



Special Collections

A CHARTING OF THE VAN HERK PAPERS

by I.S. MacLaren

©1987 Reproduced with permission

Frodo began to feel restless, and the old paths seemed too well-trodden. He looked at maps, and wondered what lay beyond their edges: maps made in the Shire showed mostly white spaces beyond its borders.

-- Tolkien

As West and East
In all Flatt Maps (and I am one) are one,
So death doth touch the Resurrection.

-- Donne

We are sitting here, you and I,
in a place on a map.
We know this.
Yet we are not on the map.
We are looking for ourselves.
This is the rustle of leaves
that you hear,
the crackle of folding paper,
the sound of old maps.

-- H. McCord

We willingly read a map as a unitary and sensible, coherent and factual story. Anyone who has needed maps to save his or her life knows how willingly we trust them; often, we cannot afford to think that they impart anything other than what our eyes could confirm. Yet, maps result partly from their makers' imaginations:

looked at objectively, many maps exhibit so much abstraction that, if they were not anonymous and were not stamped with the authoritative name of an institution, we might wish to suspend the disbelief that they need in order for their two dimensions to represent reality, rather than their makers' creativity. Maps usually entice us by their oath of verisimilitude, but what if the map that claims to depict where you live does not seem to offer you a place to locate yourself? What then? How can its authority, whose force works centripetally to affirm verisimilitude, work for you to yield a story that correlates with your imagination?

Back in the mid 1970s, the map of the western Canadian novel told a story that left Aritha van Herk unlocated, and that left a female writer little space to plot. It narrated the imaginations of one gender, did so in various ways, all of which men could understand. The only women on the map were the female characters - virgins and muses, victims and whores - plotted by male writers. If you're a woman who doesn't happen to be any of these, then figuring your bearings, plotting your imagination, indeed, doing anything other than *taking* directions becomes problematical. The unitary narrative of that map's contours defines the map exclusively in terms of itself, turning its back on those whom it cannot accommodate:

I come from the west, kingdom of the male virgin. I live and write in the kingdom of the male virgin. To be a female and non-virgin, making stories in the kingdom of the male virgin, is dangerous. You think this kingdom is imaginary? Try being a writer there. Try being a woman there.¹

A decade ago, Aritha van Herk could not even find on such a map the oral histories of Albertan women, which Eliane Leslau Silverman has since charted.² In 1977, when, as a graduate student at the University of Alberta, van Herk began to transform a short story into a novel, "When Pigs Fly," for her Master's thesis, the map of women's prairie fiction had been charted only in parts. That is, the huge and enduring plots of Margaret Laurence's Manawaka novels had drawn a few of the southeastern corner's imaginative contours, but the academic reading of the map acknowledged few other chartings - perhaps Wiseman or Wilson, occasionally Ostenso and Watson, McClung and Rule almost never. The map that one read, studied, interpreted, and from which one took directions, was routinely male: Stead and Connor, Grove and Ross, Mitchell, Wiebe, and Kroetsch.

By this point, van Herk was asking herself how useful such a map could be to her. Partly out of her involvement with the short-lived feminist magazine *Branching Out*, she began to use the essay form to ask others the same question. If "the female fiction writers of Canada map a different territory, not as obvious but just as important,...the country of the interior, the world maze of the human being,"³ then can the institutionally sanctioned map ultimately satisfy either the woman reader's or the woman writer's imagination? The answer then and now for van Herk is: no. The exclusive map, whose centripetal force verifies and affirms a unitary discourse among men's imaginations, and is called "real" for its illusion of verisimilitude, has to be opened up to other voices, ones that establish centrifugal impulses. Thereby, the natural *heteroglossia*, as Bakhtin terms the conglomerate of the centripetal and the centrifugal, which obtains in any society, and which the society's stories ought to reflect, can emerge.⁴ "The male west has," in van Herk's view by 1984, "to be earth-quaked a little, those black steel lines and the looming giant toppled. Not destroyed, oh no, but infiltrated."⁵ The map must register multi-linguagedness.⁶

"The only way a country can be truly mapped is with its stories," for in them, "as Foucault says, we begin to

understand the possibilities of juxtaposition, the proximity of the fantastic to the real."⁷ From this perspective, van Herk's fiction juxtaposes itself with what preceded it; it is post-Kroetschean, post-Wiebean. Her novels do not leave Kroetsch and Wiebe behind - how could they? - but they tell stories that the men have not told, that the men do not know; they map contours that the men have not seen.

Because in 1977 the "real" was male, or, put another way perhaps, male fantasies constituted the "real," van Herk's juxtaposition necessarily took her to the exploration of the other, the "fantastic." This simplistic formulation, however faithful it remains to the Foucauldian one cited by van Herk, belies its ultimate inaccuracy, but it does provide a perspective from which to read what van Herk has done with the map of western fiction that Academe was giving her. In *Judith* (1978, the published version of "When Pigs Fly"), *The Tent Peg* (1981), and *No Fixed Address* (1986), she tells other stories which upset the unitary thrust, while attempting to reverse the centripetal forces, of such old stories as the ones about the farmer's daughter, the North as an exclusively male preserve, and the travelling salesman/studhorse man bent on getting his rocks off. She retales other versions of Judith and Lilith, of Deborah and Ja-el, of Athena and Arachne, other stories about female strength, mystique, and purity. Her three novels explore these in the forms, respectively, of conventional third person, of diary, and of the picaresque, playing with their contents less than Kroetsch does with myth because the two writers' purposes diverge: the latter wants to unmake the authority of the unitary narrative, wants to disbelieve history and any single idea of truth; van Herk clearly strives to reconstitute story in order to map the West, not with evanescent, but with memorable "other" voices. True, her fictions narrate fantastic tales: commonly, her novels start with realistic settings and plots only to depart - akin to the manner of magic realism - towards the fantastic as secretaries *cum* mistresses, grad students, and bus drivers transform both themselves and the space on the map that they inhabit. But the fantastic quality emerges out of the juxtaposition that the novels provide with the "real" as we customarily see it. They continue intertextually to parley with the stories that they re-tell. At his most energetic, in *Badlands* say, Kroetsch disenfranchises all story, producing a narrative that woos stories only to beat them off. Men can afford to: it's a male map.

Less like Kroetsch's, then, than the late Marian Engel's is van Herk's fiction. Engel held the writer-in-residencship at The University of Alberta during van Herk's final year there. One naturally hears much of Wiebe's influence on van Herk's early work because he served as her supervisor, and because the supervised work won a \$50,000 first novel award before it had come to final examination (how can van Herk *not* be interested in the fantastic?). But when she arrived in Edmonton, Marian Engel had just published *Bear*, whose central character, Lou, transforms a need for love of another, which her ridiculous/realistic relation with the Director can never fulfill, into love for a bear. The fantastic may be absurd - many male reviewers sounded their appalled alarm and kept their daughters home from zoos, even summer camps - but as Margaret Laurence cogently put it,

Fascinating and profound, this novel speaks of woman's strange (some would say bizarre) and moving journey toward inner freedom and strength, and ultimately toward a sense of communion with all living creatures. It's an astounding novel, both earthy and mythical, which leads into the human self and also outward to suggest and celebrate the mystery of life itself.⁸

van Herk agrees. "The mystery of life itself" she has called "the magic possibilities" of *Bear*: "even today," she wrote at Engel's death in February 1985, "if there is one novel I wish I had written, it's *Bear*."⁹ This

notion of the novel as the record, the map of the imagination's transformative power, has remained with van Herk from the outset. Making over, transforming that map in fact comes to dominate van Herk's essays as well. While as a novelist she has Judith make some men wince, J.L. make them wonder, and Arachne simply make them, as essayist she makes over the received map of "home." An example occurs in a new version of the descent into Calgary:

And from the
(north)
bush and parkland, Bashaw, Tees, Lacombe,
(who taught you to forget Siksika)
Olds and Didsbury and Carstairs a descent.

That snakey arrival between the sexual clefts of the hills again surprised at the arrogance of those other coulees brooding in on themselves in a pretense at centre, an underground that repels.¹⁰

The first mapper of the West, David Thompson, descending south from Rocky Mountain House to the Bow River in November one hundred and eighty-eight years ago, plotted a different story: "On our right we have the Bow Hills, lofty in themselves and brown with woods; above them stately rise the Rocky Mountains, vast and abrupt, whose tops pierce the clouds. On our left, before and behind us, is a verdant ocean."¹¹ "Women experience things differently from men," is how van Herk has simply put it.¹² Is it more or less than necessity that accounts for Thompson's wonder for the mountains that rise from the landscape to "pierce the clouds," while van Herk explores the clefts that he did not see, which his phallogocentric gaze saw only as "verdant ocean"? No doubt, maps must change as times do, but also as imaginations do. As products of imagination, maps can grow old; what replaces them is different; not necessarily contradictory, but different. Not necessarily misogynous or misandrous; different.

* * *

Judith - Not Known Until Mapped

What I'm critical of in the Canadian novel is the extreme and dedicated realism.¹³

Going beyond realism in one's first novel presents a formidable task: one must not only write from experience in order to find an authorial voice - Rudy Wiebe queried van Herk's very first story, about a whorehouse in the American south, pointing out: "one: I had never been in a whorehouse and two: I had never been in the deep south"¹⁴ - but also put that experience through the imaginative alembic to achieve the unexperienced but true. *Judith* begins and ends rather less and more realistically than one expects. In terms of both the "real" and the fantastic, *Judith* makes a very good first effort to deal from the outside with the unitary narrative of male discourse. In terms of the "real," van Herk simply sets the story of Circe in rural Alberta and retells it, since in her view at the time,

a writer only retells an old story. Every story has been told before because there are

two subjects for stories, one of them is sex or love[--]depending on how cynical you are, you'll use one word or the other [--]and the other is death and life. Love and death.

