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Travelogues of Independence: Aritha van Herk's
No Fixed Address and *The Tent Peg*

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1 Introduction

The women in Aritha van Herk's novels are different from the 'average' woman in many ways. Headstrong but vulnerable, difficult but soothing, stoical yet restless they present themselves. Van Herk's novels to date feature exceptional female characters faced with an uncertain future, burdened by a fiercely depressing or deplorably empty past. Yet these women find – or rather create – their paths through life, describing man-made maps only to redraw them according to their own ideas, thereby distancing themselves from any idea of average and ordinary existences. Conventional characters and conventional plots are yet to be found in van Herk's texts. Rather, she draws upon a longstanding Canadian literary tradition, combines it with mythological traditions and ideas from other cultural areas and creates her own – mostly feminist – versions of stories.

Geography – or rather landscape – is important in van Herk's writings. Especially in *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey* and *The Tent Peg*, landscape plays a central role; sometimes it even seems to become a character of its own. The conscious living in and living off landscape is an inherently Canadian quality. It was Northrop Frye, in his essay "Conclusion to a *Literary History of Canada*", who provocatively formulated the essential Canadian question as being not "Who am I" but rather "Where is here"¹ – a question easily understood by anyone who has ever spent time in Canada outside the safety of a large city and found him- or herself confronted with the immensity of the country. This feeling of vastness is often connected with a sense of emptiness which in turn is equally attributed to the prairie flats of Saskatchewan and Manitoba (and, to a lesser degree, Alberta) as well as to the northern parts of Canada. With this concept of landscape in mind, the idea of featuring landscape as an additional character in a novel quickly loses its absurdity.

In *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey* and *The Tent Peg* the two female protagonists are motivated by movement, the alternative to a life of immobility and emotional death. As a consequence, they create their own travelogues or redraw existing maps in an effort to travel from their current situations to better ones – be it physically

¹ Compare Frye 220.

or psychologically. Maps are generally seen as a useful instrument in such endeavors. Depending on their use, they represent different portions of reality in different ways: a topographical map portrays an area differently from a road map or an aerial map. What they have in common is that they do not represent reality, but rather an abstract version of a standardized idea of what a certain reality may look like, so to say a “graphic representation of the geographical setting” (Robinson et al. 9). As maps and mapping on various levels are essential in discussing travelogues, attention will also be given to the question of cartography and landscape and what implications these notions carry when viewed from a feminist or colonial perspective.

In this thesis, I aim to show that *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey* and *The Tent Peg* can be read as travelogues and furthermore, as travelogues of independence. The protagonists shape their lives according to their own rules, which they formulate along the way and not according to someone else’s conception.

For Arachne Manteia, the protagonist of *No Fixed Address*, a ‘normal’, socially acceptable life for a woman is the worst thing she can imagine. Having to arrange her life according to someone else’s – most likely a man’s – idea of how and what life ought to be is even worse to her than physical death. As a consequence, she is always on the move, both literally and physically. Her restlessness is not a phenomenon that belongs solely to her adult life, but is a trait she has incorporated since she was a young child. She never allows either her parents or later any man to pin her down; she rather chooses the men she needs physically but does not let them come close to her emotionally – until she meets Thomas Telfer. Her acquaintance with Thomas represents the first real turning point in her restless life and marks the start of her travelogue of independence. Life before Thomas serves as preparation for the life beyond – in every sense of the word. However, both her travels and her life are quickly frustrated by the frequently trodden paths and Arachne takes the next possible exit – from Thomas, from a conventional plot, off the map and towards the ultimate independence inscribed in her travelogue.

In *The Tent Peg*, the travelogue may be less visible at first sight because the journey does not take place outwardly. J.L., the heroine of the novel, leaves the city to look for isolation and tranquility, which she hopes to find in a remote part of the Yukon.

What she has not bargained for are the men she spends the summer with in a geologists' camp, intruding on her in any possible way. J.L. is on a quest for isolation, attempting to get away from the emotional problems her past relationships with men in the city face her with, refusing to accept that she cannot run away from them, as the solution to her problems lies within herself. What is more, she is overwhelmed by the many different versions of life and its problems she is confronted with in the camp and with its crew. In order to find her inner answers, to reach the end of her psychological journey, she needs to bring the men on their way as well. By negotiating her connection to the men, J.L. can also master the path through her inner landscape and thereby draws her own map, tracing her travelogue of independence.

In this thesis, I will analyze both the structural aspects of the novels and the important characters appearing in them. The structure of the novels suggests a connection to the genre of travelogues on a formal basis, while the characters are instrumental in bringing the protagonists on their way, supporting them in finding the right path to their independence; other characters stand for obstacles and hindrances that have to be overcome by the protagonists to achieve a successful ending of their travelogues of independence.

In the last part of the thesis, I will discuss whether the protagonists have met with success at the end of their travelogues of independence, which describe the development of the protagonists, and consequently how – if at all – they have reached their desired destinations.

2 Traveling Canadian Identity

From the beginning of the nation which is now called Canada, the question of identity has always been a central one and has thus been highly influential on Canadian writers' literary output. The general opinion voiced is that it is a question one does not need to deal with, unlike in the case of inhabitants of colonies, who were forced to define their identity by circumstances. "Canada did not have any writers or orators of a stature sufficient to assert the distinctive nature of the land and its inhabitants, nor did it feel the necessity of defining itself" (Staines, Introduction 18). This attitude has changed greatly over the periods, especially in view of the neighboring United States, whose identity-building process was already in full swing in comparison to what was taking place in Canada at the end of the 19th century.

During the Confederation of the 1860s and 1870s and the creation of the Dominion of Canada², it was "firmly believed that the new nation would not be truly established until Canada had found a voice in national art" (Waterston 79), which at that time was nowhere to be found. Moreover, in literature "[c]onflicting images of the nation appear in the first generation of Dominion of Canada writers" (Waterston 79), not allowing for a unifying identity throughout the literary output produced at that time and thus not tremendously contributing to the identity-building processes. Questions of whether a renewal or strengthening of the connection to the British Empire would be advisable led to a surge of patriotic consciousness. As a result, artists' support as mouthpieces of the nation was demanded vociferously in the media and in politics: "Canadian content should appear in work made in Canada in the twentieth century, 'Canada's century' as Sir Wilfred [sic] Laurier hopefully called it" (Waterston 87). The demands proved fruitful and literary production grew rapidly. The contents and the ideas regarding what Canadian literature should be about differed greatly and actually enforced the questioning of the national identity, rather than providing a solution to the quandary. For Marshall McLuhan, the problem lies partly in the "multiple borderlines that constitute Canada's low-profile identity, which, like its territory, has to cover a lot of ground" (246) and proves hard to reconcile within a national concept called Canada. On closer scrutiny "Canadian identity still has a strong regional focus. The strong sense

² See table of events in Canadian history in Hammill's *Canadian Literature* xi-xxvi.

of regional distinction that pervades the Canadian consciousness is often a product of the settlement history as much as it is with the physical character of the topography and climate” (Martens 32), resulting in numerous regional identities such as the western or the northern, rather than one cohesive national identity.

What is more: “The Canadian west is young. Its settlement began in a tentative way less than one hundred years ago” (McCourt 119), and this can be read in many texts on literary criticism by way of introduction. McCourt continues to explain that the “creation of a native regional literature is dependent in part upon the existence of a relatively populous and stable society, and there was no such society in Western Canada before the coming of the C.P.R. in 1884” (12). The building of remote regional and historically disconnected centers can also be considered a counterproductive force in an identity-building process. Thus, in the twentieth century, identity-building was once again a major issue and “Canada’s postwar project of nation-building and its search for an independent identity coalescing around the 1967 Centennial year [...] were accompanied by hugely increased funding for the arts at federal and provincial levels, and new structures were put in place to support Canadian writers and publishers” (Howells, “Writing” 195). This support for the literary trade led to the emergence of many new Canadian writers, some of whom have met recognition far beyond the Canadian literary community, but who cannot necessarily be identified as being Canadian by their work. Coral Ann Howells, therefore, states that “it would seem wise to dispel misconceptions about Canada’s national self-image as one of uniformity and cohesiveness” (Howells, *Contemporary* 3) or of a process that has finally led to fruition.

On the contrary, Linda Hutcheon suggests that as recently as “[i]n the 1970s [...] Canada was once again self-consciously indulging in an identity crisis” (Hutcheon, *Splitting* 102), which led to renewed shifts in the literary tradition, signified by a strong surfacing of women writers: “In the later 1970’s and 1980’s, the patter of female feet heading for the hills, not to mention the valleys, islands, forests, and plains, becomes a small stampede” (Atwood, *Strange* 108). Atwood’s statement does not only refer to women writers as such, she also refers to the contents of novels like *The Tent Peg* and *No Fixed Address*, which place their heroines in geographical territories new to female characters.

When I started considering a topic for this thesis, it was clear to me that I wanted to write about Canadian literature, an idea one would regard as quite simple and straightforward. But the trouble with defining Canadian identity cited above also made choosing a literary tradition to draw from more difficult. I agree with John Moss, who does not identify *a* literary tradition in the Canadian novel – the genre of my choice – but rather concentrates on recurring themes, such as sex and violence:

In the Canadian novel, however, sex and violence predominate, reflecting the contemporary sensibility in general, bringing diverse visions to articulation, translating the Canadian fascination with identity into the themes and forms of fiction. There almost certainly is a higher incidence of sex and violence in the Canadian novel than elsewhere, probably because in no other tradition does community consciousness coincide with preoccupations of the contemporary imagination in quite the same way, to generate these responses. (J. Moss, *Sex* 29)

Moss then goes on to explain why, in his view, these themes are predominant to such an extent and states that “Canadian sensibility [...] [is] conditioned by a world of indeterminate perimeters” (J. Moss, *Sex* 27), referring thereby to the physical expansion of the country. This geographic vastness is also mirrored in the nation’s “official motto, *A mari usque ad mare* (‘From sea to sea’), [...] which codes in the strong spatial elements in Canada’s national rhetoric” (Howells, *Contemporary* 11), which is in turn mirrored in Canadian literature. Aritha van Herk thinks along the same lines as she states in an interview: “[I]f you think about Canada as an imaginary construct, you also have to think limitless geography. For me, the geography of Canada is connected to its fiction” (qtd. in McCance 4). And this also shows in her novels *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey* and *The Tent Peg*.

