*. Ed. Ansgar Nünning. Stuttgart: Metzler, 2005. 159-60.
- Stowasser, J.M., M. Petschienig, and F. Skutsch. *Stowasser: Lateinisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch*. Wien: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1994.
- Surgeoner, Joanna C. "A Feminist Literary Cartography of the Canadian North: Women, Writing and Place in Aritha van Herk's *Places Far from Ellesmere*." *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 14.6 (2007): 641-58.
- Tefs, Wayne. "A Book about Death Crammed with Jokes and Teasing?" Rev. of *Restlessness*, by Aritha van Herk. *Prairie Fire: A Canadian Magazine of New Writing* 19. 4 (Winter 1999): 141-42.
- Tihanyi, Eva. "(Un)riding the Range: The Ficto-Critical Travels of Aritha van Herk." *The Harpweaver* 7 (Summer 2000): 44-62.

- van Herk, Aritha "Blundering Beyond; Inveigle Into." *Crossing the West(s): Inventing Frontiers*. Papers on the Canadian and American West. The Western Literature Association and the Canadian Association for American Studies. Joint Annual Meeting. Banff Center for Conferences, Banff, Alberta, 14-17 October 1998. Special Collections: University of Calgary, ACC 827/07 17a. Box 16.
- , "Calgary: This Growing Graveyard." *NeWest Review* 13.4 (December 1987): 5-11.
- , "The Calgary Cousinage of *Restlessness*." *The American Review of Canadian Studies* 31.4 (Winter 2001): 589-96.
- , "Corpus Delecti." Special Collections: University of Calgary, ACC 827/07.17a. Box 17.
- , "Death in Vienna." *Writing Away: The Pen Canada Travel Anthology*. Ed. Constance Rooke. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1994. 326-34.
- , "Desire in Fiction: De-siring Realism." *A Frozen Tongue*. Sydney: Dangaroo, 1992. 79-85.
- , *A Frozen Tongue*. Sydney: Dangaroo, 1992.
- , "A Gentle Circumcision." *A Frozen Tongue*. Sydney: Dangaroo, 1992. 90-99.
- , "Hide and Seek." *Light Transports: Intercity*. Ed. Steve Dearden. Pontefract: Route, 2006. 117-54.
- , *In Visible Ink (crypto-frictions)*. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1991.
- , "The Invisible Borders of Disappearance." Variant Title "Beyond Borders: Invisible Geographies and Their Invented Space. Typescript (computer printout) abstract of paper presented to the Association for Canadian Studies in the United States, San Antonio, Texas, 17 November 2001. Special Collections: University of Calgary, ACC 827/07.17b. Box 5.17.
- , *Judith*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978.
- , "*Judith* and *The Tent Peg*: A Retrospective." *A Frozen Tongue*. Sydney: Dangaroo, 1992. 275-83.
- , "Late Hands." *Early Voices*. Ed. T.L. Walters and James King. Edmonton: Juvenilia Press, 2001. 38-46.
- , "Leading the Parade." *The American Review of Canadian Studies* 33.4 (Winter 2003): 487-96.

- , "Longitudinal Erotics or Dead Reckoning?" *Mapping Canadian Worlds*. London Conference for Canadian Studies, Canada House, London, UK, 27 November 1998: 1-13. Special Collections: University of Calgary, ACC 827/07.17b. Box 10.
- , "The Map's Temptation or The Search for a Secret Book." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 31.1 (1996): 128-36.
- , "Mapping as Metaphor: The Cartographer's Revision." *A Frozen Tongue*. Sydney: Dangaroo, 1992. 54-68.
- , *Mavericks: An Incurable History of Alberta*. Toronto: Penguin, 2001.
- , *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey*. 1986. Red Deer, Alberta: Red Deer College Press, 1998.
- , "Notes on *No Fixed Address*." Special Collections: University of Calgary, ACC 441/89.3. Box 10.
- , "Picaros and Priestesses: Repentent Rogues and *No Fixed Address*." *A Frozen Tongue*. Sydney: Dangaroo, 1992. 284-89.
- , *Places Far From Ellesmere: A Geograficitone: Explorations on Site*. Red Deer, Alberta: Red Deer College Press, 1990.
- , "Prairie as Flat as..." *A Frozen Tongue*. Sydney: Dangaroo, 1992. 127-38.
- , "A Re/quisation on Death: Reading Cassandra" In *Visible Ink (crypto-frictions)*. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1991. 191-209.
- , *Restlessness*. Red Deer, Alberta: Red Deer College Press, 1998.
- , "Stranded Bestride in Canada." *A Frozen Tongue*. Sydney: Dangaroo, 1992. 69-78.
- , *The Tent Peg*. Calgary: Red Deer Press, 1981.
- , "Undressing in the Dark: A Literary Transparency on Regions and Regionalism, with a Gesture Toward the Inevitability of Maps." *People and Places: Changing Relations in Canada*. Ed F.J. Toppen and J. van Weesep. Nijmegen: ACSN/AECP, 1998. 61-72.
- , "Of Viscera and Vital Questions." In *Visible Ink (crypto-frictions)*. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1991. 129-37.
- , "Waiting for the Rodeo." *Great Stories from the Prairies*. Ed. Birk Sproxtton. Calgary: Red Deer Press, 2000. 227-39.
- , "Women and Faith: The Reach of the Imagination." *A Frozen Tongue*. Sydney: Dangaroo, 1992. 107-21.