It just gets boiled right down to that. Every story has literally been told before. And the only thing a story-teller is challenged by, is the infinite art of making that story.¹⁵

In the making of that realistic story, van Herk has reconstituted the received myth of Circe and Odysseus' men, transferring it to a Battle River pig farm, much as Coleridge, in his "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," took William Wales's experience aboard Cook's second Pacific voyage and transferred it to an English port; much as Margaret Laurence, in *The Stone Angel*, reading that poem through Jungian glasses, brings Wales's experience with and Coleridge's poem about the albatross to Shadow Point. Judith's secretarial, mistressial, and porcine careers receive straightforward realistic presentation as van Herk retells the Circean story, but she also re-tells that story. That is, there may be only two subjects for stories but

a lot of the stories told about women have been neglected or abandoned. What about Circe? There is old Ulysses staying with her for one year and than [*sic*] saying "Goodby [*sic*] darling, I am going back to my wife. I had a nice time here and you really treated us to a beautiful idyllic spot, but sorry, I am going to do my duty!" What about Circe? What did she do?¹⁶

Among other things, van Herk's rechartings entail the humanizing of the women of myth, interrogating them and the stories in which they survive, asking the hard questions, which make them stand to account, make their stories' readers look again at them as women, as female people:

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 Circe side of the story. [Interviewer:] But the men would say that she is the one who seduced him. [vH:] Like hell. He sends half the men on the ship to go and find her. She turns them into pigs. He sends the other half to go and see what this magic castle is, not to find her, he doesn't know she is there [in the castle]. She turns them into pigs. He goes to find out what happens to his men and he comes upon her. What does he do? Look at the story. She is about to wave her wand and turn him into a pig, when he threatens her with his sword! Now that is a fancy way for saying that, what he does is, he makes love to her. And she just says to him, "Well, I won't turn you into a pig."

She is seduced by him!...In most of the reference books you will find that she seduced him. That is just nonsense. What the hell is he doing there in the first place?...He was on a big trip and he stopped of [*sic*] to have a little bit of fun? You see how nonsensical it is when you start to ask these questions. She seduced him, they seduced each other. She seduced him as well, [*sic*] She was really interested in him. But I mean, what a boring life, sitting there on that island waiting for people to stop so she can turn them into pigs.¹⁷

Judith Pierce takes on the myth, reconstitutes Circe as a woman with desires, frustrations, a sense of humour,

not just as the dumb, silent, farmer's daughter, "Judy-girl," who will grow up waiting for people to stop so she can tease them. The stories of pig farming in Alberta and of Circe conjointly transform one another; 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:

In the barn she was immediately surrounded by the pigs, the warmth and sibilance of their procreation, the whispered shuffle of their rising. She inspected them, walking the length of the barn and back so scrupulously, her eyes following every detail of their snuffling movement. Enacting the ritual - hanging her coat, gathering pails, feed, water, clean straw - they could see it was becoming her systematic and deliberate liturgy, an ordering of her time and body. She was as contingent on them as they were on her. (*J*, 121)

Other stories figure prominently into this reconstitution of the woman and pigs, this reinvestment of a woman's self - her money, her desire, her life - in "other." The name Judith recalls the biblical Judith of the Apocrypha - "We don't know, maybe Judith castrated Holofernes but the biblical scholars have made it so that she beheads them."¹⁸ Many of the sows' names impart the symbolic significance of other women. Lilith carries the name of the first woman, whose distaste for Adam's crude insistence only on the missionary position for intercourse ends in her being censured and banished to the Red Sea, where she indulges her natural fecundity and sexual preferences, bearing a hundred children daily. Not only did Hebraic tradition erase her from the literary map, the bible, but it replaced her with the "more docile" Eve, whose purity and sanctity supplant Lilith's reputation as the Great Mother, whose Red Sea "gave birth to all things but [which] needed periodic sacrificial replenishment."¹⁹

As more stories abound in *Judith*, the centrifugal impulse of *heteroglossia*, of multi-languagedness, develops; meanwhile, the realistic third-person narration weaves in and out through Judith's three selves - daughter, mistress, farmer - always coming up against the pigs' point of view.²⁰ And just as the fantastic reaches paramountcy, van Herk achieves the sort of ironical insight, the potential for which such juxtapositions generate. The castration scene, the one that made so many male reviewers recoil from the book, figures both as Judith's apotheosis of freedom and quintessential self-reliance, and as the biblical Judith's beheading of Holofernes.²¹ Simultaneously and ironically, however, it also counterpointedly acknowledges Judith's return to community and van Herk's own realistic experience in a farming community. Her return implicitly arises out of her need for the assistance of another person, Jim, to perform castrations, either to cut or, when he blanches, to hold the pigs (*J*, 164-166). As to the necessity of the scene from the most realistic point of view, castration, whatever else it might be seen to signify, is simply a necessary procedure in the job Judith has taken on. Her gender has nothing to do with it. As van Herk, the former farm-girl, puts it,

she only emasculates them because she has to. You can't eat pork if the males are not castrated. It is perfectly necessary [*sic*]. The story dictated that. Whatever it serves as an image is up to you to decide. But you have to castrate male pigs unless you want them to grow up and be boars. That is perfectly simple.²²

To isolate the realistic thread momentarily, this novel is perfectly simple, as simple as its style is smooth. Aspects of it may be downright autobiographical/reportorial at one end of the spectrum. Until she was

eighteen years old (1972), van Herk had to slop the pigs and muck out their stys on the farm her parents started near Edberg, 140 km southeast of Edmonton, above the stunning Battle River valley, some years after their arrival from southern Holland in the spring of 1949. Yet, even in that very real, agrarian setting van Herk found herself the "oddball," the fantastic other; realism transforms into the fantastic without quite leaving the real context behind. (As if to intensify such transformative potential, six years after she ceased doing chores on the farm, except in the summers, van Herk found herself perched high on a billboard in Montreal, countersigning the \$50,000 cheque for a novel about a woman, the "oddball" of the farming community, rearing pigs.) The critic of biographical interpretation of fiction will find much in van Herk's portrait of the fantastic as the natural home for the outsider

growing up in the country, in a community that did not value books, with parents who did value books but who wanted you to become successful [i.e. her older brothers are an engineer and a physician, her older sister a Registered Nurse; her younger brother works the family farm], parents who didn't speak English very well, who didn't have a television, who didn't have a telephone for a long time, and growing up to be a complete and bloody oddball. You take a little kid who already knows how to read, you send her to school in the middle of a country community, with a different language, funny cloths [*sic*], different habits²³...after a certain point I really retreated into fiction, into stories instead of into real life. And real life to me was a big fiction and stories were real. So I reversed everything on its head. I didn't like my family, didn't like where I lived, I didn't like my life, but I could read about interesting lives in the books I read.²⁴

And when she began to write, the fiction was waiting for her. The van Herk barn can be Judith Pierce's barn - "She pushed open the barn door and the chill sheathing her skin submerged under the hazy warmth inside. The interior heat colliding with the cold air formed a pillow of steam that hung about her even after she pulled the door shut" (*J*, 66) - and cannot be Judith Pierce's barn: Marie Antoinette, Circe, Venus, Lilith transform it into a mythical porcinity. Perhaps the real pig barn awaits her in Norberg, where Judith must mythically play Circe to a muster of prairie men, a 'malestrom':

They entered into a hot, sour smell of sweaty bodies and spilled beer...how many were there, five or six exploding into a parody of mirth - coarse, abrasive guffaws that echoed and rebounded in the tavern. She was on her feet and facing them, that pack howling like coyotes in their field, brave because they were not alone, one supporting the other. (*J*, 129, 134)

She may not have known a whorehouse in the deep South, but van Herk evidently knew the archetypal rural Alberta bar, and saw its patrons from a different perspective than does Kroetsch, who venerates their tall tales. Compared to the bar, the barn provides endless if intermittent fascination: for Judith, as if entering an underworld below, beyond the van Herk barn of Edberg, a "cavern," where "she felt the subterranean current of their breathing," learns to shed skins she cannot use, exploring the self that lies beyond Mr. Pierce or Norman, or Jim. Without losing the identity of Judith Pierce, then, Judith Pierce explores and finds an other, one not defined by a man, and locates her on a map, at first hesitantly ("you know General Delivery is for folks just passin' through") and later more securely ("I'll get a box" [*J*, 179-180]). Such a character

development achieves what van Herk regarded as the essence and value of all story - transformation - both when she was a girl growing up in Edberg and when she wrote the polemical abstract to the thesis out of which *Judith* was made:

Canadian heroines are surviving. What is interesting is not the fact that they survive, but how they do so, their journey of self-discovery toward psychological freedom. That transformation moves us to understand that it is possible to transcend established reality by considering, not the obvious aspects of the world around us, but the unexplored, the unexplainable. Then fiction becomes magician and transforms itself.²⁵

* * *

Most reviewers chose not to bear witness to the effort at transformation much less to the fact that Judith Pierce's transformation is not consummate. Instead, they either found a place for the novel on the old map, only treating the book's realistic aspects, or they dismissed it as a patently feminist tract, which it so obviously is not, although it is feminist certainly, if by that one can mean that its orientation is female and it shows concern for female people. When read realistically, the novel's depiction of pig farming received commendation (by Georgia Jones, for one²⁶), and some silly condemnation, an example of which forms part of Maria St. Goar's review: "It is a sad reflection on modern taste that a writer of obvious ability feels the need to resort to unpleasantness and sordid subject matter."²⁷ Perhaps the chances are that a new map, a transformed map, will be misread as often as not.