Canada’s process of national identity-building and its literary idiosyncrasies are important, influential factors on the two novels that will be discussed in this thesis. “Canada’s first documents were shaped by two main (auto)biographical forms [...] [including] travel and exploration narratives” (Darias-Beautell, *Graphies* 17) laying the ground for later travel writing, both factual and fictional in content. In my view, travel writing and travelogues are important literary ancestors of the two novels mentioned above, in which the traveling takes place on various levels. These novels are representative of a twentieth century trend which draws from literary sources but redefines genres and themes almost beyond recognition:

In the twentieth century, the principle of deviation from a familiar pattern, the functional formula of all allusion (the deviation consisting in the occurrence of the familiar context), has resulted in a juxtaposition of generic features which in some works amounts almost to a reversal of traditional rules of the respective genres. (Heidenreich 121)

Such deviation is often seen in connection with postmodernism, which I would like to quickly discuss before going into the topic as such, because “[c]ontemporary prairie writers are exploring [...] new forms, like post-modernism and magic realism” (Calder 54). What is more, Aritha van Herk cannot be considered to be solely a prairie writer; for post-modernism and magic realism are also relevant in the analysis of *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey* and *The Tent Peg*.

In his book, *Postmodernist Fiction*, Brian McHale opens the chapter titled “From Modernist to Postmodernist Fiction: Change of Dominant” with a disillusioned statement: “‘Postmodernist?’ Nothing about this term is unproblematic, nothing about it is entirely satisfactory” (3). His exasperation can be easily understood when one immerses oneself into copiously published texts of literary criticism dealing with postmodernism. Postmodernism “[i]n general terms [...] takes the form of [a] self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement” (Hutcheon, *Politics* 1) and therefore depicts a concept which is difficult to grasp because it is so volatile and multilayered. In terms of definition, it is easier to illustrate by concentrating on its disruptive impact instead of trying to pinpoint any clear characteristics:

Postmodernism is construed as a more extreme form of aesthetic autonomy, openly declaring its fictive status, radically disrupting the conventional features of narrative and drawing extensively on myth and fantasy. In Canada, however, the demarcation between modernist and post-modernist strategies would appear to be less marked than in Europe or Asia. (Regan 110)

What makes the concept so hard to pin down is the fact that it does not truly present a new form of, for instance, fiction but that it reworks existing ideas into entirely new patterns, thereby endowing them with new meaning. Thus, the “main point about contemporary postmodernism is that it operates in a field of tension between tradition and innovation, conservation and renewal, mass culture and high art, in which the second terms are no longer automatically privileged over the first” (Huyssen 267).

What is a defining problem of postmodernism on the one hand opens up many possibilities for writers on the other, as the rules in fiction are softened to their virtual disappearance – ‘anything goes’, so to speak. In certain respects, Aritha van Herk’s novels *No Fixed Address* and *The Tent Peg* show significant traits which can be considered in keeping with a postmodern concept – or extraneous to a modernist definition, depending on the chosen perspective.

A first example is the character of Arachne Manteia. She only knows extremes and does not feel comfortable in the average security of 'normal' life. Only the non-average characteristics of her persona are highlighted in the novel, thus laying emphasis on her position as an outsider in society. "Her behaviour – sexual and social – breaks the rules of society's game. That game's sexism and classism define ex-centricity here" (Hutcheon, *Postmodern* 128). This highlighting of extreme character features to the detriment of more ordinary ones can also be seen in the other characters: Thena's feminist rantings and her hate of men; Thomas's saint-like patience with Arachne's indiscretions and his generally caring behavior or Josef's introverted anger and sorrow.

This same selective drawing of the novel's characters can be seen in *The Tent Peg*. The characters – with the exception of Jerome – do not show any extreme or socially questionable behavior. However, they are depicted solely by bold brush strokes with only essential information added to this initial description in the course of the novel. The emphasized features of the characters play an important role for the journey and thus for the travelogue of the novel's protagonist, as will be established in chapter 3.

In *No Fixed Address*, different genres such as the picaresque, the Gothic or Greek myths are twisted, inverted or simply rewritten, especially in the darker part of the novel, when Arachne flees from the law.

Gothic, fantastic, or at times just absurd, this last section, like Arachne who fills its pages, seems to lack any sense of direction. It is a sudden dismantling of oppositions between outside and inside, between realist and fantastic fiction, between omniscient and fictionalized self-conscious narrator, that totally exposes the textual construction and unveils the text as a postmodern artifact. (Darias-Beautell, "Panties" 157)

The rewriting of existing (con)texts in the two novels often goes hand in hand with a blending of different texts and genres within the corpus of the main text. This "[i]ntertextuality might be considered one of the major defining features of postmodern fiction" (Darias-Beautell, *Graphies* 165), meant to elicit certain effects on the reader.

In *No Fixed Address* there is a break at various points in the text, where the 'Notebooks on a Missing Person' are inserted. To stress the difference between the texts and to maximize the effect on the reader, the 'Notebooks' are not only written from a different point of view, with a narrator that changes from a third-person to a you-

narrator, also the tonality of the text changes to the academic. A further example is a poem inserted into the text at another point in the novel.

In *The Tent Peg*, intertextuality works on a different level. The narrators are constantly changing throughout the novel, the content and tone of the narrative changing with them. To highlight this, van Herk inserts different textual genres into the novel. These range from to-do-lists for setting up camp, rock sample descriptions, a claim staking checklist or Deborah's song in the last part of the novel. This song also illustrates that postmodernism readily draws from existing sources; it changes the text or the original meaning of the text completely, putting the text into a new context and thereby fulfilling a slightly different purpose than the original biblical text had.

A further item to be included in this short discussion on postmodernism is the so-called magic realism, which is equally difficult to pinpoint but has various identifying features to offer: "exaggerated comic effects; hyperbole treated as fact; a labyrinthine awareness of other books; the use of fantasy to cast doubt on the nature of reality; an absurd re-creation of 'history'; [...] a collective sense of a folkloric past" (Hancock 36). All of the above-mentioned features appear in at least one of the two novels, most in both. What is even more compelling evidence that magic realism plays a role in the novels is that "[m]agic realists disrupt history even more by placing Biblical myths, timeless myths and pagan allusions at the service of the narrative" (Hancock 44). *The Tent Peg* includes various such instances: the constant referral to the biblical Ja-el and her deeds; the crew's allusions to J.L. being a witch; the continuous mention of the eternal connection between woman and earth, just to name just the most prominent examples.

In *No Fixed Address*, magic realism surfaces in the latter part of the novel, mostly by introduction of characters which transcend the realist conventions and presents an obvious case of postmodernist subtext within the novel.

On her flight to Vancouver, Arachne stops to pick up a hitchhiking woman accompanied by a tame black bear named Columban. Immediately "the woman's hands and the cut of her face make Arachne think she's seen her before" (225), a feeling that deepens noticeably the longer the two of them are together. The **woman with the bear**

represents Arachne's doppelganger, both in physical appearance and in her vocation, thereby representing an alternative reality to Arachne: in meeting her, "Arachne almost allows herself to envy the woman. No kidnapping charge, no car, no uncertain future" (227) like her.

Arachne's transgression into magic realism is marked by her encounter with **the sushi chef** who functions as a transitory force, enabling her to access an alternative reality, marked by a death-like oblivion and memory loss. In this sense, the chef functions as a sort of gate keeper, enabling Arachne to make the transition. The fact that the next chapter is set on a ferry, which in Greek mythology was used to convey the souls from the mortal world into the underworld via the river Hades³ is hardly a coincidence, considering the influence of other mythological elements in the novel.

Afterwards, Arachne is unsure whether she is alive or dead and drives up an elevation called **Radar Hill**, where she encounters a man. She has sex with him because "she has to find out if she's alive, if she inhabits the same body she always has" (244), but the outcome is not clear. On her return to her room, she reads a pamphlet explaining that "several men drowned while swimming at night" (245). The implication that the soldier has been dead for 40 years is not resolved or even commented on any further. If the novel ended with this chapter, most readers would likely agree that Arachne died of Fugu poisoning, and the following chapters are her after-death-experiences, which would explain the encounter with the dead soldier. However, van Herk interweaves this text with the realistic plot by stating historical facts from the area, thereby emphasizing again the postmodern quality of her work.

The first encounter with the "gang of rock-toting, backpack-lugging geologists [...] sprinkling rye on the meat instead of ketchup" (247) takes place at one of her stops at a diner. She continues driving north and meets the group again at the side of the road, where their truck has broken down, "and before she has time to hesitate, there are four of them in the car" (250). **The geologists** are also the last persons to meet her within the central plot, and, in my view, their role is comparable to that of gatekeepers into a new, hitherto undiscovered – or rather not yet experienced – world. They take care of her, admit her in their group and then fly her "into the endless indifference of wilderness"

³ See entry on "Charon" in Tripp 135.

(253). Had she not met the geologists, Arachne might not have been able to reach “the roadless world [...] knowing she has arrived” (253).

Even though the encounter with **the alphabet speller**, as I call him, takes place when Arachne is fifteen, he is only mentioned in the later, magic realist part of the novel. His most striking feature is the way he talks, spelling every word in the alphabet of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), presenting another intertext in the postmodernist context of the novel.

The use of postmodernist techniques and excursions into magic realism achieve an interesting multilayeredness in the two novels, which only becomes apparent upon close reading. Van Herk does not only rewrite existing texts but also includes different text genres to achieve this effect. She also switches between realist and magic realist encounters throughout the respective novels, without entirely disrupting the plots.