- , "Woman Writers and the Prairie: Spies in an Indifferent Landscape." *A Frozen Tongue*. Sydney: Dangaroo, 1992. 139-51.
- van Varseveld, Gail. "Worship Thy Father?" Rev. of *Judith*, by Aritha van Herk. *Branching Out* 6.2 (1979): 43-44.
- Vanderhaeghe, Guy. "'Brand Name' vs. 'No-Name': A Half-century of the Representation of Western Canadian Cities in Fiction." *The Urban Prairie*. Ed. Dan Ring. Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery, 1993. 111-31.
- Verduyn, Christl. "The Grace of Living and Writing: An Interview with Aritha van Herk." *Aritha van Herk: Essays on Her Works*. Ed. Christl Verduyn. Toronto: Guernica, 2001. 15-30.
- Verhoeven, W.M. "West of Woman, or, Where No Man Has Gone Before: Geofeminism in Aritha van Herk." *European Perspectives on English-Canadian Literature*. Ed. Charles Forceville and Hilling van't Land. Nijmegen: Stichting Studiegenootschap Canada, 1995 (*Canada Cahiers* 8: 33-42). Special Collections: University of Calgary, ACC 827/07.17b. Box 16.10.
- Vernant, Jean-Pierre. "Feminine Figures of Death in Greece." *Diacritics: A Review of Contemporary Criticism* 16.2 (Summer 1986): 54-64.
- Wachtel, Eleanor. "Barefoot in the kitchen." Rev. of *The Tent Peg*, by Aritha van Herk. Special Collections: University of Calgary, MsC. 53.8.1/3.
- Walker, Barbara G. *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*. New York: Harper and Row, 1983.
- Wanner, Irene. "Voices Merge into a Monotone." Rev. of *The Tent Peg*, by Aritha van Herk. *Seattle Washington Post – Intelligencer* February 28, 1982.
- Weigle, Marta. *Spiders and Spinsters: Women and Mythology*. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1982.
- Wicks, Ulrich. *Picaresque Narrative, Picaresque Fictions: A Theory and Research Guide*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1989.
- Wiebe, Rudy. "Passage by Land." *Canadian Literature* 48 (Spring 1971): 25-27.
- , *Playing Dead: A Contemplation Concerning the Arctic*. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1989.
- Wilcox, Alana. "Brief Reviews." Rev. of *Restlessness*, by Aritha van Herk. *Books in Canada* 27.8 (Nov/Dec 1998): 45.
- Wittke, Petra. "No Lies this Time: An Interview with Aritha van Herk." *Zeitschrift für Kanada-Studien* 38 (2000): 135-46.