In the case of the denomination and dismissal of *Judith* as a feminist tract, reviewers merely had found a way, whether their response was positive or negative, of putting little effort into their reading. Thus, John Ryle of the *Times*:

Although Miss van Herk does not develop her heroine's physical relationship with the pigs as far as her compatriot Marian Engels [*sic*] took the love a lady for a British Columbian [*sic!*] bear in her recent novel *Bear*, she has an unaffected feeling for the consensual relations between animals and their keepers....[*Judith*] is a lively piglet of a novel that will appeal to those who like their country matters raw and their pork larded with sexual politics.²⁸

When one recalls the sensitivity with which Laurence had reviewed *Bear* (cited above), one notes not just the disparity here but also the sad fact of how ill-served a writer can be by her reviewers. Still, one review stands out for its acuity because it seizes on the tension between the mythic and the realistic. Peter Lewis described the novel as "an ostensibly realistic study of the identity problem of a woman in contemporary society, but... the central character takes on a symbolic role so that the [novel] expand[s] beyond realism towards myth."²⁹ But like too many other reviewers, Lewis then proceeds to read the book as resolving that tension by way of clichéd romance: "Unfortunately the real issues about women in society are raised only to be hedged in sentiment [Judith's romance with Jim, presumably], and since Judith simply recreates her childhood world minus parents, her liberation could be described as nostalgic regression." At least in 1978 - and only foreign reviews are cited here in order to demonstrate that the plight certainly occurred beyond Canada - reviewers

seemed unable to distinguish a woman author from her female characters. van Herk must, they uniformly opine, throw her support, whole-hog, behind Judith. Perhaps van Herk's feistiness with interviewers translates in the reviewers' minds into utter support for women and utter scorn for men; any thinking reader, on the other hand, may wish to give pause, to recollect that little really fine art issues out of such polarized views as misogyny or misandry.

On the contrary, van Herk's concluding line of this novel, "'Pigs,' she said, 'you win,'" scarcely signals a fully redeemed female identity. The question of Judith's community with humans remains, indeed is intensely asked under this oath of resignation. Where will this woman of energy, of independent spirit, of gusto fit into a society that does not recognize her type? Having been seduced by the pigs, has she exiled herself, like Circe, out on her own island? Can she go back to the bar on less pugilistic terms? Will she become one of the boys? As with much other feminist writing, this novel ends less in unitary, conclusive declaration than in paradox and suggestion. The celebration of Judith's exploration for independence does not proceed unqualifiedly. Transformation, van Herk surely is saying, exacts its costs. The individual can change, can do so only by taking the first step - desire for change - but her relation to society may not change in step. (Women's studies ten years later remain concerned by women's inclination to marginalize, to decentre, to exile themselves and their characters.) Still, where Atwood's women or Munro's - older women bred out of the older world of Ontario - often express such a fatalistic view of transformation, as if survival were one's purpose, van Herk's energetic women make the effort to change, even take the risk of inducing change in others. The second and third novels of this trilogy examine women taking greater risks than Judith's.

* * *

The Tent Peg - Re-drawing the Map

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

If, as John Noble Wilford maintains, maps originated out of the felt need "to draw a sketch to communicate a sense of place, some sense of *here* in relation to *there*,"³⁰ then Aritha van Herk's second novel, *The Tent Peg*, may be regarded as a woman's imaginative re-drawing of the map of the North to communicate a different sense of place. Today, we have the reprint of Agnes Deans Cameron's hitherto forgotten non-fiction and Mary Burns's recent stories to remind us that the literary map of the North has not been drawn exclusively by males, but when van Herk published *The Tent Peg* in 1981 she seemed alone in continuing northward the "earth-quaking" that she had started with *Judith*.³¹ Perhaps this is her most aesthetically satisfying novel, in so far as, while its style remains as smooth and compressed as the first novel's, the careful choreography with which the thirteen male characters' roles are drawn achieves, in sum, an ongoing dialogue between the men's and the woman's map. That is, the North that arises from male discourse suffers here from neither dismissal, neglect, nor assault; rather, its unitary impulse, by being contextualized by a female imagination, produces a *heteroglossia* that works centrifugally to disperse, rather than centrifically to cohere, a single, dominant discourse. The different voices do not, as different voices do in, for example, Hugh Brody's *Maps and Dreams*, sit in unfruitful, paralysed opposition to each other.³² Those, like reviewer William French, who, by insisting upon reading van Herk's novels as feminist treatises, entertain no distinction between the author and her female characters (a juvenile error of reading), manage sublimely to miss her art and her point. They fail

to see, as van Herk clearly can, beyond the war of the sexes.³³

In its straightforward plotting, this novel has a female character hold a mirror up to thirteen male characters (nine principals) who, during the course of a summer's geological work, explore both

themselves and the northern terrain, seeking worth in each and discovering not only worthlessness and falseness but also mystery and goodness. The technique of diary entries, not so much woven together as imbricated, with J.L.'s serving as the foundation, reminds one of Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* (even in the same number of principal and secondary characters) or of Frisch's *I'm Not Stiller* though to a lesser degree, but as significant as this affiliation to the structure of a novel by one of van Herk's favourite authors is the diary form's tradition within existing writing, mainly by males, about northern Canada. And if the diary or journal does not realistically remember the male literary map of the North - though no reviewers seem to have taken note of this fact - the symbolic use of the explorers' names for many of the men confirms that realistic remembrance.³⁴ These generic and nominal forms of allusiveness couple with the realistic rendering of a geological party's remote summer camp, which van Herk knew well from both her own summer jobs and her husband's work. As in *Judith*, then, though in a different way, the narrative starts with realism and remains contextually linked to it, though it goes on to transform into the fantastic. Neither are the male maps overthrown; indeed, the novel comprehends those vestigial maps, comprehends them so well that a mining company chose to publish an excerpt of the novel in its corporate magazine, applauding van Herk's accuracy of portrayal.³⁵

Here then at one level are fifteen lays of the land, but the novel then begins to work its magic on them. That magic is desire realized, articulated, acknowledged. In the summer of 1980, when Lily Miller was working on the manuscript for publication the next February,³⁶ van Herk spoke at the second annual NeWest Institute for Western Canadian Studies Forum for the Arts, at Strawberry Creek, Alberta. There, as Stephen Scobie reported later, she

castigated various clichés of realism, such as romanticism masquerading as myth, history masquerading as timelessness, and the "selective realism" of "a masculine world view...where women are portrayed as mothers, saints or whores, but never people in their own right." Against these inhibiting conventions, she advocated the force of desire: "Desire moves us forward, incites change, asks for more. It is desire that refuses to believe that the world is finished and complete, desire that stretches romanticism, defies history, transforms detail, perplexes tradition and invites freedom."³⁷

This report of the writer's contemporary ideology bears witness to the paramount concern of *The Tent Peg*: J. L.'s effort to reconstitute herself within community. Not just the evident opening chicanery where she masquerades as a male, but all her roles, both those she assumes and those she has thrust upon her by the men at different times in the summer - a listener, a mystery (*TP*, 145, 168), a confessor (*TP* 202 and *passim*), a "reformer" (*TP*, 156), a redeemer, a goddess, a prophet (*TP*, 187), judge (*TP*, 137), executioner, trickster,

shaman, devil, "witch" (*TP*, 109, 125), good luck charm (*TP*, 194), icon, mystic (*TP*, 145), magician (*TP*, 126, 152), jinx (*TP*, 126), crack shot, and "a cocktease and a bitch, a useless cunt" (*TP*, 105) - war with the woman as camp cook of the realistic setting. Her desire disprizes the men of some of the masquerades that they would have her play out, but her own desire allows her to assume others. Throughout, J.L. transforms and continues to transform as much as the men or the landscape do, trying to insist on being a female person, not a symbol, not a masquerade, not a facade within community. She is human, although even she is tempted to forget that.

Gradually she deals with these roles as she liberates herself from the identity that graduate student life accorded her. Initially, this amounts to a purging of sorts, but because, unlike Judith, J.L. has introduced herself willy nilly into another community, her Judith-like resolve to remain apart necessarily runs amok. As a consequence, the second novel explores the female map relentlessly through a paradigmatically anthropocentric perception ascribable to all mankind. Especially because the structure provides multiple perspectives - all of them anthropocentric but all different - on any one event of the plot, the *heteroglossia* throws up an apparent infinitude of possibilities; many of those possibilities, as those who can distinguish between author and character will readily remark, offer J.L. only dangerously delimiting and dehumanizing development, more of which later. Not everything J.L. explores and illuminates in others turns to gold; just so, those dimensions of themselves that J.L.'s presence among the men makes them explore offer chasteningly critical readings, some of which some of them choose not to see, others of which they use profitably to reconstitute their attitudes, at least within the community of ten people that summer.

The course of these recognitions, acknowledgements of potential transformations/reconstitutions, and, for some characters, like Mackenzie, realized imaginative transformations is charted by the four diary entries of Roy, the float plane pilot who supplies the camp from Mayo once each week. He chronicles the camp's transformation as follows.

1. It's a strange camp. It has an air of careful control, as if things are never out of place and if they are, ignored into line. 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. I can't see that it's her fault, she doesn't seem bitchy to me. It's more than that, she's done something to them so that they're not quite sure of her, they keep their distance. Yet they like her, everybody's always joking around. (*TP*, 78)
2. The tension is plain as can be. They like her plenty but they keep their distance. It's gingerly respect. And I can understand it. When I motor up to shore and see her standing there with that hat tipped over her eyes, I'm not so sure either. An innocent face can hide a mean streak...but not one of them's got through to her yet, I can see that too. And it's not for lack of trying. (*TP*, 104)
3. [following the mountain slide] And it is Fort Chaos. Every week the camp seems less stable. I can't describe it, it's more a feeling I have, but it's getting so I'm glad to get out of there, glad when my floats lift off the lake and I'm buzzing back to Mayo.

That cook just doesn't change. She's as cool, as secretive as ever. I think she's got the whole camp by the balls. (*TP*, 128)

4. [at Jerome's furlough] Boy, some strange camp. That crew working and clambering over and ignoring the rockslide that practically wiped them all out. They're cheerful as hell. I can't figure whether it's because Jerome is leaving for a week or whether they're just happy. (*TP*, 188)

Such tension, partly issuing of course out of an attenuated sexual expectation (the phallogentric view of driving the peg), dominates the reading of the plot by a male awaiting the conventional transformation of virgin or tease into vixen. Disappointed when that doesn't come about, like William French he is bound to sulk in a peevish rebuke of innovation. Apart from this Jeromish response, however, many others, much more instructive responses most of them, may be adduced.