3 Aritha van Herk's Travelogues of Independence

Travel accounts are as inherently Canadian as Mounties or the Maple Leaf. Canada's founding history can hardly be separated from the written tales produced at that time and the genres it coined. The mostly autobiographical accounts of the settlement and later the Confederation period represent realistic impressions of life in those times and the hardships that had to be overcome. In 20th century Canadian literature, fictional genres are predominant, thus almost substituting their biographical predecessors as eminently Canadian genres.

For this thesis I have selected two novels, both written in the 1980s, which are entirely fictional and can certainly not be considered to be biographical accounts of travels or travel writing in the strict sense. Yet, both novels incorporate elements characteristic to the travel writing genre, creating fictitious versions of what can be considered travelogues. It becomes clear when researching travelogues and travel accounts that "to define travel literature – that is, the *récit de voyage*, perhaps a better term – is just impossible" (279), or so Percy G. Adams states in his book *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel*. He continues to explain that most expert views on travel accounts consider a text "a 'travelogue' [when] written in the first person" (Adams 279). Adams disagrees with this as a travelogue is often "not just a first-person journal or diary. Much of it is in third person" (Adams 280), thus hardly allowing for discernment between fictional and non-fictional accounts for the "subjectivity and selectivity" (Adams 280) of information incorporated in the texts. The boundary between fictional and non-fictional travelogues is thereby effectively blurred.

Authors of fictional travelogues include famous names such as Jack Kerouac, who wrote the highly influential novel *On the Road*. When one considers *On the Road*, the connection between travelogues and fictional travel writing applied to *No Fixed Address* and *The Tent Peg* is not so far-fetched anymore. This becomes especially apparent in consideration of the fact that "[p]erpetual motion may be a means of escape for Dean" (Mayer 49), the protagonist in Kerouac's novel, which shows a remarkable parallel to especially one of van Herk's heroines. What is typical about Kerouac's book is that the experiences of his protagonist on the road and with people he encounters make up the

appeal for the readers and produce a fair number of situations and thoughts to identify with. In Kerouac's case, it provided identification for a whole generation called the "Beats"⁴.

No Fixed Address and *The Tent Peg* tell different stories, yet in both novels the characters are shaped by the experiences of their travels and by encounters they have with people during this time, just like Kerouac's protagonist. In addition, landscape plays an essential role in the travels of the protagonists in van Herk's novels, creating a unique literary picture show which functions as an important subtext and significantly influences the characters.

Drawing upon the literary heritage of works such as *On the Road*, I consider the characters encountered by the heroines of the two novels as highly relevant for their journeys and thus for their development. Their relationships to and their influence on the protagonists shape the way in which these travelogues of independence are drawn, just like the surrounding landscape does. Thus, I will take a close look at the characters and what function they have within the travelogues of the protagonists.

But before going into the depths of the characters and their importance for the protagonists, I will provide a short overview of the novels and continue by taking a closer look at their structural and formal aspects, as these mirror the journeys of the protagonists in their travelogues of independence.

3.1 *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey*

In the novel *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey*, which was first published in 1986, Aritha van Herk presents her readers with the most immoral and entertaining protagonist she has so far created: Arachne Manteia. The story envelops the reader in a modern version of a Western, combined with the restlessness of a travelogue or a written road movie. A short summary of the novel should serve as a cursory introduction into the text that will prepare the reader for the analysis of both the structure and the characters.

⁴ Compare definition and development of the term in Mayer 155.

3.1.1 Short Summary

The reader is first introduced to Arachne Manteia in her capacity as an underwear sales representative, contemplating her job and the latest edition of panties featuring catchy slogans. The novel follows Arachne on her tours through the small prairie towns of Alberta, selling underwear for a company by the name of Ladies' Comfort. Besides collecting orders from stores, Arachne spends her leisure time exploring the roads of Alberta and picking up 'road-jockeys' along the way to appease her insatiable sexual hunger. Her reliable partner on these tours is a black 1959 Mercedes she inherited from an acquaintance of her mother's by the name of Gabriel Greenberg. With the progress of the story, the reader learns more and more details about "Arachne's measly, scrubby childhood" (30) in Vancouver and her disrupted relationship to her parents Lanie and Toto, whom she sees as "two people she lived with as a child" (30) but does not identify with.

During a week off in summer, when the sales are slow, Lanie comes for a surprise visit and the reader finds out more about Arachne's childhood and Lanie's role in it. Arachne is forced by Lanie to drive her back home to Vancouver, a direction she does not appreciate much. When they stop at Banff, Lanie falls into her old habit of reading peoples' fortunes from tea cups until she is thrown out of the hotel. The reader learns about Lanie's past and how she ended up with Toto in Vancouver, reading tea cups for money to help better their financial situation.

Arachne, on the other hand, works as a bus driver in Vancouver and is quite satisfied with her life. It is through a chance meeting with a classical piano player named Basilisk that she experiences the first notion of her social inferiority when he asks her to sit in the audience at his last concert. She only recovers slowly from this clash of worlds and drives her bus more decisively than before, with no plans to leave this position or the city – until she meets Thomas Telfer, with whom she leaves Vancouver to go to Calgary.

Throughout most of the novel, Thomas, "[who] appears 'too good to be true'" (Carrera 436), represents the stable focal point of Arachne's life in Calgary. He makes a home for her in his house, does not expect anything in return, is there when she comes home from work and "[i]n that first year with Thomas, Arachne is happy. [...] They

have become best friends” (132). Then she meets his family. The dinner party, at which she is to be introduced to Thomas’ family, takes place at the Telfer family home in Mount Royal, a rich area of Calgary. In these pristine surroundings, Arachne feels like a socially inferior being and decides to leave Thomas. He does not accept her withdrawal but instead offers to teach her all the social knacks she needs to know to pass as a ‘respectable woman’, or at least to disguise as one.

While there, Arachne also discovers a love for maps that she did not know before meeting Thomas, and which they also share. Consequently, it is Thomas who “encourage[s] Arachne to apply for the job with Ladies’ Comfort, suggest[s] that it would give her a reason to drive to all those small towns she’s so interested in, enable her to follow the webbed maps she’s so fascinated by” (140). With this job, Arachne has found the perfect match for her personality, which is substantiated later on in the novel, when she even receives a sales award as the most successful sales representative of the year.

Along the way in Calgary, Arachne also finds a female best friend and, what is more, a confidante: Thena. She is her exact female opposite, “a housewife par excellence. First class, neurotic, valium-motivated, divorced, tied to two bratty kids and mad as hell” (165). The two women are brutally honest with each other, and Thena is the only person who hears all the stories of the road and of the men Arachne picks up along the way – except for Josef, whom Arachne keeps a secret even from Thena at first. Josef is a 97-year old Serbian immigrant, with whom Arachne strikes up a friendship which transcends her usual physical longing and who appears at numerous occasions throughout the novel. Josef’s alleged kidnapping from a retirement home signals the turning point of the novel.

Charged with kidnapping, Arachne skips bail and turns her car west, the only possible direction left to her. While involuntarily participating in a women’s movement meeting in Banff, Arachne extorts a \$ 25,000 check from one of the participants and tries to cash it in a town close by. There she meets Dougall McKay by chance in a bank, who helps her withdraw the money. In return, he takes half of the money from her for an alleged share in a coal mine. This does not sit well with Arachne and, true to her

nature, she attacks him in the dead of night behind a bar, takes the money and again flees in her Mercedes, this time to Vancouver.

She does not want to stop in this city laden with negative memories but hunger and a full bladder force her to do so and she enters a sushi bar. After a meal which culminates in a platter of fugu, Arachne finds herself on the ferry in the Strait of Georgia, bound for Vancouver Island, apparently having lost weeks of memory. When a man grabs her from behind and molests her, she stabs him. She flees again in her Mercedes and drives to the end of the island, where she experiences dreamlike situations, including a sexual encounter with a soldier already dead for over forty years. In realizing that she has reached the end of the island and the end of the road leading west, she turns the car in the only other possible direction without turning back: north. Northbound, she encounters a crew of geologists in a diner, which she leaves in a hurry when a Mountie enters and asks about her car. She continues north and later picks up the geologists, whose car has broken down. They introduce her to her first northern experience, the brilliant colors of a glacier at night, which overwhelms her in such a way that she falls unconscious. When she comes to again, she is in a hotel in Stewart, basically the end of the road, and the geologists force her to fly with them in a helicopter into the wilderness, where together they leave the helicopter to explore. Arachne explores the slope and discovers Thomas' geodetic mark in the moss. Arachne's story ends in the wilderness, imprinting in her a feeling that she has finally arrived.

3.1.2 Structure and Formal Aspects

At first glance, the structure of *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey* appears to be that of a more or less conventional novel. It consists of 68 chapters which differ in length but do not follow any systematic order in the distribution of the different lengths. The chapters are consistently titled with reference to their content; Stanzel calls them 'nominal titles', such as in the chapter title (e. g. "Disguise"), or 'participial titles', such as in the chapter "Eat and be Eaten". As the examples show, "these are leitmotifs or have a symbolic rather than a synoptic function" (Stanzel 37) within the novel. The chapters are mostly concluded in themselves, which gives the novel an episodic character and thereby provides it with a relevant link to travelogues on a structural level.

Travelogues generally recount a series of travel experiences which take place within a certain time frame defined as ‘the journey’, but are often complete stories in themselves. If one of these stories is taken out of the context, the travelogue is still readily understood by the reader.

In *No Fixed Address*, the chapters are also more or less concluded. The difference between a real travelogue and a novel incorporating a travelogue – such as this novel – lies in the fact that the chapters of the novel may be concluded in themselves. For a comprehensive appreciation and full understanding of the text, however, the reader needs to follow the plot line, which weaves itself along the structure of the chapters, creating the effect of following the protagonist on her journey.

In the case of *No Fixed Address*, the structure leaves the conventional form of a novel with four chapters named ‘Notebook on a Missing Person’. These disrupt the overall temporal structure of the plot and can be seen as a sub-plot within the novel. Similar inter-textual insertions can be found in travelogues, e. g. when historical facts or information on mythology concerning a certain venue are given within the corpus of the main text. They disrupt the plot to a certain degree, but also offer more insight into a topic. The ‘Notebooks’ in the novel have to be considered with a similar strategy in mind. A closer look at these ‘Notebooks’ will be taken further below.