12. Index

- Apocrypha 35, 36, 42, 121, 135, 138, 143, 145
 Arachne (classical) 15, 70, 71, 73, 75-78, 120, 136, 144
 archaeology, archaeological 1, 2, 26, 60, 102, 123, 129, 137
 Ariadne 13, 99, 115
 Athena 13, 15, 71, 75-77, 82, 111, 115, 120
 Atwood, Margaret 17, 40, 59, 80, 123, 135
 Barthes, Roland 2, 9, 10, 41, 42, 135
 Basilisk 81, 82, 130
 bear 30, 41, 45-47, 51, 52, 62, 63, 73, 83, 114, 115, 131, 132
 Beauvoir, Simone de 3, 6, 8, 9, 11-14, 16, 22, 41, 59, 135
 Bible 4, 31, 35, 36, 47-49, 69, 72, 79, 80, 120, 121, 135, 138, 143, 145
 Blumenberg, Hans 7-9, 136
 Book of Judges 31, 47, 49
 Campbell, Joseph 4, 5, 7, 70, 83, 118, 136
 Charon 84
 Circe 15, 31, 33, 34, 37-40, 42, 43, 56, 59, 114, 121, 131, 135, 142
 Cixous, Hélène 3, 6, 11, 12, 60, 136
 Deborah 15, 47-50, 52, 55, 56, 61, 112, 114
 Deleuze and Guattari 92, 93, 95, 101, 102, 117
 Demeter 15, 111, 112-116, 137
 disappearance, disappearing 2, 68, 69, 74, 75, 89, 95, 97, 108, 117, 128, 129, 146
 doppelgänger 73, 83, 107
 Eurydice 11, 23, 137
 First Nations 17, 19, 25, 28, 29, 51, 120, 131, 132
 Foucault, Michel 1, 17, 18, 26, 65, 102, 129, 137
 Frye, Northrop 5-7, 16, 17, 22, 25, 138, 144
 Grace, Sherrill E. 18, 24-29, 138, 148
 Grosz, Elizabeth 13, 75, 112, 118, 139
 Gubar, Susan 11, 15, 139
 Gunn Allen, Paula 72, 73, 139
 Hamelin, Louis Edmond 26-28, 139
 Harrison, Dick 19-21, 139
 Hayes, Elizabeth T. 111, 113-115, 136, 139
 Hecate 111, 113-116
 Hera 51, 114
 hero, heroes 4, 5, 17, 31, 35, 49, 70, 71, 83, 86, 87, 118
 heroine, heroines 1, 2, 3, 5, 31, 49, 52, 56, 68, 70, 74, 86, 89, 95, 96, 112, 115, 117, 118, 127, 128
 home 1, 3, 25, 28, 36, 39, 58, 69, 71, 73, 79, 81, 92, 97, 98, 103, 104, 110, 111, 115, 117, 125, 126, 130, 131, 132
 Huggan, Graham 65, 66, 69, 102, 127, 139
 Hulan, Renée 26, 27, 28, 140
 Hutcheon, Linda 1, 2, 70, 74, 85, 86, 88-91, 140
 Io 51
 Irigaray, Luce 3, 6, 13, 75, 76, 111, 112, 140
 Iris 83
 Jäel 15, 47-50, 52, 54, 120, 121
 Jones, Dorothy 6, 37, 38, 54, 56, 59, 61, 63, 66, 68, 78, 79, 86-89, 111-113, 115, 140
Judith 1-3, 15, 30-45, 47, 48, 52, 54, 56, 58-61, 64, 66-70, 73, 92, 103, 112-115, 117, 120, 121, 123, 127, 128, 131, 132, 136, 138, 142, 143, 145, 146, 148
 Kolodny, Anette 16, 22, 28, 29, 58, 59, 122, 141
 Kreisel, Henry 21, 141
 Kroetsch, Robert 1, 2, 17, 19-21, 23, 25, 26, 29, 30, 44, 60, 70, 90, 91, 99, 103-105, 107, 109, 115-118, 122, 141, 143
 Lacan, Jacques 107, 135
 Lacanian mirror 107, 126
 landscape 2, 3, 16-24, 26, 28, 30, 31, 34, 45, 53, 58-61, 63, 80, 90-92, 117, 118, 120, 122-124, 131
 Lefkowitz, Mary R. 5, 8, 9, 16, 142
 Lutz, Hartmut 6, 36, 47, 48, 50-52, 54, 62, 63, 75, 77, 82, 84, 132, 142
 MacLaren, Ian S. 42, 52-55, 62, 65, 66, 75-77, 79, 87, 90, 114, 132, 142