Not only do the men initially keep their distance from J.L.; she fully intends to remain apart from them; the northern silence, whose siren-like promise of transcendence from the anthropocentric world and its conventional identities like graduate school by which one is pegged, prompted her application for the job of cook. But like Maggie Vardoe, who escapes from a bad marriage to become a summer camp cook and Maggie Lloyd once again, J.L. soon finds herself as embroiled as ever

with men, with stinking humanity; worse, she is "the goat [that] shall bear all their iniquities" (Lev. 16:22): "all I wanted to find was silence, a relief from the cacophony of sound, of confession that surrounded, that always impinged on me. I didn't want their secrets, my ear not receptacle enough for ordinary words, let alone confession. I do not practice absolution" (*TP*, 57).

At this stage J.L. vows "to keep them at bay," but when Roy next flies in, a transformation has occurred: J. L.'s desire has taken an ursine objective correlative. Here, not just Engel's bear but also Ursa Major obtain. So too, through J.L.'s own imagination (*TP*, 111), do the biblical Deborah and her mythical forbear, Artemis. (In Roman mythology also Diana, in Greek mythology Artemis, is the daughter of Zeus and Leto, sister of Apollo, and is the goddess of wildlife who transforms Callisto, the virgin of herself and one of her train of nymphs, into a she-bear who later is turned by Zeus into the Ursa Major constellation.) This conglomerate mentor preaches patience and endurance: "'Wait. Don't let them drive you away'" (*TP*, 111). Witnessing the bear, J.L. is told to bear witness by bearing with the men, but when she asks out of exasperation, "'What am I, some kind of sacrifice?'," the bear's response imparts a host of meanings: "'We all are,' she says, 'We all are already'."

Of course, the J.L. at this juncture in the novel interprets the pronoun to signify we females, but van Herk's repetition of "we all" and "all of us" throughout the novel may perhaps suggest that all mankind - men as well as women - must sacrifice to one another. Read merely as a feminist tract, *The Tent Peg* will not sustain this reading, but were another Christian echo - a notorious one at that - permitted here, the she-bear's consolation may be seen as yielding universal application as the "great mystery" delineated by Paul in his letter to those who kept and worshipped the statue of Artemis/Diana - the Ephesians:

Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.
Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto
the Lord.

For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

...

So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. (Ephes. 5:21-25, 28)

Raised on the bible, van Herk writes in terms of it, if against it, often; as with any other received text, she willingly infiltrates and transforms it. Here, the obvious hierarchy of Paul's enjoiner - man as head, woman as body of Christ - can only give grave offense to the feminist in van Herk; but the reciprocity connoted - all is in Christ; we are all in Christ; like Christ we all sacrifice to one another, submitting ourselves one to another; we all live equally for each other - does not differ widely from the sort of secular Chaucerian *gentillesse* (the spirit without the letter of Paul's words) that the she-bear advocates.

Read in this light, however controversial, J.L.'s act of hammering pegs of awareness into the geologists' minds (into their heads, into their temples) may be regarded as an act of love, however judgemental. She is hammering into them the remembrance that the sacrifice must be mutual. Even the "huge goddamn mother grizzly" (*TP*, 95), the *ursus arctos horribilis* who, after breeding - the novel's she-bear has two cubs in tow - "has little to do with males until her next oestrus three years hence [because] males will kill cubs and yearlings if given a chance,"³⁸ even the grizzly knows that to recuperate the male who has forgotten what sacrifice entails, necessitates a sacrifice of one's own. But that act of sacrifice does not involve precisely what the distraught J.L. imagines: it does not mean that she must "'give up, lay them all one after the other, let them do what they like to me'" (*TP*, 111), to her body. Rather, it involves teaching, and teaching less didactically than caringly, less rationally than viscerally (*TP*, 113), because the man's head can be set in right tune through his body, through his affections. Still, this transformation, as Deborah says, cannot be effected "'if I don't care about them'" (*TP*, 113). Such a sacrifice, J.L. comes to realize later, is not demeaning; it integrates female identity: "That's what we are, after all, we women. Survivors. Thank God for the she-bear and Deborah, or I would be back home right now and Jerome would be strutting around saying, 'I told you so!'" (*TP*, 136). The worst sort of hierarchy would have remained intact.

Transforming the biblical story of Ja-el (Judges 4,5) from a literal hammering of a peg through Sisera's temple, van Herk uses her character to hammer the realization of her transformation of the Pauline enjoiner through the temple, the seat of reason, of both Mackenzie and Thompson. (Other men she hammers less rationally, more viscerally.) She must disprize Thompson of his "patina of presumption, unquestioned right" (*TP*, 137), and make him understand that he does not own Katie like a possession. He must rejoice in her, not expect her to act the subservient part of a Penelope, rejoicing in him each time he returns home: "But how can I," he asks, "live like that, never knowing from one day to the next whether she'll be there when I come back?" J.L. makes him see that his summer work has forced Katie to overcome precisely this doubt: for his sake she has sacrificed a certain peace of mind. J.L. tells Thompson that he must do likewise: "If you don't expect to keep Katie, you'll always be happy if she stays" (*TP*, 158).

Mackenzie already is struggling on his own to answer a question that it took him ten years to ask: "What did she [Janice] want?" (*TP*, 202). During the intervening decade, he has swept the question aside, taking refuge like his explorer namesake in his male maps, in the rational enumerations of exploration, "as if they might protect him" (*TP*, 38) from the question. "He pushes himself harder than anyone" (*TP*, 137) to avoid the question, gathering facts, plotting his discoveries.³⁹ "Every once in a while," however, "he presses his fingers to his eyes as if it's not maps he's seeing" (*TP*, 136). When he does come to ask, J.L. condemns in him just what she descried in Thompson - that certain willingness of the man to sacrifice himself to a relationship in which he expects only the woman to submit, to become a malleable commodity, a possession:

"She left for herself. You were a good man but you couldn't *give* [emphasis added] that to her, it had nothing to do with you. It was herself she was after and the only way she could find that was by leaving."

"But," I stumble, "I wouldn't have prevented her from doing what she wanted."

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

It is the sound of my own assumption that hammers in my temple. (*TP*, 202)

Ringling the changes on the common complaint of the 'abandoned' husband - But I *gave* her everything she wanted - the first quoted line of this conversation foregrounds the wife-as-commodity syndrome that J.L. has sacrificed her devoutly sought freedom in order to address in each of these men. With others she enjoys differing degrees of success.

Roy's third trip has occurred long before Thompson and Mackenzie have suffered their pegs of understanding, but the peggings depend from the process of transformation, the early stages of which Roy has identified as destabilization ("the camp seems less stable"). The outward manifestation of this destabilization is the mountain slide, which deeply troubles the men (in one obvious sense, it immediately renders their maps of the terrain inaccurate); for J.L., however, the slide functions cathartically, unburdening her: "Silently I call, the invocation blossoming from my skin, my sorrow, the very spaces in my bones" (*TP*, 120). "I was relieving myself" (*TP*, 122) she tells the badgering Jerome and means much by the statement. Thereafter, perhaps against her will because, though it acts as a fit response to the she-bear's admonition, it will mean involving herself in community, J.L. initiates the process with each man, culminating in them all bearing their pegs of recognition. The process involves three steps. Providing relief/relieving the men is the first - Thompson: "I'm leaning toward her, spilling everything" (*TP*, 157); Hudson: "I find myself blurting out like a fool" (*TP*, 170); Ivan: "finally I can't help myself, I say to her what I've never dared to say to myself" (*TP*, 186); Cap: "She turns herself toward me and smiles, then she opens her arms. I stumble into them, clench her against me, feel warm skin like liquid pearls" (*TP*, 193); and Mackenzie: "I find myself falling into her invitation" (*TP*, 202). Either simultaneously or thereafter follow a symbolic laying on of hands (*TP*, 157 for Thompson; Hudson's hand is shaken by the men [*TP*, 182] after he lays his fisted hand on Jerome's snout [*TP*, 181] precisely in the places that the target practice has hit the image of the bear [*TP*, 75]; *TP*, 187 for Ivan; *TP*, 193 for Cap; and *TP*, 203 for Mackenzie⁴⁰) and then the figurative blow of the tent peg in the form of realization.

Most characters also gain from their realization an image either of the ideal, connoted by some form of the word "perfect," or of completion. And all go home with a sachet of moss by which to remember viscerally -

by touch and by smell - their transformations. Not all these incidents pertain to men's relations with women, but all do help the men to see themselves truthfully, to come to terms with their own humanity, and, thereby, to make them fitter for any community. In this sense, they have all explored, although Hearne can only learn through his camera, Ivan through his helicopter, Franklin through the contemplation of his sachet as a perfect poetic act, and, in a lovely ironical touch, Milton the Anabaptist Mennonite who is terrified of women (the Niels Lindstedt of the piece), through wilful voyeurism, which reduces him to a snake ("I drop to my belly..." [TP, 211]) because he can see a kiss only as a sinful act.⁴¹

All but Jerome. Faithful to his saintly namesake, the Church Father whose legendary sarcasm and invective van Herk retells superbly, Jerome remains so unregenerately misogynist that his hatred in fact spills over into a full embrace of misanthropy. He grows unfit for humanity -dialogue for him is only confrontational. He is the constant character, regarding women as "nothing but trouble" (TP, 28) even before the expedition leaves Yellowknife, snarling the same words after Hudson pegs him (TP, 175), and confirming an inability to think otherwise once he returns from his furlough: "...she makes trouble, she does nothing but stir up shit" (TP, 218). Jerome does not need completing; rather than requiring relief from his central problem, Jerome merely needs it confirmed for him. J.L. has already decided "to take him down a peg" (TP, 139) by orchestrating a consummate practical joke at his expense, but once he resolves that she must be "taken down a peg or two" (TP, 218), only confrontation can ensue. When it comes, J.L. must aim the peg not at Jerome's temple - it's beyond repair - but at the seat of his knowledge: "She's holding that deadly pistol [Jerome's own peg, as it were] at a point directly between Jerome's legs where he lies writhing on the floor of the tent" (TP, 221). And she pins him with his own words as well: "'Just try to get up, you bastard, and I'll blow your balls off. That's the only language you understand!'"