Form of the Narrative

The form of the narrative itself shows some similarities with the web of a spider: “als netzförmiges Geflecht, dessen Ausgangspunkt ein Zentrum ist, von dem aus sich die Handlung immer wieder vor und zurückbewegt” (Zöbinger 127). Van Herk thereby mirrors the arachnid connection of her protagonist not solely in her name and the way she travels, but also in the narrative structure of the novel, as it features two alternating plot lines: on the one hand, there is the third-person narrator recounting Arachne’s story. On the other hand, there is the inclusive you-narration of the ‘Notebooks’, which is obviously directed at the reader.

The main plot, and therefore Arachne’s travelogue of independence, is narrated from a more or less neutral point of view, giving the reader the choice whether to identify with and like the protagonist or to be abhorred by her immorality and therefore

dislike her. Further into the narrative however, it becomes evident that the narrator is rather unreliable. He (or she for that matter) at times hints at the future plot line, while at other times s/he allows the reader to stumble upon the changed plot utterly unprepared.

It is interesting that the novel starts with Arachne in her job as a sales representative, informing the reader about her past only with the progress of the novel, and thus establishing the ambivalent feeling the reader is expected to develop towards the protagonist. She is not supposed to be perceived as a likeable and unquestioned character and her past should not be offered as an excuse for her present behavior. Her background is only revealed later, offering more detail about Arachne's childhood, her time as a bus driver, and her meeting Thomas. At strategic points, Arachne's present experiences are put into context by little bits of information from her past, establishing again a structural kinship with travelogues.

The narrative takes a turn for the darker when Arachne, charged with kidnapping Josef, skips bail and leaves behind her comparably stable life in Calgary. The narrative still follows a basically linear order; the text, however, leaves the realistic plot line and offers several excursions into "the use of fantasy to cast doubt on the nature of reality" (Hancock 36), the novel thus establishing its magic realist facet. It starts with strange events at a women's convention in Banff, continues with the peculiar meeting of her doppelganger and a bear, and then culminates in a near-death/death experience at a sushi bar, an encounter with a dead soldier and her death-like disappearance up north. By leaving behind her ordered life, Arachne also seems to leave behind the realistic plot line, which opens up the possibilities of the text for a less conventional and less realistic avenue. This "sudden shift in perception and the 'surreal' quality of the last section of the novel have given rise to debate" (Lutz and Hindersmann 15). The novel surely requires open-minded readership, as its "ending certainly destabilizes the readers' expectations by taking its female hero to inconceivable limits" (Darias-Beautell, *Graphies* 101).

Furthermore, the point of view shifts within the plot line of Arachne's travelogue. There are multiple switches when the active narrator turns into a reflector narrator, establishing "a character in the novel who thinks, feels and perceives, but does

not speak to the reader like a narrator” (Stanzel 5). Thus, the reader is allowed insights into different situations and is also “occasionally tuned in to the mind of other characters, notably that of her stable love Thomas” (Carrera 436). Still, Arachne remains the focus of the travelogue and most of the narrative is “conveyed, directly and often painstakingly, through the third person narrator; [...] [and] through her eyes, her mind, and her body” (Carrera 436).

‘Notebook on a Missing Person’

Beside the main plot line, there are also four ‘Notebooks on a Missing Person’, written from the viewpoint of a researcher who stumbles across Arachne’s story and her ultimate disappearance in the course of research on the history of clothing, especially of undergarments. The inclusive ‘you’ of these ‘Notebooks’ counteracts the strategy of distancing the reader by decisively involving him in the search for Arachne, as the author has explained in an interview: “[T]here is a sense that you are following the adventures of someone, but there’s never recognition that someone is doing the following. What I wanted to do was put the follower [...] into the text” (qtd. in Beeler 88). Van Herk thereby consciously introduces the potential audience into Arachne’s travelogue of independence, trying to solve the puzzle posed by it.

The voice of the researcher is given a neutral and, in parts, even an academic/scientific quality, which justifies the inclusion of the reader further. It is not clear whether the voice of the researcher is female or male. The choice of topic seems to suggest a female researcher, even though at times the text rather echoes a male voice. This becomes especially apparent in the third ‘Notebook’ when the researcher visits Thena on a cold winter afternoon with a bottle of Scotch and tries to find out about Arachne’s whereabouts: But “[no] matter how many bottles you bring, no matter how you cajole her” (196) she will not tell more. Most texts of criticism on *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey* generally agree on a female researcher, therefore I will adhere to this view.

The first ‘Notebook’ offers a neutral introduction to the topic of undergarments and does not mention Arachne at all. This particular chapter contributes less to the content of the novel; rather, its role is to introduce the voice of the researcher and her aims.

The next two 'Notebooks' mark important caesuras in the text. They are used to flag the transition points when the darker side of the novel is starting to surface. After the second 'Notebook' in the novel, Arachne takes Josef for a ride in her car and is attacked by his distraught daughter afterwards. Her accusations can be read as a premonition for the charges of "kidnapping, transportation out of the province and intent to extort" (191), which actually happen later in the text. The third 'Notebook' marks the complete emergence of Arachne's dark and criminal side. After this chapter she skips bail, 'borrows' a blouse, writes a fraudulent bill to her company, commits check fraud, attacks and injures a man, flees afterwards, kills a man and flees again.

It is with the fourth and last 'Notebook' that the novel is concluded. Due to the realistic narrative form of the 'Notebook', the reader is once again led back from the magic realist context of Arachne's disappearance up north. The last 'Notebook' also clearly states that "there will be no end to this road" (260). Therefore, the researcher's quest will continue.

Furthermore, the 'Notebooks' help to position the novel in a postmodern literary context, as mentioned in chapter 2. In a way, the 'Notebooks' stand in contrast to the postmodernist tendencies of the novel as "the italicized voice of the narrator (who is desperately trying to plot Arachne's movements) represents the realist reader who is bent on establishing a map of Arachne's journey" (McLaren qtd. in Goldman, "Earth-quaking" 29). The narrator can only fail in this attempt though, as Arachne moves beyond the realist framework of the novel.

The 'Notebooks' fulfill multiple tasks within the framework of the novel. They mark important transition points on the one hand and bridge the gap between realist and postmodernist/magic realist fiction; on the other hand, the 'Notebooks' provide the novel with a second narrative framework, subordinated to the dominant third-person narration. The inclusive you-narration draws the reader into Arachne's journey beyond the actual events and thereby stresses the novel's underlying 'character' of a travelogue. While the narration leaves off at Arachne's disappearance, the researcher is not satisfied with this end to the story and tries to rewrite the ending by searching for Arachne, by searching for an alternative ending more reminiscent of a travelogue to be retold time and again.

Temporal Structure

Both the form of the narrative and the temporal structure of the novel emphasize the connection to the concept of a travelogue. The temporal structure, which is linear only at times, mirrors the way stories are told orally, especially when referring to journeys. Information and memories, which are relevant at certain points of the narrative, are added to support or highlight events or situations. The same holds true for *No Fixed Address*.

The overall temporal structure of the novel is straightforward, but only at first sight. The reader is propelled directly into the action of the novel from the first chapter and then follows the female protagonist Arachne on her travels through the western provinces of Canada and subsequently up north. But when one takes a closer look at the temporal structure, the picture is certainly a lot more complex. The main plot line is essentially linear, up to the point where Arachne escapes to fulfill her travelogue of independence. In her article “Panties and Roads”, Eva Darias-Beautell sees a causal connection between the linear temporal structure of the plotline and Arachne’s life with Thomas, because “when Thomas enters Arachne’s life, the sexual and textual seem provisionally connected: As he provides Arachne with some emotional stability, the text also shows an increasing tendency to linearity” (155). Predictably, the linearity also ends when Arachne puts an end to the relationship and leaves to create her own travelogue of independence.

Apart from the overall linear structure, the order of the chapters features a multitude of flashbacks and leaps into the future of the plot respectively. The temporal structure can therefore be divided into three main phases along a logical time line: Arachne’s childhood, her teenage and pre-Thomas-years in Vancouver; her time in Calgary with Thomas and Josef; and her escape west and north.

A tentative fourth part, which consists solely of one chapter and is detached from the main time line, is the story of Lanie and Toto, Arachne’s parents; it only serves as background information about Lanie and her behavior and offers some insight into the family Arachne was born into.

What makes the chronological analysis even more challenging is the fact that of the 68 chapters, 21 are entirely or partly devoted to flashbacks of Arachne's past. It is also interesting to note that there are different kinds of flashbacks. On the one hand, the memories of Arachne's childhood, which she mostly connects with negative experiences, are kept at a grammatical distance by the use of the past tense in these text passages. The memories of the more immediate past, on the other hand, such as meeting Thomas and Thena, which are connected with positive associations, are set in the present tense.

The ending of the novel is left open; it does not give any possible outlook into the future of the protagonist. It is open to various interpretations as to whether Arachne has simply disappeared or rather died up north, or whether something entirely different has happened to her.

The form of the narrative supports the temporal structure and allows for constant interweaving of background information and memories of the protagonist to offer more insight into certain situations. The effect for the reader is a rather immediate participation in the events, although the novel is for the most part told by a third-person narrator. Even though the third-person narration is unusual for travelogues, as they generally recount experiences and journeys of the narrator from a very immediate, first-person point of view, the narrative and temporal structure further support the connection to travelogues. The choice of narrator(s) in the novel thus has to be seen as a stylistic device of the fictional components of the travelogue, which allows the travelogue to be transferred into a novel without entirely disrupting the genre conventions of either travelogue, or novel.

Apart from the above mentioned conventions allowing for a close connection between travelogue and novel, *No Fixed Address* also offers an interesting connection to two other genres with a long standing literary history: the picaresque and the Gothic novel. These shall be examined in the following short digression.