- mapping 2, 61, 65-67
 map 1, 30, 50, 64-67, 77, 82, 89-91, 93, 100, 110, 118
 Maverick 96
 McCourt, Edward 20, 21, 142
 Medusa 11, 12, 136
Metamorphoses 4, 31, 37, 56, 62, 69, 75, 77, 78, 113, 114, 143
 Midas 46, 62
 Miller, Nancy K. 75-77, 142
 Moss, John 19, 24, 26, 27, 73, 138-140, 142, 143, 145
 myth and mythology 1-7, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 21, 22, 26, 31, 32, 40-43, 50-52, 58, 62, 70, 72, 75, 77, 79, 87, 89, 97, 99, 111, 113-115, 117, 118, 120-123, 125, 127, 129, 131-133
 Neumann 38, 78, 79, 143
No Fixed Address 2, 3, 23, 29, 67-71, 73, 74, 76-79, 81, 82, 84-93, 95, 103, 104, 112, 115, 117, 124, 127, 130-132, 135-140, 142, 145, 147
 North 3, 18, 19, 23-31, 45, 46, 50, 61-63, 65, 68, 69, 74, 75, 90, 94, 95, 115, 117, 122-124, 129, 131, 132, 138, 139, 141, 143, 145
Odyssey 4, 31, 37-40, 56, 77, 80, 137, 139
 Odysseys 4, 15, 23, 37-40, 42, 56, 59, 77, 79, 80, 114, 121
 Orpheus 23
 Penelope 15, 39, 77, 79, 80, 135
 Persephone 13, 15, 23, 39, 111-116, 139
 Philomela 77, 78
 picara 69, 86, 88, 100, 129
 picaresque 85, 86, 88, 100, 135, 136, 148
 pig 30, 32-34, 36-39, 42-45, 47, 51, 63, 65, 121-123, 131, 136, 140, 141, 148
Places Far from Ellesmere 23, 29, 67, 92, 93, 96, 103, 104, 123, 138, 143, 145, 147
 Pomeroy, Sarah B. 6, 13, 144
 postmodernism, postmodern 2, 88, 140
 prairies 18-21, 23, 24, 60, 132
 Prometheus 14, 87
 Proteus 7, 87
Restlessness 2, 3, 67-70, 82, 98-106, 110, 114-117, 124, 125, 127, 130-132, 136, 137, 142, 144-148
 Ricou, Laurence 20, 21, 122, 144
 Shields, Rob 26-28, 145
 Sirens 56, 106, 114
 space 6, 17-19, 22, 26-28, 45, 61, 64, 67, 69, 90, 93, 94, 102, 103, 108, 122, 124, 127
 spider 69, 71, 72, 75, 76, 78, 80, 84, 85, 89, 91, 94, 109, 120, 125, 131, 132
 Spider Woman 72, 73, 81, 85
 Styx 84, 115
 tent peg 45, 54, 63
The Tent Peg 2, 3, 29, 30, 31, 36, 45-54, 56, 58, 61, 62, 64, 66-68, 70, 73, 74, 82, 83, 92, 111, 112, 114, 115, 117, 124, 127, 131, 132, 138, 140, 142, 143, 146-148
 Tip 71, 96, 97, 109, 117
 travel, travelling 69, 70, 71, 89, 91, 96, 98-101, 107, 108, 110, 129, 130, 133
 voice 2, 3, 6, 14, 23, 24, 30, 31, 38, 42-44, 60, 88, 104, 121, 122, 124
 Walker, Barbara G. 12, 43, 44, 48, 51, 56, 71, 72, 79, 81, 83, 107, 113-116, 148
 Weigle, Marta 72, 80, 148
 West 2, 3, 18-21, 23, 24, 28, 30, 31, 33, 41, 58, 60, 61, 65, 68, 75, 94, 115, 122, 123, 137, 138, 142, 146, 148
 Wiebe, Rudy 19-25, 27, 29, 67, 122, 145, 148
 Zeus 4, 51, 75, 76, 111, 114, 115

Zusammenfassung in deutscher Sprache

Mythologie stellt eine Art Bezugssystem dar, gibt uns eine Vorlage, in der wir unser Leben einordnen können; sie macht Erfahrungen greifbar, gibt ihnen Gestalt. Doch in der klassischen Mythologie wurden Frauen entweder gar nicht repräsentiert oder aber man zeichnete ein zweideutiges Bild von ihnen. Somit war es für Frauen schwierig, eine eigene Identität zu finden, weil sie nichts hatten, wonach sie sich orientieren konnten. Robert Kroetsch spricht dies in seiner viel zitierten Aussage „The fiction makes us real” (*Creation*, 63) an und genau darum geht es Aritha van Herk in ihren Werken, nämlich die Geschichten von längst vergessenen, ausgelöschten weiblichen Figuren neu zu erzählen und ihnen ihre Stimme zu geben.