Here is the biblical story (Judges 5) played out at its most basic, untransformed and untransformative levels. In Ja-el's tent, the first unified victory over the enemy in one hundred and seventy-five years is proclaimed an act of a whole people - Israel. Deborah's gloating over it (Judges 5:24-27) only clarifies how much she deemed it a *moral* deed.⁴² In Fort Chaos, all the camp's members achieve a conditional catharsis from J.L.'s act, which rids it of Jerome's inhuman presence. J.L. may have thought that she had made her peace with man (TP, 214) but that sort of notional perfection presupposes a perfectible world. In Jerome's case, exile simply must be invoked where all other measures prove unavailing.

* * *

If J.L. only heard confession, granted absolution, and provided the opportunity for transformative regeneration, Jerome would be right: she would be too good for community. She would remain as Michelle Gadpaille, among many such reviewers, has disappointingly seen her, "an androgynous witch-goddess with mysterious powers over men and beasts."⁴³ But J.L. also wears a tent peg through her temple. Either a narrowly feminist or, as William French has proved, a myopically chauvinistic reading of this novel misses the drama van Herk writes into her female character as well. For J.L. develops in a dialectical manner of give and take, gradually moderating her views of men from an initially polarized perspective that echoes Jerome's: "'If you care, they'll destroy you'" (TP, 113). That is, she views the opposite sex just as Jerome's wholesale dismissal of women does - uniformly: "It seems so much simpler for them, everything is clearcut, laid out from the moment they're born. They do not have the questions and doubts that get laid on our backs, the bundle of faggots we carry and carry" (TP, 37). Such renunciation galvanizes J.L.: she uses men only

solipsistically, "acquiescing to touch but moving only for myself, not another" (*TP*, 149).⁴⁴ Gradually, and more by fluctuation, which allows for regression, than by straightforward development, J.L. achieves a perspective that allows her to differentiate among the men: "they're gradually coming clear for me" (*TP*, 136). Thereafter, J.L. begins even to see some goodness in some of the men, acknowledging, for example, that Mackenzie has "been fair, he's given me a chance" (*TP*, 136).

Towards the end of this particular diary entry, J.L.'s tenth, she takes her first willing step in the recreation of camp life, seizing on a typically male gesture - the practical joke - to accommodate herself to what are fast becoming her people (as the Israelites are Ja-el's). The orchestration and organization of the prank involves J. L. in community; suddenly, cooking, washing up, playing solitaire - in short, the life of a Martha - no longer entirely define her. She has resolved to take the she-bear's advice, "to face it head on" (*TP*, 111). Having come down from the mountain where she received this advice from the bear (much like the children of Israel's descent from Mt. Ephraim after being judged by Deborah, or the Ephesian women's withdrawal after worshipping at the statue of Artemis [bear]), J.L. recognizes the error of isolating herself outside the community. That will be Jerome's fate. But, as ever, this involvement promises as much treachery as reward for a woman because, as J.L. well knows from past experience, she risks having herself defined/claimed by the men as their "property" (*TP*, 106). Her practical joke, moreover, risks supplying Jerome with a cause, which he simply did not yet have, for more than a verbal repudiation of her.

Possession and victim are just two identities that her reinvolvement presents, even if the particular event of the prank markedly improves camp morale. The risk intensifies once "it's started. They're coming to me one by one, pouring their pestilence into my ears, trying to rid themselves of the poison" (*TP*, 172). However much care J.L. takes to shield herself - "And after they leave I run myself a tub full of water as hot as I can stand and lie there as long as possible sloughing them off, dissolving the sweat, the spit they've chafed into my skin" (*TP*, 160) - her involvement comes to define her. It yields many insights, including the one "that men carry heavy bundles of faggots too" (*TP*, 172). But increasingly, J.L. must face the dilemma of contemporary female life: how to balance womanhood and personhood with the inhuman roles that some men impose upon women. (This balancing appears essentially dialogic where isolationism engendered only silence: J.L.'s entries argue with themselves now, while together they engage in a dialogue with each man, and all mankind.) She manages a symbolic "balance" during the slide (*TP*, 120) and hope for another balance remains at the end in her otherworldly balancing act over the bonfire (*TP*, 227), but the image of balance between the two worlds of womanhood - real and fantastic - does not often occur once J.L. takes up the men's burdens, which unbalance her. Indeed, the recurrent image, one that J.L. is tempted by, is that of deification. Soon after she plays the prank on Jerome with all the other men, "every night...we have a fire" (*TP*, 148) in which at least Thompson sees her inhumanly as the centre of the universe:

...for a moment her face flares white and then falls into shadow again. After the slide she has somehow become our center, we all orbit her...We look to her for focus. And she stands quietly within our circle, unafraid to bend us backward upon ourselves. (*TP*, 151)

As the practical joke makes her one of the gang, her mysterious witness of the slide when no one else even awoke during it keeps J.L. up on the pedestal, around which the men circle in some sort of awe approaching reverence. Even while J.L.'s isolation modulates towards community, this temptation by the men to deify her, together with her submission to the temptation to be worshipped, intensifies and threatens to isolate her above

them rather than, as formerly, apart from them. Her stories, which remember Faulkner's Ike Snopse and Engel's Lou, dangerously enchant them. Rather than establishing dialectic, they stupify the men; they feel "pulled into a motionless circle" (*TP*, 154) by them. She anticipates the discovery of the Midas claims (*TP*, 164). "She's like a pillar in the middle of the camp" (*TP*, 168) - both peg and statue. Milton's polarized imagination transforms her body into a statue, "luminous glass, perfectly turned" (*TP*, 211). And Mackenzie, who already has seen J.L. as a transforming magician, "catalyzing sorrow to joy" (*TP*, 145), and who has said a prayer for her at a mountainside waterfall (*TP*, 198), worships her body - "with each movement the porcelain clarity of her skin more luminous" (*TP*, 213) - as his hands transform it into an adored beauty. By the end of the summer, he gazes at "that marble-smooth body" (*TP*, 227). The womanly J.L. seems no longer to be balancing the goddess J.L., and even though the last night's fire prefigures the torching of the statue of Artemis by Eratostratus, thereby censuring the worship of that goddess, the lingering impression left to the reader here is that of a woman almost trapped in yet another unwomanly/otherworldly role.⁴⁵ The men may no longer be worshipping their own temples (*TP*, 172), but does this solution improve the woman's lot? Has their transformation allowed J.L. to find a place for herself within community as a woman? van Herk problematizes this predicament thoroughly; nor does she stop here.

On the realistic side of this fascinating character there persists another unresolved problem having to do with J.L.'s willing participation, once commanded, to join in the staking of the Midas claims. Given the references, by J.L. as well as by men, to nature as female (*TP*, 11, 13, 52), and given that J.L. derives strength to endure from the mountain slide and the she-bear, surely the landscape's, nature's, exploitation by the geologists (and later, one presumes, by miners) poses a problem because it invokes at least an anthropocentric if not a phallogocentric conception of the world. In Hearne's words, she does, it is true, pound the posts into the ground "with an intent seriousness that makes me think this staking has another importance" (*TP*, 210), and it may do; it provides her with an "act of reference," claiming for her a stake in the northern map of a hitherto unitary male discourse. Moreover, it may, given J.L.'s invocation of the name of Midas, acknowledge the foolishness of the enterprise. Even so, van Herk seems to be saying that that act alone costs J.L.: immediately she drives the last post, the she-bear looms on the horizon, and when discovered by the helicopter, "the bear rises, monstrous, unforgiving," at least from Thompson's perspective, "filling the frame of the sky between the mountain slopes, her silhouette like a huge, ragged omen against the light" (*TP*, 209). When J.L. secretly prays to the she-bear as the helicopter lifts away, is it a prayer of apology for transgression and complicity? Is this the cost to woman of heterosexual community?

Can the multiple roles that J.L. has tried to balance prove assimilable or does the dichotomy persist problematically? The camp seems to end in celebration - the assays appear positive; J.L. achieves perfect balance in her dance.⁴⁶ Apparently, the novel offers an essentially comedic, that is to say resolved, conclusion. Yet, these recurrent problems of reconciling the extra-worldly symbol of Ja-el with the worldly woman J.L. constellate contemporary woman's vexed relations with men who want the same female to play the parts of cook and prophet, cunt and judge. The novel ends, as it were, with the promise of gold, but a Midas promise *guarantees* nothing. At its most precarious, then, *The Tent Peg's* final tent peg may be this one that fixes woman in dualistic paradox, fluctuating between the most hopeful and the most hopeless of possibilities.⁴⁷ The judge, Deborah may sing triumphantly in both bible (Judges 5:24-27) and novel (*TP*, 223), but while at least two versions of Judges 5:24, the King James and the New English, celebrate Ja-el as "Blessed *above* women" (emphasis added), van Herk chooses the more human, or less exalted "Most blessed of women" (*TP*, 223) for the celebration of J.L. by her friend. This intertextual echo with difference seems to imply just that difficulty of according the appropriate status - symbol or woman - to the eponymous character.

Without a narrator - van Herk's refusal to adopt any dominant voice accords well with her theme - the novel splendidly exploits the ungendered genre of diary to adumbrate the ceaseless flux - the novel begins, one recalls, with *heteroglossia* in the form of two versions of the same event - through which community necessarily restlessly ranges. Not the solitary male explorer but community. Not silence but dialogue, and a dialectic ever in flux. No resolutions. No answers, except for Jerome.