Short Digression on Literary Legacies: The Picaresque and the Gothic

As shown in the introductory chapter, Canadian literature has been able to draw from a plethora of historical sources and examples to develop its own literary identity – or rather identities. Influences from different genres, varying in their strength, can however not be negated, even though Aritha van Herk “would venture that all Canadian novels can be seen as either romantic or picaresque” (“Picaros” 284). In the case of *No Fixed Address*, these influences can be found especially in the tradition of the picaresque and the Gothic novels, as both genres have a clear tendency to feature restless female protagonists who, much like Arachne Manteia, aim to follow their own paths – or travelogues of independence for that matter – against societal conventions. Therefore, I would like to make a short digression and graze these two topics to explain their relevance for the novel.

The **picaresque genre** has quite a long history. Nevertheless, it displays a rather fluid quality when it comes to its definition. In his book *The Picaresque*, Harry Sieber outlines the basic framework of the genre:

The idea of the picaresque that emerges out of our brief sixteenth-through eighteenth-century European itinerary is based on a group of novels conceived and written within conventions established by Spanish narratives. [...] [The] ‘picaresque’ adventures and level in society were made to conform to the peculiar satiric, social and historical contexts of each country, the general effect of which was to turn him into an ‘anti-*pícaro*’. [...] He began as the dishonourable offspring of thieves and prostitutes. [...] He was generally required to abandon home at an early age [...] to improve his situation. (58-59)

While some characteristics such “as ‘outsiderism’, [...] [have] been found to be constitutive of the genre” (Maiorino xiv) and have generally remained stable, the picaros themselves have changed. In earlier times, a female picara was hardly ever found in literature. Francisco Delicado’s *La Lozana andaluza*,⁵ written in the 16th century, is a rare example and not a very worthwhile prototype for Arachne. A loose but still tangible parallel can be found in the occupation of the two women. While the historical picara engaged in selling her body, our 20th-century picaresque heroine uses her body primarily for pleasure and play and – to a lesser degree – to help with her work, such as teasing the shop owners when taking their orders: “The least she can do twice a year, bend over their counters filling out her order form, give them a chance to rub up against her” (van Herk, *Address* 17) – which certainly helps with her sales figures. The picaresque hero/ine may also find love, but “love may not offer the

⁵ See Giancarlo Maiorino’s introductory article in *The Picaresque: Tradition and Displacement xi-xxix* for more information on this example of a female picara and her characteristics.

protagonist a chance to resolve his [or her] inner restlessness” (Ehland 79). This certainly applies to Arachne. What is more: “räumliche und gesellschaftliche Mobilität sind wesentliche Komponenten einer Pikaro-Figur” (Reinhart 126). Needless to say that movement is indisputably one of Arachne’s most prominent features, one that even Thomas cannot inhibit. On the contrary, Thomas opens different social and spatial regions for Arachne by introducing her to the important little tricks that are necessary so she can pass herself off as a ‘respectable person’. This allows Arachne not only to put on a disguise in adverse social environments, but it also gets her the job as underwear sales representative for Ladies’ Comfort, which involves long traveling periods. For a picaresque plot, movement of the protagonist is essential, as it defines the genre’s form:

Thrown back solely on his or her own wits, this character is loosened to travel the highways and by-ways of the land. The plot of the narrative, to outward appearance anyway, simply follows the traveler’s wandering as the picaro or picara winds along randomly from one episode to the disconnected next one, buffeted about by the experiences of the road, as he or she successively engages elements of the topographical and social scene. (Sherrill 3)

Arachne’s need to follow her desire for movement does not allow her relationship with Thomas to progress beyond a certain point. Her choice for movement on the road and against a static life with Thomas in Calgary is not without consequences; her decision automatically leads to her losing Thomas. “At the moment when the picaresque protagonist solves the conflict between his [or her] individuation and his [or her] socialisation, the novel is no longer picaresque but has transformed itself into a Bildungsroman” (Ehland 91), focusing on the concept of a literary character going through a phase of development.

The Bildungsroman “emerged from the particular historical and intellectual circumstances of the eighteenth-century Germany. [Its] understanding of human growth assumes the possibility of individual achievement and social integration” (Abel, Hirsch, and Langland, Introduction, 5), but a certain social position of the character was necessary to achieve this personal development, as it was frequently connected to growth by education or educational travels. Interestingly, the picaresque genre is seen as a relevant influence on the formation of the Bildungsroman, even though especially the social circumstances of the protagonists tend to differ greatly. But both similarities and obvious differences are inherent to the respective genres, amounting to the distinctiveness of each:

Despite the resemblance between their progressive biographical perspectives it is the pattern of the Fluchtsuche as the direct expression of the ultimate insolubility of the archetypal picaresque dilemma which distinguishes the fragmented spatial discourse of the picaresque novel from the purposeful coherency of setting in the Bildungsroman. (Ehland 92)

In both genres, however, the development of the protagonist is the central theme, even though the development may not always be a positive one, as is often the case with the picaresque genre.

Whether the protagonist Arachne Manteia, a 20th-century picara par excellence, remains within her picaresque framework or transgresses the genre will be further analyzed in chapter 5.2. Just this much may be said in the words of Aritha van Herk: “The female picaros invented by male authors, whether Moll Flanders, Fanny Hill, or Thelma and Louise have been punished for their transgressions. Not one of them ends up alive and unreformed. Those are the two choices they have: to die or reform” (qtd. in Clayton 167).

Equally dangerous for its heroine is the other literary influence relevant for the novels in discussion: the **Gothic novel**, which “refers here to a subjective view of the dark side of life, seen through the distorting mirror of the self, with its submerged levels of psychic and spiritual experiences” (Northey 6). Its roots can be traced back to the late 18th and early 19th centuries, when “between 1790 and 1820, the Gothic novel [...] was the most popular kind of fiction in England” (Howells, *Love* 1). The topics of love, horror and misery, paired with insight into the protagonist’s inner anxiety, can account for its popularity. “Gothic novelists attempted to give imaginative worlds external and objective reality” (Haggerty 7), something that had not been done before and has created lasting interest among readers of the genre. What is more, it gave the female protagonists more freedom of movement within the constraints of literary conventions. Thus, “the Gothic novel became a feminine substitute for the picaresque, where heroines could enjoy all the adventures and alarms that masculine heroes had long experienced” (Becker, *Gothic* 210).

Aritha van Herk has drawn from this tradition for *No Fixed Address* in more than one way. On the most obvious level, visual and symbolic allusions to the Gothic tradition abound in the novel, as Eva Darias-Beutell notes in her analysis:

Arachne's own attraction [...] to funerals and graveyards, would also anticipate the texts shift to the gothic – explicitly signaled in the third notebook by the castle-like Banff Hotel, the enclosure of the women's sauna, and most obviously, by Arachne's murder and her subsequent encounter with a dead man. (*Graphies* 94)

Josef's role can also be interpreted on this level because it contains one of the most prominent Gothic issues present on a subliminal level throughout the whole novel: "[Josef's] subplot is only one of the elements that make the novel so obsessed with the basic gothic dread: the fear of the ultimate stasis, death" (Becker, "Ironic" 126). Josef is also the trigger of the dramatic change in Arachne's story. As I have discussed previously in this chapter, the story takes a turn for the darker when Arachne skips bail after abducting Josef from the retirement home. Following this incident, the Gothic influences become more prominent and out step the picaresque elements.

Another important influence on the character of Arachne can be found in the tradition of the Gothic heroine, even though Arachne transcends this model's conventions considerably. The Gothic heroine holds a unique position in her social environment, "being always in a state of intense awareness yet peculiarly isolated from her circumstantial context and from personal relationships, existing as she does in a self-contained fantasy world" (Howells, *Love* 9). She is physically part of her world but does not consider herself part of the same reality. Though Arachne Manteia may be considered at the margin of respectable society, she certainly does not live in a fantasy world. What differentiates her even more from historical Gothic heroines is the way she uses her sexuality, namely openly and at most times aggressively. In contrast, the Gothic heroine "innocently arouses the admiration of practically every man she meets, but usually escapes the penalties of commitment until the end" (Howells, *Love* 11). It is also the fate of a Gothic heroine to try to overcome her social realities. Thus, especially in the erotic Gothic, as Gary Kelley calls it in *Varieties of Gothic*, "subjectivity is represented as a field of struggle between desire for the social other [...] and the need for self-discipline [...] to control desire" (viii). The heroine tries to overcome her social realities against all odds – mostly with a rather horrible ending for her.

This certainly does not hold true for Arachne, who hardly shows any desire to overcome her social standing. She makes two forays into other social worlds, when she meets Basilisk and at the dinner with Thomas' parents, but she does not display any desire to belong to this world. Rather, she puts on a disguise to pass as a 'respectable person', but feels more like "an escaped criminal who has survived by relying on what

slender veneers are available” (van Herk, *Address* 114), never willing to be fully integrated into a world she does not regard as her own.

Another difference lies in the way female and male worlds are represented. The historical Gothic heroine suffers at the hands of males and is thrown into a passivity she simply has to endure. In Arachne’s world, the men

are victimized by her sexuality, and later by her violence: she robs and kills another man in self-defence. [...] [T]he gothic combination of immobility and violence is thus extended to representing female self-defence against male physical abuse. (Becker, *Gothic* 220)

The relationship between Arachne and Thomas is another peculiarity, where the novel does not comply with the “popular gothic constellations where the female must be ‘rescued’ by the male, a notion that Arachne explicitly detests” (Becker, “Ironic” 123) and van Herk obviously reverses when Thomas assumes the more passive and comparably immobile part in the relationship.

In addition, Arachne’s involvement with Josef can also be read as adhering to the Gothic tradition, because it “provides the possibility of an ironic reversal of a gothic elopement, when Arachne kidnaps him from an old people’s home” (Becker, *Gothic* 221) and is detained afterwards. What has to be acknowledged is that, like with other Gothic heroines, all of Arachne’s relationships to men are problematic, to say the least.

Neither the picaresque, nor the Gothic tradition exerted relevant influences on content and style of *The Tent Peg*, because the novel draws on a different literary background than *No Fixed Address*. Literary influences such as adventure stories of the North or diary writing are not directly connected to the development of the heroine in *The Tent Peg* as in the case of the numerous picaresque and Gothic features in *No Fixed Address*. I chose to include this short digression on literary legacies, as the influences are too apparent and thus too relevant in the style and context of *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey* to leave them out of my analysis entirely.