Im meiner Arbeit gehe ich auf die Darstellung von Frauen in den Werken *Judith*, *The Tent Peg*, *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey* und *Restlessness* ein. Ich analysiere, wie Aritha van Herk das Leben der klassischen, mythologischen Frauenfiguren in unsere heutige, postmoderne Welt transportiert, indem sie sich klassischer und biblischer Mythologie bedient und diese gleichzeitig neu schreibt. Dadurch zeigt sie die ursprünglichen Kräfte und Fähigkeiten der Frauen auf und stellt uns Heldinnen in ihren Narrativen vor, die nicht immer Vorbilder, vielleicht nicht perfekt, wahrscheinlich auch nicht realistisch und schon gar keine Heiligen sind – doch gerade das macht sie so einzigartig.

Indem van Herk sich der mythologischen Vorfahren bedient, untergräbt sie diesen Master Narrativ von innerhalb. Es geht ihr nicht darum den Mythos zu zerstören, sondern darum, sich aktiv damit auseinanderzusetzen und neu zu schreiben. Somit entstehen neue Geschichten mit Frauen in den Hauptrollen; Geschichten, in denen niemals gehörte oder längst vergessene Stimmen wieder Gehör finden; Geschichten, in denen über die Realität hinaus gegangen und über Traditionen und Konventionen gelacht wird.

Doch nicht nur Mythen werden von Aritha van Herk kritisch hinterfragt und neu überarbeitet, auch Kanadas *Prairie-Literature* und Literatur über den Norden werden kritisch in Frage gestellt. Denn auch hier wird Frauen oftmals der Platz als Heldin verwehrt. Die Autorin zerrüttet narrative Strukturen, die von Männern festgelegt wurden und zeigt, dass die Landschaft eine Vielzahl von Narrativen in sich aufnehmen kann.

Indem van Herk ihre Heldinnen quer durch Kanadas Westen und Norden schickt, zeigt sie deren mobile Kraft und Unverfrorenheit sich nicht an Landkarten und vorgezeichnete Wege zu halten. Im Gegenteil, die Figuren tauchen ein in die Landschaft, gehen über die Grenzen der festgeschriebenen Straßen hinaus – nein, nicht in den Tod, sondern in den Zustand des Unsichtbarseins. Sie tauchen unter, verschwinden – das ultimative Abenteuer. Kaum glauben wir die Intention der Figuren verstanden zu haben, sind sie plötzlich weg, nur um dann in einem anderen Werk unerwartet wieder aufzutauchen.

Letztlich schafft es Aritha van Herk mythologischen Figuren neues, fiktives Leben zu geben, Frauen eine Stimme und der Landschaft ihre eigene Identität. Somit wird ein neuer, zeitgenössischer Narrativ erzählt, der oft nicht linear, manchmal nicht realistisch und schon gar nicht rational ist – Traditionen werden unterminiert; Grenzen überschritten und Frauen machen Unmögliches möglich.

Lebenslauf

Zur Person

Name	Katrin Fennesz
Geburtsdatum	17. November 1983
Geburtsort	Oberpullendorf
Staatsbürgerschaft	Österreich
Familienstand	ledig, keine Kinder

Schule

1990-1994	Volksschule Horitschon
1994-2002	Gymnasium Oberpullendorf mit Matura am 17.06.2002 (ausgezeichneter Erfolg)

Studium

2004 - 2008	Anglistik und Amerikanistik an der Universität Wien Wahlfach: Kulturwissenschaften Prämierung für „außergewöhnliche akademische Leistung“ im Wintersemester 2004/2005
2005 - 2008	Lehramtsstudium Englisch und Psychologie und Philosophie an der Universität Wien

Auslandserfahrungen

Juli 2000	Einmonatiger Sprachaufenthalt in Kalifornien, USA
August 2002 – Sept. 2003	Au-Pair in Kalifornien, USA
Okt. 2003 - Jänner 2004	Dreimonatiger Sprachaufenthalt in Kalifornien, USA
März 2008	Calgary, Kanada: University of Calgary Stipendium für Kurzfristige Wissenschaftliche Arbeiten im Ausland

Sprachkenntnisse

Deutsch	(Muttersprache)
Englisch	(fließend in Wort und Schrift)
Französisch	(Grundkenntnisse)
Spanisch	(Grundkenntnisse)