No Fixed Address - Refusing the Map

Because, as far as novels are concerned, this accession of Aritha van Herk's papers does not extend beyond *The Tent Peg*, a less detailed charting of *No Fixed Address* (1986) is called for here, but it seems necessary since van Herk has spoken of the three novels as a loose thematic trilogy that attempts to see women as other than victims.⁴⁸

The novel weaves four tales, all of them bearing the same title, "Notebook on a missing person," about a woman named Arachne Manteia, who is unfixed, wayward, droll, lustful and lusty, underprivileged (the 1959 Mercedes 300 notwithstanding), untrustworthy, defiant, delightfully free. She has not enjoyed the luxury or status either of a secretary or of a graduate student, and so, unlike the more solemn Judith and the more wary J.L., does not have conventional roles even to renounce. She inhabits the realm where picaros/picaras have always found themselves: on the outskirts, outskirting society/community, skirting around it, unskirting for it, and unskirted by it. Whereas Judith and J.L. both could draw contours of their own on the existing social map, Arachne, because of her social dispossession and probably also her simple disinclination, cannot or does not; she remains the outsider, travelling to travel, mapping where she will but unconcerned whether or not she leaves the tracks of her routes for others to follow. Society does not take her nor does she take society for granted. She distrusts it, falling back always and ultimately on her own resources, her own strengths. She will not allow herself to be defined and will not agree to define others. The disadvantaged kid who clawed and scraped and connived her survival - "This then was life. It would never change" (*NFA*, 180) - cannot even take trusting Thomas for granted. He is the vestigial prince, the dream that Arachne learns early on can happen but cannot be counted upon to happen. He is the unbelievable Penelope whom Odysseus, travelling to travel, only in his wildest dreams imagined still be there on his return, and, if she were, not quite comprehending why. Life is quixotic, itinerant, unfixed. Travel does not so much link events as constitute them.

Kerouac or Kroetsch's *Studhorse Man*, the reading of which was for van Herk "a germinal experience,"⁴⁹ or Ken Mitchell's prairie novel of escape, *The Con Man*, seem forbears of this novel, but as Stephen Scobie's thorough review of reviews of *No Fixed Address* so ably shows, van Herk could retell more than those stories of the West; her generical forbears reach back to seventeenth-century Spanish and German novels in which picaras defy their societies.⁵⁰ The picaresque form demands that closure not be invoked unless the picaro/picara repents and seeks readmission into society/community on society's terms. Tom Jones and Moll Flanders dwindle into such comedic readmissions, but Moll and Fanny "dissatisfied" van Herk: "they were incomplete and repentant, as well as being at the mercy of their very femaleness."⁵¹ Exploring the character who refuses readmission, who resists conventional society, even in ironical relations to it, who resists the temptations of mapping and being mapped - whereas Thomas is "drawn by his maps" (*NFA*, 26) - van Herk produces a chaotic novel. Its impulses are anarchical, its defiances mysterious and disturbing. One wants at first to deny them, even to resist the laughter they cause. Surely, the reader for realism thinks, the oddity of

the scene at Crowfoot's grave will, given narrative time, resolve into sense. Surely, the reader's lust, which the two characters' fascination for the uncovered bone engenders, will sensibly be explained and subdued. Surely, all these voices and this desire will take recognizable shape. But when they don't, the reader reading for realism, for moral, will lapse dissatisfiedly into reproach. Yet, if a text signs itself by the title *No Fixed Address*, why does its reader still expect it to end, to arrive at some identifiable terminus, to stand still, to follow a route? Just so. And if a character, who never has understood society and in whom society has never shown any interest except as its victim, expresses desire, what shape will it take?

The woman who refuses to wear underwear is not, the italicized voice tells us, a fashionable woman, and therefore has no recognizable "*shape*" (NFA, 9). She is socially unrecognizable, unmapped, unacknowledged; she does not lie at the centre of a world of "*wooden and metal hoops of cages, [her] progress a gently swaying bell and the body within an unclamorous tongue*" (NFA, 10). She is renegade, rogue, outlaw out of skirts. The web she weaves has no centre, none either that one can readily identify or that in terms of one can orient one's reading of character or text. Not fixing herself in address she remains realistically unrecognizable. The reader then is caught in a narrative web that seems without structure, where the webbed childhood weaves with the present in unexpected ways. The narrative's impulses, like a web's, are all centrifugal, refusing to cohere. Arachne's trips describe ever-widening itineraries, gyrating out of Calgary where the faithful Penelope, Thomas Telfer, will provide her with homespun stability and sanity when she desires it; but the travels describe irregular, unpredictable routes, from Minton, Sask. to Eagle Hill, Wainwright, and Nanton, Alta. to Tofino, B.C. and Macmillan Pass, Yukon/N.W.T. (just south, down the Selwyn Mountain Range from the she-bear's haunt in the Werneckes of *The Tent Peg*). Tracing the routes of the 179 places through which she travels produces no coherent web; rather, she has woven what a picaresque would weave: a map of deceit, or surreptitious delight, of another world (the itineraries include several cemeteries, as well as the author's home towns of Edberg and Calgary). She doesn't get caught, doesn't get banged up, doesn't have to pay a price (no Moll she), doesn't lose without later winning. And, like character, so like her story: the narrative defies all the rules too, especially those the realistic reader is looking to see obeyed. The web (t)ravels and unravels beyond what society (read William French) allows.

"What wish is enacted," Hayden White asks, "what desire is gratified, by the fantasy that *real* events are properly represented when they can be shown to display the formal coherency of a story?"⁵² Recognizing as fantasy that desire for coherency, having, since her days in Edberg, recognized that the fantastic may be more real, van Herk writes against this conventional desire for coherency in narrative. Let's get those characters into real situations, shall we? Let's not. Let's shape them by the "*imprisonment*" (NFA, 10) of narrative underwear, make sense out of them, conform our desires for them to the literarily coherent. Let's not. van Herk resists, refuses the map altogether this time. By 1986, she has mapped her voice on it and, unlike eight years earlier, many other prairie women writers have added their voices - Barclay, Alford, Birdsell, Gom, Butala, Braun, Crozier, Murphy, to name a few. Forget the map then; forget the urge to reshape someone else's map in someone else's terms; forget the map. Instead, interrogate that "apparently universal need not only to narrate but to give to events an aspect of narrativity."⁵³ Earth-quake that a little. Infiltrate it. Narrative form need not be a cognitive instrument. Find other forms. Feel other adventures for women than adultery. Give their energy expression.

van Herk set herself a near impossible task, one that she knew would doom her in the eyes of the realism fetishists who had already denounced the transformations she had worked in the first two novels.

But a writer hardly can afford to toe the line set down by the reviewers. The impossible, desirable task lay not in ignoring the demand for realism but in writing a novel wholly determined by a character's desire. With *Arachne*, van Herk seems barely to be in control. Her character's unpredictability leads her: bent on discovering where sex and death (the mortality of the amorous journey) and desire and feeling meet, somewhere beyond the bounds of sense. To follow this character is to risk leaving the unsmitten reader behind. Will this be most readers? Such a question asks itself of the artist who strives for the rogue's freedom. Do most readers care to follow *Arachne's* tracks? Most of us cathartically enjoy/crave being taken to the "edge of the abyss of nothingness,"⁵⁴ but do many of us desire, even in story, to be hurled over the edge, to disappear into nothingness, into no fixed address? Probably not. Probably most readers want to find out who the hell the italicized voice belongs to, not recognizing it as the realistic reader's - for once the displaced voice - which sits outside the narrative; this voice tries to track down the *picara* who ventures outside society, the home of realism.

* * *

Arachne's presumptuousness is the mythical *Arachne's* presumption: to be, if obsessively so, what she desires. *Arachne's* story needs retelling. (If *No Fixed Address* bears one contextual benchmark apart from the picaresque it is Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, in which of course fantastic transformations are the norm rather than the exception.) Somehow, the presumptuous and defiant male rogue, Prometheus, is remembered and made a martyr for affecting godhead. His opposite number in women's story is silenced. Perhaps the peasant girl from Lydia who challenged the goddess Athena to the contest of weaving is too presumptuous a social upstart to take seriously; Prometheus had better genes or a better address, perhaps.

Another factor in the retelling of this story is noteworthy. Nancy K. Miller has identified a kind of marginal, peripheral, outsider discourse in writing by women - congenial to the picaresque, though Miller does not mention the form - which "reads against the weave of indifferentiation to discover the embodiment in writing of a gendered subjectivity." This can be found in both criticism and fiction. Because the *Arachne* of myth, an artist figure, wove her stories silently in tapestries whose subjects and themes contested society's power, Miller calls a text an *arachnology* which similarly positions itself.⁵⁵ What the mythic *Arachne* resists and contests is any sanction of the "hierarchy of talents" that the goddess insists she acknowledge. What happens when *Arachne* resists may not surprise van Herk's readers: like Circe, like Ja-el, *Arachne* is silenced. Dictionaries and encyclopediae commonly tell how *Arachne*, guilty of the sin of pride, either hangs herself for shame and/or is transformed by Athena into a spider. Again, silence. But Miller has redirected attention to precisely the two contesting discourses that Athena and *Arachne* weave in their struggle. Unsurprisingly for one who seeks to confirm existing hierarchy, Athena weaves the story of war for power and ideological supremacy. The women depicted in the four novels all were guilty, like *Arachne* in Athena's view, of aspiring beyond their stations as women and mortals. But in the story of *Arachne*, one never hears what *her* tapestry narrated. Its discourse has been silenced as it (and simultaneously her identity as a woman) was by Athena. In his allegorical commentary, George Sandys's "Englised" edition (1632) of Ovid's *Metamorphosis* distinguished between the stories depicted in Athena's tapestry and those in *Arachne's* as follows: "These [Athena's] serve for instruction. But profane *Arachne* sets forth the rapes and adulteries of the Gods."⁵⁶ In short, *Arachne* tells the story of women's seductions and betrayals by male gods. Following Sandys's edition, Miller provides a contemporary context for *Arachne's* tapestry:

Against the classically theocentric balance of Athena's tapestry, Arachne constructs a feminocentric protest: Europa, Leda, Antiope, are the more familiar names of women, carried off against their will by the "heavenly crimes" of divine desire, whose stories she weaves; Medusa, and more obscurely Erigone, who in one account, deceived by Bacchus, "later hangs herself on a nearby tree." ...though the product [of Arachne] is judged flawless in the signifiers of its art - the *verisimilitude* of its representation - "real bull and real waves you would think them" - its producer must be punished for its signified. Thus, outwomaned, in a phallic identification with Olympian authority, the goddess destroys the woman's countercultural account: she "rent the embroidered web with its heavenly crimes." Symptomatically - we recall that Athena identifies not only with the gods, but with godhead, the cerebral male identity that bypasses the female - she goes on not only to mutilate the text, but to destroy its author by beating her over the head with the shuttle - their shared emblem. Arachne, in indignation, tries to hang herself, at which point Athena both pities and transforms her; she is to hang and yet to live: her head shrinks, her legs become "slender fingers" and, virtually all body - the antithesis of the goddess - she continues the act of spinning: "and now a spider, she exercises her old-time weaver art." ...Arachne is punished for her point of view. For this, she is restricted to spinning outside representation, to a reproduction that turns back on itself.⁵⁷

In retelling this received story, which she apparently has diligently sought out, van Herk quite naturally locates Arachne beyond society: only her love for Thomas, which she cannot believe - "Arachne wants for nothing but does not dare believe that this will last" (*NFA*, 180) - because betrayal is all she knows, which ultimately must suffer from entropy, and which can offer no more life than his maps, remains within society. In a witty reconstitution of the power-conscious goddess Athena, van Herk traps her Thena in a ceaseless hatred of how society works; Thena defines herself wholly by her social context. She is infuriated by Arachne who refuses such a trap. It seems fitting indeed that a woman who told her story in pictures and told it immaculately (note that Arachne does not lose the contest to Athena) should not need words to represent herself. van Herk's Arachne instead uses the language of her body; it is all that Athena left the mythic Arachne.