3.1.3 The Characters

No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey is a novel filled with interesting and colorful characters, revolving around the heroine of the novel. The central character is Arachne Manteia and even though some characters seem at times to be major figures at

first glance, they lose importance in comparison to other characters which would have been considered to be minor in turn. Thus, the classification of characters into ‘major’ and ‘minor’ proved unsatisfactory in the context of my topic.

Therefore, I have decided to view the characters from a different perspective. They are classified according to three groups:

- characters who are important for Arachne’s travelogue of independence,
- characters providing a foundation for Arachne’s desire for movement, and
- characters who exert an influence on Arachne’s psychological development.

The characters belonging to these groups will be closely analyzed in this chapter. In one way or another, all the characters focus on the protagonist Arachne and influence her to different degrees in her travelogue of independence, which follows her physical and psychological traveling over a non-specified period of time. Before discussing these influential characters, I shall at first take a thorough look at Arachne’s character:

Arachne Manteia

Arachne is the protagonist and heroine of the novel *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey*, and a very unlikely heroine at that. She is not an entirely likeable character, in fact even van Herk thinks: “Oh, she’s even worse. She’s really bad” (qtd. in Jerve 70). Arachne lives according to her own rules and concept of morality. Her upbringing and the people she was associated with on the one hand, and on the other hand her inborn desires induce Arachne to leave conventional paths and map out her own travelogue of independence, molding her into the person the reader is introduced to.

Even though Arachne’s present age is never explicitly mentioned, I would place her in her late twenties or early/mid thirties at most. Physically, her most pronounced features are “her muscular solidity” (17) as well as “[h]er dark hair and wide-set green eyes, wide cheeks, this strange pronouncement to her bones, a wide mouth, broad shoulders” (77). In short: Arachne is not what one would conventionally consider beautiful, not even attractive. Her physical peculiarities, however, do not hinder her to have a ready supply of willing men to still her seemingly insatiable sexual hunger. The men she has sex with are mostly random acquaintances, road jockeys, men she picks up along the way. To her, “[t]hey’re just bodies, you could put a paper bag over their

heads" (24) and she collects them as other women collect china. On the other hand, she does not appeal to the average, conventional men because "[r]espectable men hesitate. The other kind are attracted" (77), until she meets Thomas Telfer. With him she has a stable and rather long-lasting relationship, though (or probably because) she does not give up picking up men on the side.

For Arachne, marriage would be the complete opposite of the sexual relationships she has: "To her the true exchange of hearts within the bonds of holy matrimony speaks death to the life of the body" (180), and therefore she would lose the joy of "her reliable, well-tuned body" (180). Arachne gets all the pleasure she wants out of her sexual encounters, her body being a finely tuned instrument through which she "has learned to get her pleasure fast [...] [and] trained her body to pleasure itself" (53). Her pronounced sexuality, which she uses to keep her desires at bay, can be considered as one of her most striking features, her "sexual fantasies [being] incorrigible" (10). Furthermore, Arachne feels a physical need that is a central feature to her personality:

Arachne loves to drive, it is the only activity that convinces her that life is not static and fuzzy [...], driving seems the only sensible way to deal with the world. [...] She is infatuated [...] with motion. (52)

Her love for movement is not something that develops when she finally gets a driver's license and a car, it is rather a character trait she incorporated from early childhood on: "At three Arachne climbed the fence" (30) of her parents' garden and as an adult she became a bus driver. A job as a traveling salesperson only seems the logical consequence, even though it is not an obvious choice for a woman.

Arachne's behavior is quite different from the average woman's in most respects. She despises dressing up, putting on make-up or even shaving her legs, and she holds jobs that normally do not appeal to women. She starts out delivering newspapers while still a child, works at a gas station and then as a bus driver before she becomes an underwear sales representative and is glad that "[s]he's no powdered frill trapped behind a typewriter" (51).

In the household she shares with Thomas, the traditional gender roles are reversed: Thomas takes care of the domestic sphere while she is on the road doing business.

Arachne is perfectly capable of domesticity. She deprecates it – “who’d waste their life cooking and cleaning?” – [...]. Thomas usually takes care of that angle of life, but when he’s not around, Arachne can experiment, refresh her sense of the horror of what she calls house arrest. (27)

Arachne is also different with regard to female bonding. During her childhood, her friends were boys, mostly other outcasts who grouped around her for protection, Arachne being the leader of a notorious street gang. She does not seem to have had any girlfriends. Thena is her first female friend and Arachne awards her with all the trust she has to offer.

Arachne “was an unwanted child, who often ran away, and grew up without any hovering parental presence” (Hutcheon, *Postmodern* 126). Her unusual development as the opposite of the perfect little girl and her lack of female friendships can therefore be largely traced back to Lanie, Arachne’s mother, who was never really interested in her daughter and therefore “Arachne slept and grew without a mother hovering over her progress. Lanie did not neglect Arachne, she just ignored her” (66). Arachne in turn “isn’t convinced that she has a mother; Lanie’s connection to her feels tenuous and unproven” (28), and she even tells Thomas that she thinks she “was either stolen or adopted” (91). When Arachne decides to leave for Calgary and packs up, it becomes clear that she is not leaving behind anything connected with Vancouver that she may subsequently miss: “Arachne packs her clothes and her Melmac dishes and her tools in the trunk of the Mercedes. There’s nothing else to take” (74). It is striking that there is nothing personal – apart from the Mercedes – that she can take along to her new life.

Arachne’s background is working-class, but she “has never thought of her narrow life as disabled. She is concerned with survival, self-protection” (59). She grows up in East-End Vancouver, one of the seedier neighborhoods of the city, and, as a consequence, grows up wild and unrestrained, showing a tendency towards bad habits, criminal behavior and violence. Unusual for a girl, she also becomes the leader of a street gang by the name of ‘Black Widows’. Even though she leaves street life behind when she turns into an adult, she can never negate her working-class background entirely:

She looks like a person who will speak ungrammatically. True enough. She does not mind dirt under her fingernails, she does not feel that deodorant is necessary every day. It shows on her face. Rebellion. Dissension. Trouble. (77)

It is this background, after all, she can rely on when she gets herself into trouble and flees from the law. Thomas has helped her to develop and put on a careful disguise to function in a more conventional world. But

[t]he truth is that Arachne is no different than she ever was. She is amoral, selfish, dishonest. She is afraid that if the details of her amorality come to light, she will lose Thomas, her one solid connection with what she calls “the real world,” certainly the respectable world, in which she is an impostor. (81)

And she does lose him eventually. When she gets into conflict with the law for taking Josef for a ride and practically abducting him from his nursing home, Arachne takes the easy way out. Instead of facing the charges and having to explain everything to Thomas, she takes the car and escapes.

Thomas is not only her lover and her connection to Calgary, he is also the one who “encouraged Arachne to apply for the job with Ladies’ Comfort, suggested that it would give her a reason to drive to all those small towns she’s so interested in” (140). Before her relationship with Thomas, Arachne’s various jobs supply her with enough money to get by and to pay for the maintenance of her Mercedes, her work being part of the daily routine and structure, but nothing she wants to be good at. But the job as a sales representative seems to be more of a true calling to Arachne than just a job, even though “[o]n principle, adamantly determined not to be her own best advertisement, Arachne wears nothing at all” (6) underneath her own clothing. And Arachne is good at the job, she even wins a sales award because of her outstanding sales record. She wonders at herself at times and is amused by the person she has become. She has turned from “a street urchin into a passably respectable – not lady, Arachne will never be a lady – person” (140).

Arachne has numerous acquaintances but hardly any serious relationships to speak of, neither in her past nor in her present life. The relationship to her parents is mostly strained and indifferent at the best of times, and she does not have many friends. Thena is her only but true friend, the one person she trusts completely, even with all her little indiscretions and sexual experiments she has outside her relationship with Thomas.

The one lasting and reliable relationship Arachne has throughout the novel is that to her car, an antique 1959 black Mercedes she inherited from Gabriel Greenberg. The car is more than just a means of transportation to her: “it’s a blessing from the past, one talisman against her uncertain future” (58). All her adult life, starting with when she

inherits the car at the age of 19, it accompanies her. If one considers the frequency with which it appears in the novel and the continuity it represents, one could say that the Mercedes is one of the main characters in the novel, her reliable partner: “Her petty discontent is stilled by the car” (60), movement being the remedy to her ills. In turn, she treats the car with respect, even with tenderness, when she “caresses the Bakelite wheel” (75). Therefore, it is hardly a coincidence that the key passages in the novel and the passages when Arachne meets relevant other characters are frequently connected to the car. For example, Arachne meets Thena in the garage where she has her Mercedes serviced, and “although a garage named Venice Imports is an unlikely place for confidantes to meet [...], Arachne only likes women who care about cars as much as she does anyway “ (131).

The Mercedes also plays an important role when she drives to Calgary with Thomas. It is in the car that their first sexual encounter takes place and it is also Thomas who convinces her that a job driving her car through provincial Canada selling underwear would suit her well. The Mercedes is also the one thing she does not leave behind when she skips bail and leaves Calgary. “The car is her worst liability, but she cannot abandon it” (222), and it is in the Mercedes that Arachne drives farther and farther north. It is only on the last page of the novel, having arrived at the end of the road, that she proceeds by helicopter, leaving her trusted car behind.

A closer at Arachne’s past reveals that the preparation of her escape to follow her own travelogue of independence was simply a matter of time. Even the relationship to Thomas is too confining to fulfill this travelogue; therefore, she has to leave him and the structured life he stands for. However, Thomas – and also Thena – are essential for Arachne’s travelogue of independence.

Characters Important for Arachne’s Travelogue of Independence

Every traveler needs two essential personae to help him/her fulfill the role of a traveler: someone who provides the traveler with the idea, the concept and the maps for traveling; and someone to tell one’s adventures to, the audience for one’s travelogues. The same holds true for Arachne in *No Fixed Address*. Therefore, Thomas and Thena are the two characters who can be found in this category, as they play the most important roles for Arachne’s traveling and thus for her travelogue of independence.