She proceeds viscerally; she identifies by touch, by feel (like arachnids, which have no antennae and so rely on tactile hair to process information). Like any picara, she thrives on her own, travelling/ spinning outside representation stories for herself that are as illegal as both the deeds of the gods that the mythic Arachne depicts and her depiction of them. Only Josef, another outcast of society, an artist who is forced by his daughter to hammer his stories outside (in the "detached garage behind the house" [*NFA*, 151]), seems to understand her, doing so through his body, not through language. They identify their souls corporeally:

...they recognize each other in their finger-fumbling bodies....Arachne has had countless men....But this man is strangely wild; he calls her from her body despite the cane flung down in the stubble, his slack skin. They are thieves locked in the same cell, a man with too little and a woman with too much.

They have their hands on each other; their mouths too. She has never felt a mouth as hot and wide as his, the bones of a face against hers so insistent. Arachne is

unprepared. When his suspenders are untangled and he slides into her, she arcs herself upward, digging him inside, animal and burrow. "Wait," he whispers against her ear, but she is already screaming, a hoarse long cry that he can feel columned from where he enters her all the way up her throat. He plunges his arms under her buttocks, but that only rushes them closer together.

Riding under his weight, the straw a cushion and above his head the moon spiked against the sky, Arachne is lifted beyond herself. They have not shed their clothes but they are searingly naked, shorn of all costume, all disguise, a man who has fled half the world and four score years, and a woman who wants more, more, always more, the broken halves of rebel and assassin whole. They reach beyond the touch of skin, beyond longing and desire. Disorder and dissent make order whole, give it reason. He's completed the act begun so long ago, passed on his insurgence with his hands, the two of them one piece of the universe observing itself.

Their bodies raw, cooling despite the warm straw, she brings her hand up to his face. It is wet. Arachne turns her head, the field drawn with poplars black lace against the feathered sky. "Look," she says, "the trees."

He raises his head from her shoulder. It is what you see at the edge of your eye before dying, black trees etching an autumn wind. (*NFA*, 187-188)

Arachne's premonitions of desire and death commingle here in a vision that reminds the reader of what else Josef passes on to her from his hands: his gift of the copper disc depicting the endless (because circular) dance of death that is life (*NFA*, 104).

And Arachne's now off and running again. Refusing even to tell society what she thinks of it, and thereby further infuriating Thena, she spins out of control, beyond the forces of control (police), beyond logic (knifing the ferry passenger), beyond realism (screwing a dead sailor), beyond plot, "beyond longing and desire." We follow as long as we can take it, this novel of exhaustion, which transcends the essential social questions that *Judith* and *The Tent Peg* addressed, which travels beyond society on the road to myth.

Is van Herk able to satisfy herself within the novel genre any longer? Is the form infinitely elastic? Has it room for modern-day *Metamorphoses*? One thing is certain: only the writer taking risks can provide us with the occasions to investigate these questions. van Herk's spirit of imaginative inquiry, fueled by an apparently limitless energy, seems resolved to keep us wondering. The fantastic will become more real in time perhaps, just as the Edberg girl decided it would, just as John Barth says it does in the best writing: the "impulse to imagine alternative to the world can become a driving impulse for writers....So that really what you want to do is re-invent philosophy and the rest -make up your own whole history of the world."⁵⁸ In such a reckoning, the literary map will be transformed to whatever extent the writer taking risks has the imaginative strength to transform it.

NOTES

1. Aritha van Herk, "A Gentle Circumcision," in *Trace: Prairie Writers on Writing*, ed. Birk Sproxton (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1986), p. 257.
2. Eliane Leslau Silverman, *The Last Best West: Women on the Alberta Frontier 1880-1930* (Montreal, London: Eden Press, 1984).
3. Aritha van Herk, "Mapping as Metaphor," *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Kanada-Studien*, no. 2 Jahrgang 1982, p. 76.
4. See M.M. Bakhtin, "Discourse on the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson, Michael Holquist (Austin and London: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981). The interests of Bakhtin in this essay on the novel are being somewhat re-appropriated here. He is inclined to speak of *heteroglossia*, multi-linguagedness, and the centripetal and centrifugal forces of discourse within single works; but, as the early pages of his essay suggest, these aspects in a novel reflect similar characteristics in society.
5. Aritha van Herk, "Women Writers and the Prairie: Spies in an Indifferent Landscape," *Kunapipi*, vol. 6, no. 2 (1984), p. 24.
6. This view does not mean to suggest that any one of the male novelists (with the possible exception of W.O. Mitchell) produces a single, unitary voice in his *oeuvre*. Wiebe obviously gives the literary map the contours of the Mennonite, the Cree, the Métis, and so on that it had not hitherto exhibited. His imagination is heteroglossic, multi-linguaged. In every sense, Kroetsch recognizes the value of the centrifugal impetus that decentralizes the power of the unitary discourse. His invocation in various novels of Greek myth only in order to play with it, not to transplant it in the West, exemplifies that impulse. No, here the unitary discourse refers to gender, to the male voicedness of these writers' cumulative efforts.
7. Aritha van Herk, "Mapping as Metaphor," p. 77. The reference is to Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Random House, 1970), p. xvi.
8. Margaret Laurence, rev. of *Bear*; rptd. in Marian Engel, *Bear*, New Canadian Library ed. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982, 1986), p. [1].
9. *Calgary Herald*, 23 Feb. 1985, A9, A14.
10. Aritha van Herk, "CALGARY: this growing graveyard," *NeWest Review*, vol. 13, no. 4 (Dec. 1987), p. 11.
11. David Thompson, *Travels in Western North America, 1784-1812*, ed. and introd. Victor G. Hopwood (Toronto: Macmillan, 1971), p. 223.
12. Aritha van Herk, interviewed by Gyrid Jerve, *Kunapipi*, vol. 8, no. 3 (1986), p. 71.
13. Aritha van Herk, interviewed by Sharon Batt, *Branching Out*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1978), p. 26.
14. Aritha van Herk, interviewed by Ingwer Nommensen, Kiel, 4 Aug. 1983; in Nommensen, "Das Thema der Verwandlung in dem Romanwerk Aritha van Herks," M.A. Thesis, Univ. of Kiel, 1984, p. 79. (Copy in MsC 53.12.19.)

15. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
 16. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
 17. *Ibid.*, pp. 87, 88.
 18. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
 19. Barbara G. Walker, "Lilith," in *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), pp. 541-542.
 20. While a study of the differences between "When Pigs Fly" and *Judith* shows how the book changes to third person what was a porcine perspective, van Herk viewed the alteration as salutary because, without losing sight of the pigs' point of view and consciousness, the reader gains an additional, omniscient point of view. The alteration was proposed by Lily Poritz Miller, senior editor at McClelland and Stewart. See her letter to van Herk of 27 March 1978 in the van Herk papers, MsC 53.1.14, item 2.
 21. For a different interpretation of how this allusion works in *Judith*, see Dorothy Jones, "'A Kingdom and a Place of Exile': Women Writers and the World of Nature," *World Literature Written in English*, 24 (1984), 269-272.
 22. Aritha van Herk, interviewed by Ingwer Nommensen, p. 89.
 23. van Herk's parents worship in the Dutch Reformed Church; many in the Edberg community are of Scandinavian descent, Edberg lying south of Camrose in the New Norway district of central Alberta, much of which Scandinavian immigrants settled (west of Edberg towards Wetaskiwin remains known as New Sweden). Other backgrounds which van Herk encountered at school in Edberg were Mennonite and Holdeman (Church of God in Christ, a separate, post-Mennonite sect that developed out of a nineteenth-century schism). In most cases, however, the school children were at least second or third generation Canadians, all of whom spoke English. Since only Aritha and her young brother, Andrew, were born in Canada, the van Herk family tongue is Dutch.
- Dutch Reformed is one of the strictest of the three Protestant Churches in North America that emerged out of Dutch Calvin origins. The others are Canada Reformed and Christian Reformed. Although unaffiliated with any particular institutionalized religion today - mainly because she cannot approve their paternalistic attitudes and patriarchal theologies - van Herk does occasionally speak from the pulpit, most recently on the subject of "Women and Faith: The Reach of the Imagination," in the series *Women in Church and Society*, sponsored by Garneau United Church, Edmonton, 16 November 1986.
24. Aritha van Herk, interviewed by Ingwer Nommensen, p. 75.
 25. Aritha van Herk, "When Pigs Fly," M.A. Thesis, the University of Alberta, Fall 1978, p. [v].
 26. Georgia Jones, rev. of *Judith*, *Herald Examiner* (Boston), 31 Jan. 1979. (Copy in van Herk papers, MsC 53.4.6.)