Thena

Arachne first meets Thena at the garage in Calgary where she has her Mercedes serviced. The two women strike up a friendship, even though they are unlikely companions:

Thena is a coincidence. If they had known, they might have looked each other over more carefully, hesitated. [...] Arachne found Thena stridently aggressive; she found Arachne unformed and raw. Although they confess that they sized upon each other the day they met. (125)

And Thena turns out to be a lot more to Arachne than just a friend. She is also her confidante:

Arachne returns from the road with a store of chronicles for Thena: tales, descriptions, narrations, expositions. She is the explorer for Thena's determined enclosetment, a messenger from the world. And needs her too. For what is a traveler without a confidante? (118)

Thena learns all about Arachne's indiscretions and road jockeys and eventually also about Josef. Even though she patiently listens to her stories, she also shows her that she does not approve of Arachne's life style, predicting a bad outcome for it all. Though Thena considers all men to be scum, she is very solicitous about Thomas, even thinks that Arachne is really lucky to have found "the only nice man in Calgary" (124). She also warns Arachne that with her behavior, especially when she is on the road, she is bound to lose him.

In many ways, Thena is the complete opposite of Arachne. She describes herself as "a housewife par excellence. First class, neurotic, valium-motivated, divorced, tied to two bratty kids and mad as hell" (165). She is disillusioned with men and the male-dominated world in general, tries against all odds to instill her distrust of men in her two teenage daughters and drinks too much, especially when in company of Arachne, for whom she is the perfect female friend. She would not connect to the average woman who lives on a different agenda than Arachne ever will. And most women would feel threatened by Arachne. "Thena relies on dry irony to keep herself going" (86) and this, in combination with her fierceness and fury, is an equal match for Arachne's stubbornness.

Thena is introduced to the reader right in the first chapter of the novel, when Arachne remembers Thena's reaction to her new job. Her entry into the story already hints at the importance she carries for the protagonist Arachne, and Thena's role in the novel does indeed function on various levels. Most importantly, she provides Arachne

with the audience for her travelogue, she becomes the confidante Arachne trusts with all the adventures and little secrets she gathers on the road. Thena also fulfills the role of a “keeper of history” (194), the role of the storyteller when Arachne has disappeared. When the researcher tries to find out whether Arachne truly has died up north as the papers have written, Thena is the only person mentioned to have been interviewed by the researcher in Calgary – and multiple times at that. Thena hints at the possibility that Arachne is not dead, but does not want to say more about it. She is the only one who knows how Arachne’s travelogue will continue, if at all. At various stages of the novel, Thena also acts as a sort of bearer of predictions about Arachne’s future, hinting at a possible path on the map of Arachne’s travelogue. The most obvious example of this occurs when Arachne tells Thena about her relationship to Josef and she disapproves of Arachne’s “planning to kidnap an old man” (160).

Thena’s importance for Arachne’s travelogue of independence is asserted in the novel: “For what is a traveler without a confidante?” (125), Arachne needs her as her audience and sounding board for new ideas, someone to approve and disapprove of her adventures. As a consequence, when Arachne decides to reach the ultimate destination of her travelogue of independence, she also has to leave Thena. The irrevocable disappearance off any map does not require an audience.

Thomas Telfer

Arachne meets Thomas Telfer by chance, like most men in her life, when something stirs inside her while driving the Vancouver bus he rides on. Thomas reverberates with “an indefinable quality that he represents, conveyed in his walk and the angle of his head and the surety of his hands” (59), and Arachne has a hard time ignoring this passenger on her bus. She can judge by his appearance that he is not working-class like herself and nurtures her prejudices about men like him, her views flickering through her mind to distract her from the attraction for him. One evening, when Thomas is the last passenger on the bus, he forgets his map tube. He runs after the bus and finds Arachne looking at the maps, and he explains to her that he is “a cartographer with the Geodetic Survey” (72). It is then that Arachne decides to be bold and drives him home in the bus, telling him she plans to quit the job to do some traveling. Thomas gives her his card and tells her to call him if she is planning to drive to Calgary, the place where he lives.

Arachne really calls him when she has finalized her plans to leave and he agrees to come along. Soon the attraction between them becomes more and more tangible, but “Thomas, too well-bred to show a visible erection, Arachne too shy to wriggle and burn, [...] they sit on the verge of squirming, faces flushed and averted” (76), driving through the western Canadian landscape. They stop at a graveyard and then give in to their lust. When they finally reach Calgary, Thomas offers Arachne to stay at his house: “I have a big house, there’s lots of room. [...] No obligation, you understand” (80). So Arachne moves in and stays with Thomas, “a man who matches Arachne’s practical interest in roads and maps with a successful career in map-making” (Crosby 15).

A serious disruption in their relationship occurs when Thomas introduces Arachne to his family, his well-bred and well-educated background, and her own blatant social inferiority is thrown into her face. Arachne decides that this is the time to leave, but Thomas manages to convince her to stay. He also agrees to teach her some social tricks, like eating properly and petty conversation. He even goes shopping with her: “The clerks in the shop are fascinated. The man has impeccable taste; he knows exactly what is right” (112), and he provides Arachne with a collection of new, respectable clothing. And it is also Thomas who encourages her to apply for the position with Ladies’ Comfort, a job that suits her love for driving. Thomas also literally offers her a new perspective of the world when he takes her on a balloon ride on her birthday. But still, Thomas’ fears come true and Arachne leaves him after he bails her out of jail. Thomas does not appear again in the text after this, only his initial on a bronze marker in the northern moss is mentioned just before the novel comes to an end.

Thomas is an interesting choice as a partner for Arachne and she is aware of it: “It’s ridiculous, she knows better than to choose someone so patently unsuitable” (77). Still, he loves her with a vengeance, even though “he knows her infidelities, [and] he can imagine her misdemeanors. But she has saved him from life with a blue-eyed and bouncy-assed fembot [...]. Unthinkable that he has found a woman like this, and that she stays” (90). And Arachne sees him as “the one who will linger and stay” (94). Taken at face value, though, “Thomas appears ‘too good to be true’” (Carrera 436), the drawing of his character rather unrealistic.

Thomas presents a stable focus in Arachne's life in Calgary and she manages a more or less adult relationship with him. He is the driving force in her life there, especially because he shapes her more than anyone else before. Thomas functions as Arachne's anchor in the world, the one reason for her to lead a more or less respectable life and to return home to Calgary after her sales trips. Even Thena, Arachne's friend, thinks, contrary to her usual views on men, that Thomas is a good man, and "[s]he is convinced that Thomas will not fail Arachne" (116). It is clear however that Arachne has to part with him once she decides to leave her respectable life behind. Besides being the perfect lover for her, Thomas also represents respectability, social achievement and a conventional future, everything Arachne has to leave behind if her travelogue of independence is to prove successful.

Thomas is very important for the progress of Arachne's travelogue. Without him, Arachne would have stayed a bus driver in Vancouver without ever following up on her desire for traveling and her love for maps. Thomas also furnished her with the perfect job for her abilities and equipped her with the instruments to safely navigate through a world full of social pitfalls, a world she had not been prepared for by her own upbringing. "So Arachne is not wrong to credit Thomas with saving her" (80), at least on the surface of it. Having reached the fork in the road where she has to decide whether or not to live a conventionally drawn life of stasis with Thomas, she chooses to take the other road. She follows her own map instead of the ones given to her by him. This leads her into unknown and uncharted territory, thereby ultimately fulfilling her travelogue of independence. Thus, Thomas is instrumental on various levels in furthering Arachne's travelogue.

Characters Providing a Foundation for Arachne's Desire for Movement

Arachne's desire for movement is not acquired but inborn. Two people in her life provided the foundation for the fact that movement turned out to be of utmost importance, not to say a desire for Arachne, making it indispensable to her way of life: Lanie and Gabriel. Therefore, these two characters basically instigated Arachne's travelogue of independence in her past.

Lanie Manteia

Lanie was a shopgirl sitting behind a counter filing her nails in a sooty English town when she looked up into Toto Manteia's smile. Both parents killed in the London blitz, technically an orphan, she was seventeen, too old to be adopted. It was 1945, plenty of uniforms around, but most of them ignored her for the older girls. (40)

She marries Toto and arrives in Vancouver as a war bride, wife to Private Toto Manteia. But "[h]er expectations were hardly met. [...] Lanie did not cry, nor did she try to return to England, as so many others did" (41). She tries to make the best of the situation instead. She gets a job as a teacup reader and contributes to bettering their financial situation, allowing the couple to move into a better house soon. "For four years she circumvented the inevitable" (42), preventing a pregnancy which would put a sudden end to her ambitions, until she becomes pregnant with Arachne, a child unwanted but expected from the beginning. Lanie adapts to the situation with her usual pragmatism and first "ignored the child inside her" (63), continuing to do so even after when Arachne is born. She makes up her mind: "Now that her body was her own, Lanie was determined never to give it up again. She refused to breastfeed the child [...] [and] [...] handled Arachne with calm aloofness, changed her and bathed her and fed her, but separate, out of range" (65). As soon as she can somehow manage, Lanie finds herself a job at the Orange Café across the street, determined to regain some of her independence and never to relinquish it again.

Lanie is not the picture perfect mother, rather the opposite. The narrator is uncompromising in this respect: "There is nothing soft or yielding about Lanie. She is a pragmatist, without sentiment" (29). This holds true for the relationship she has with her daughter. She never neglects her, she just does not tote over her like one would expect from a mother. It is actually Toto, Lanie's husband and Arachne's father, who shows emotion and interest towards their daughter: "[h]e played with Arachne, tossing her in the air and making train noises" (66). Also, Lanie does not refrain from physical punishment when Arachne disobeys.