27. Maria St. Goar, rev. of *Judith*, *Chattanooga Times*, 31 Dec. 1978. (Copy in van Herk papers, MsC 53.4.6.)
28. John Ryle, "Of Pigs and Men," rev. of *Judith*, *Times* (London), 27 Dec. 1978. (Copy in van Herk papers, MsC 53.4.7.)
29. Peter Lewis, rev. of *Judith*, *The Standard*, June 1979. (Copy in van Herk papers, MsC 53.4.7.)
30. John Noble Wilford, *The Mapmakers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), p. 7.
31. Agnes Deans Cameron, *The New North: An Account of a Woman's 1908 Journey through Canada to the Arctic* (1909); rpt., ed. and introd. David Richeson (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1986). Mary Burns, *Suburbs of the Arctic Circle* (Moonbeam: Penumbra Press, 1986).
32. Hugh Brody, *Maps and Dreams: Indians and the British Columbia Frontier* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1981); rpt. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983).
33. William French, rev. of *The Tent Peg*, *The Globe and Mail*, 21 Feb. 1981. The opening paragraph illustrates well French's myopia: "If I get the message that Aritha van Herk seems to convey in this provocative novel, and I hope I don't, it's that sex between men and women is unnecessary."
34. Hudson, Hearne, Mackenzie, Franklin, Thompson (though he never explored beyond what today are the northern extremities of the prairie provinces), and Cap Kane (remembering the American arctic explorer, Elisha Kent Kane?) eponymously keep that male map firmly before van Herk's reader. One of the few reviewers to remark on van Herk's choice of names was Barbara Godard, *The Fiddlehead* (April 1982), p. 92.
35. *Orbit: The Cominco Quarterly*, vol. 12, no. 5 (Dec. 1982), p. 12. The excerpt, cited for its faithful, realistic picture of geology camp life, is, unsurprisingly, one of Mackenzie's entries (*TP*, 122-123).
36. Letter, Lily Miller to Aritha van Herk, 10 July 1980; van Herk papers, MsC 53.1.14, item 71.
37. Stephen Scobie, "Realism West: The NeWest Conference--no more home on the range," *Edmonton Magazine*, vol. 2, no. 7 (Nov. 1980), p. 133.
38. Gary Turbak, "Lord of the Mountain," *Equinox*, no. 18 (Nov./Dec. 1984), p. [67].
39. The structural adumbration of the trap of facts that he has built himself occurs in the various lists he produces (*TP*, 47, 76, 99); although these lists quietly and ironically show the reader that MacKenzie has anticipated everything Jerome thinks the camp ought to be doing on its surveys, they still show Mackenzie's proclivity for defining himself in terms of what he does rather than in terms of what he might imagine or feel. The final lists serve a different purpose in that one details an analysis and involves memory (*TP*, 183), while the others (*TP*, 195, 206) set out the figurative area where J.L.'s peg must strike Mackenzie, and the literal area where she must help with the pegging of the claims.
40. The laying on of hands may be symbolically interpreted in various ways. The act is better known from the New Testament, where it signifies something positive: blessing, healing, benediction, confirmation of an office, or the bestowal of the Holy Spirit. But in the Old Testament its significations differ somewhat. While

the parental bestowal of inheritances and rights (blessing), and the confirmation of the gifts and rights of an office anticipate similar significations in the New Testament, a third does not: this is the transference to an animal of one's guilt. Variations of this act occur in the Old Testament, and all are naturally sacrificial. Given that Ja-el's is an Old Testament story, and that her name means "wild goat," it may be that van Herk, in retelling Ja-el's story, is remembering all the blame that biblical interpreters make Ja-el bear for her heroic deed; in retelling Ja-el's story, then, van Herk may also see her as the sacrificial scapegoat, on whom Aaron lays his hands to "confess over him [the goat] all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and [sending] him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness;/ And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities into a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness" (Lev. 16:21-22). Having felt the sins of the men cast upon her ("I didn't want their secrets" [*TP*, 57]), J.L. will not become their scapegoat in the wilderness, in the "land not inhabited." Indeed, this reading of her laying on of hands suggests that she is reinforcing for each man the realization he has reached about himself. At one and the same time, the act seems both to comfort and bless, and to issue a stern rebuke.

41. The name, Milton, became a late addition to the novel: right up until the final draft, this character's name was Wendall, and even in that draft (MsC 53.7.2), the name Wendall is typed but crossed out in pencil and replaced by the name Milton.

In the course of a letter to the author of 5 Aug. 1985 and in response to his protest that the *poet* Milton did not deserve this eponymous fate, van Herk wrote as follows: "I have not tried to make any direct correlation between Milton and the English poet; I quite agree with you that said poet is no misogynist, and coped with the tension between innocence and experience very well. As a young Mennonite boy, Milton originates in a world innocent of not just experience, but of the implication of that innocence. The Community of Mennonites where I grew up believed that education and the arts were sources of undesirable experience; because they refused contact with those aspects of life, their perception or apprehension of them was often ironically innocent. I remember one family calling their son Calvin, when, if they had known that Calvin represented the antithesis of what the Anabaptists (Mennonites) stand for, the name would have horrified them. Milton is called Milton because it has somehow drifted down to his community or his parents that Milton was a religious poet. The irony is intentional and I wanted it to underline the notion of the dangers of fragmented or incomplete or stratified knowledge, which is the problem that all of the men confront and that J. L. must confront too. Naming something does not necessarily define it. That J.L. can articulate for the men something that they have had difficulty naming does not necessarily mean that it is instantly resolved. One of the critical errors that has been repeatedly made about *The Tent Peg* is that J.L. 'fixes' everything too neatly. The fact is, she fixes nothing, she only names it. Milton has the name of someone who recognizes the difficulties of innocence and experience. J.L. does not, in the same way as she does for the others, *name* his education. Nothing verbal is exchanged between them at all: he already owns the word for his missing education in his name. Instead, he watches a physical enactment of it. His voyeurism is a necessary part of his background...."

42. The moral dimension that Deborah sees in Ja-el's act bears an intertextually ironical relation to an early conversation in the novel between J.L. and Paul (whose own name, given his views, is intertextually significant). He espouses the common male view about a woman in camp bringing bad luck. Like the sailor who wants the woman only inanimately present, at the prow of the ship, the geologist merely jettisons women as sinister: "'Common theory is it's bad for camp morale.' I snort. 'Surely you mean morals.' ... 'No.

Morale" (*TP*, 25).

43. Michelle Gadpaille, "Novels in English 1960 to 1982: Other Talents, Other Works," in *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, gen. ed. William Toye (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983), p. 591.

44. That J.L.'s reorientation of perception involves regression as well as progression, is evident nowhere more than in those situations calling for her to disprize herself of her own deceit. The just-quoted passage accords not at all with a later, self-pitying remark, delivered in the conclusion of an apt excoriation of Jerome: "When I think of how much I've given out to all the men I went to bed with and how little I got back, I know it's better not to" (*TP*, 191).

45. "She is not a trickster, but she is a shaman. She is a priestess of a kind,...something they almost worship." (Aritha van Herk, interviewed by Ingwer Nommensen [see note 14, above], p. 82.)

46. See Dorothy Jones, "'The Centrique Part': Theme and Image in Aritha van Herk's Novel *The Tent Peg*," *Kunapipi*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1983), p. 78.

47. A comment by van Herk on the story she re-tells may be adduced for its implications vis à vis such potential, harmful dualism: "Her [Ja-el's] act [of killing Sisera] ends a civil war and leads to 40 years of peace. But the interesting thing is that all the encyclopedias and dictionaries I've read on the subject condemns [*sic*] the woman as a bitch who has offended the rules of hospitality. Think on that! It goes to show that if you're a man, like Samson, and commit 150 murders, you'll still be lauded as a hero. If you're a woman, you're a villain. That's typical of our male-dominated society, the kind of attitude that makes me furious." (Aritha van Herk, interviewed by Ken Adachi, *Toronto Sunday Star*, 1 Mar. 1981; copy in van Herk papers, MsC 53.12.21.) Herein lies the key to one of van Herk's purposes for transforming the story from a national/racial and martial battle to one of gender. Not just the original story but the ideology of its interpreters receives purposeful reconsideration and reconstitution in *The Tent Peg*.

48. Marty Gervais, "A Feminist, Yet, But Not In Print," *Windsor Star*, 19 Feb. 1983. (Copy in van Herk papers, MsC 53.12.21.)

49. Aritha van Herk, "Picaros and Priestesses: Repentent Rogues," *Newsletter*, Humanities Association of Canada, vol. 13, no. 1 (Fall 1984), p. 14.

50. Stephen Scobie, "arachne's progress," *Brick*, no. 29 (Winter 1987), pp. 37-40.

51. Aritha van Herk, "Picaros and Priestesses," p. 16.

52. Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality" (1980); rpt. in *On Narrativity*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 4.

53. *Ibid.*

54. Aritha van Herk, "Picaros and Priestesses," p. 17.

55. Nancy K. Miller, "Arachnologies: The Woman, the Text, and the Critic," in *The Poetics of Gender*, ed. Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1986), pp. 270-295; p. 272 qtd.

56. *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished, Mythologized, and Represented in Figures by George Sandys*, ed. Karl K. Hulley and Stanley T. Vandersall, fwd. Douglas Bush (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1970), p. 289.
57. Nancy K. Miller, "Arachnologies," pp. 273, 274.
58. John J. Enck, "John Barth: An Interview," *Wisconsin Studies in Literature*, vol. 6, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 1965), p. 8.

WORKS CITED

Judith. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978. Cited as J.

No Fixed Address. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986. Cited as *NFA*.

The Tent Peg. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1981. Cited as *TP*.

The Aritha van Herk papers: first accession. An inventory of the archive at the University of Calgary Libraries. Compiler: Sandra Mortensen. Editors: Apollonia Steele and Jean F. Tener. Biocritical essay: I.S. MacLaren. [Calgary]: University of Calgary Press, [1987].