In most respects, Arachne is different from Lanie, most likely because she refuses to resemble her mother. For instance, in one of their conversations upon Lanie's visit to Calgary, Lanie cannot help commenting on what a good husband Thomas would make and asking why Arachne does not consider marrying him. Arachne, rebukes her mother: "Marriage, *Mother*, is not the haven of refuge for me that it was for you. [...] I don't want no ring in exchange for screwing" (45). While marriage was a welcome

avenue of escape for Lanie, it looms as a trap with no way out for Arachne. However different Lanie may seem from Arachne, they do have something in common: “She and Lanie wanted the same thing. Arachne began to understand this when Lanie locked her in the high-fenced backyard while she went off to a Bingo or a shoe sale” (30). Both women cherish their personal freedom, actively and consistently pursuing it.

For various reasons, Lanie is responsible for Arachne’s desire for movement, which eventually carries her on her travelogue of independence: Apparently Arachne inherited her dislike of being fenced in from her mother. On the other hand, the lack of motherly care from Lanie infused in Arachne an emotional distance in relationships to other people, which facilitates her escape in the latter part of the novel considerably. In addition, Lanie is also instrumental in the provision of the most important element in Arachne’s travelogue of independence, the Mercedes, since Gabriel was her acquaintance.

Gabriel Greenberg

Gabriel Greenberg, a man “stocky, dark, with a toothbrush moustache” (64), is a regular client of Lanie’s tea-leaf readings and continues to visit her every second week at her home once she is not able to work at the downtown Fisherman’s Café any more. Still, Gabriel is an unlikely customer of dubious fortune readings, apparently being wealthy and successful. He is “dressed in dark blue with a dazzling shirt and a narrow tie [...] against the backdrop of the house, Gabriel looked as alien as any orchid in the Arctic. He came from somewhere else” (127). It is also Gabriel who is in a way responsible for Arachne’s name, as he holds a conversation about spiders with the pregnant Lanie on his first visit at her house. And in Arachne’s memory, Gabriel is inseparably connected to the expensive cars he always drives, “parked in front of the house when she came home from school” (127).

In the novel, Gabriel Greenberg is first introduced in connection with the Mercedes when Arachne picks up Lanie at the airport and she acknowledges “Gabriel’s car. [...] He took us both for a ride in Stanley Park” (31). It is also in the same paragraph that the unclear relationship between Lanie and Gabriel is hinted at, when Arachne “is sure Lanie is making it up, she wasn’t along, more likely it was just Lanie and Gabriel” (31). The role of Gabriel in Lanie’s – and therefore Arachne’s life – never

becomes quite clear, though some indication of more than a business relationship between them seems to constantly hover below the surface. Arachne is not oblivious to this possibility, especially since she “was only repeating a story she had always heard, how Gabriel would come over and talk to [Lanie] before she was born, how he would watch Lanie” (128). Lanie, however, never admits to anything more than having read his fortune from a teacup for him, even tells Toto “[i]t’s nothing, honest. An ugly old guy like that?” (67) when she is confronted by him with obvious suspicions in mind.

Apparently, Gabriel seems to have more influence on Arachne during her childhood years than anyone else, including her parents:

She knew that [Gabriel] loved her, loved her the way no one had ever loved her. He never bought her a present, he never gave her money. He did not touch her or kiss her, give her advice or ask her what she was doing. [...] When she banged the door and scuffed into the house, she could feel his love. [...] Yet she knew that his silent presence protected her. (128)

The protection stops when Gabriel suddenly dies of a heart attack and leaves the Mercedes to Arachne and nothing to Lanie. As if to stress Gabriel’s protective function for Arachne in the text, Toto breaks Arachne’s arm and throws her out of the house for good after finding out about the inheritance.

Gabriel is instrumental in furthering Arachne’s innate desire for movement as he “bequeaths the car so necessary to fulfil her potential” (Jones, “Restoring” 428). When Arachne is sick one day and Lanie does not find any remedy to get Arachne to sleep, Gabriel “[s]et her in the front seat beside him and drove, one hand holding her. Arachne gave up screaming and curled against his thigh, the rhythm of the car wheeling her into a long cry and then sleep” (62). From childhood on, Arachne learns that movement means soothing and escape at the same time, and even more if one has a car at one’s disposal. Gabriel’s legacy, the black antique Mercedes he leaves to Arachne after his death, presents her with this kind of freedom she has not known before. And the car does not only shape her future but also her destiny.

Without Gabriel’s car, Arachne’s travelogue would certainly have been written differently. She may have remained trapped in Vancouver with no possibility to fulfill her travelogue of independence. Therefore, Gabriel and his generous legacy to her provided her with the means to follow up on her desire for movement towards ultimate independence.

Characters exerting an Influence on Arachne's Psychological Development

In the course of the novel, there are three characters which exert considerable influence on Arachne's behavior and therefore constitute a major force in Arachne's psychological development. As Arachne's travelogue does not only describe a physical traveling but also a psychological one, these three characters are important for her travelogue of independence.

Josef

Josef is a 90-year-old Serbian immigrant Arachne meets by chance when she is on one of her sales trips and stops at the graveyard where Chief Crowfoot is buried. Arachne observes "[t]he man, a gangling figure shrinking in his clothes, [...] [whose] eyes are hooded and the joints of his fingers knobbed [...] his hair, a spun floss white, thick and wild, with a beard like it" (10). He is introduced early in the novel, when he opposes Arachne in a staring contest at the graveyard, both willing the other to leave so that they can rebury a partly uncovered skull. When other visitors appear and fail to notice the skull, Arachne and Josef silently reconcile and rebury the skull together. Arachne does not think again of the incident until that evening, when she is compiling her orders in her motel room, and Josef suddenly appears at her window. She invites him in and lets him touch her but then is taken aback by "his face so closed he seems blind" (20) and refuses to let him go any further. After silent moments shared together Josef leaves again to rejoin his family.

The next encounter with Josef occurs when Arachne returns home after one of her sales trips and finds him sitting in front of the house, waiting for her. He lets her drive him home and shows Arachne his work place in his daughter's garage, where he crafts copper discs with ornate patterns. Arachne realizes it was him who had left such a disc on her doorstep weeks before. Their conversation is abruptly stopped by the appearance of Josef's daughter who seems annoyed with him whenever she is mentioned in the text, caring for her father with "her iron love" (153). Subsequently, by way of introduction, Josef tells Arachne "My daughter. I am a burden..." (123). Josef's assessment is confirmed when he is put into a nursing home to lift the burden off his daughter's shoulders. Arachne is disturbed when she finds Josef in the nursing home and she "stands helplessly while he weeps" (184). Arachne sleeps with him and then

decides to take him for a drive, a drive that extends into the night and the next day. Their adventure ends when they are apprehended and Arachne is arrested on the “charges of kidnapping, transportation out of the province and intent to extort” (191). Josef does not appear in the text after this.

Josef plays a peculiar role in Arachne’s life. On the surface, their relationship seems to be sexual, but on closer scrutiny a deeper connection becomes apparent. It is interesting that their first encounter is hardly sexual, more of a test of forces, rather. Arachne and Josef have sexual encounters later on in the novel, but this seems to be only a small part of their relationship. Indeed, they share a deep understanding of each other’s needs, Josef being “a man who has fled half the world and four score years, and [she] 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” (152). Josef, like Arachne, is an outsider of sorts. He is an immigrant and his less than perfect English betrays him whenever he speaks. He also believes he is a burden to his daughter, who, for her part, makes no secret of this. He thus feels isolated, a feeling not unknown to Arachne. “Josef’s shabby frame has hooked her sympathy [...], her sympathy for Josef is more like recognition, an indication of what she might become, a reminder of the ragged child that Raki was” (160).

He resonates in Arachne on a deep level, an understanding only someone can have who has experienced true isolation and unasked for self-sufficiency. Josef is marked by the war experiences in Serbia and the subsequent flight to Canada. He seems to have never truly come to terms with this new world, feeling uncomfortable with his role in his own family.

In my view, there is one fact that establishes Josef’s importance for Arachne and therefore for the progress of the story more than anything else: from the first encounter with Josef “she knows that she will not tell [Thena] about this man, at least not for a while” (21). This means a lot, especially considering the fact that normally the two women are brutally honest with each other and Thena is the only person to learn all about Arachne’s road adventures. Therefore, Josef’s significance can be established by the fact that he is left out of Arachne’s stories for Thena for a while. Also, it is hardly a

coincidence that it is the charge of Josef's alleged kidnapping which functions as the turning point in the plot.

Josef influences Arachne's life, notably her future, in a relevant way. The relationship to Josef triggers her escape from her life with Thomas, from a stable and respectable future in Calgary. By abducting Josef from his nursing home to save him, she sacrifices her own stability and chooses flight over fight – with the law and Thomas.

Dougall McKay

Arachne meets Dougall McKay in a Pincher Creek bank, where she tries to cash her illegally acquired check. Because of the high sum of the check, she needs a co-signer and McKay jumps in, not for purely altruistic reasons as it turns out later. He introduces himself to Arachne as “miner, entrepreneur, self-styled historian, archivist and rescuer of the Crowsnest Pass, heavy drinker, big talker, drifter, gambler, high-rigger, helicopter pilot” (212). He wants to sell her a share in his coal mine, but when Arachne refuses he takes her to some dilapidated miner's shack to introduce her to one of his friends, an old miner by the name of Frank. In this shack Arachne gets drunk on Scotch and moonshine together with the men, and when she awakens the next morning her money is missing and she confronts McKay about it. He, in turn, feels himself in a safe position as he thinks “[she]’d never have gotten the money at all if it hadn’t been for [him]” (218). This justifies the partnership of sorts in a coal mine, but does not sit well with Arachne, who seeks revenge. She positions herself in the back alley of the only two bars in the town of Fernie, waiting for McKay to show up. “Arachne settles down in the shadow where she can watch both doors, where the moon will not catch the metal of the tire wrench she holds. [...] She draws up her knees and hopes that her instinct is still intact” (220). When McKay leaves the bar through the back door to relieve himself, Arachne pounces on him:

He is shaking himself when she raises the wrench. The undeflected descent of the iron, its dull contact with the back of his head, [...]. He falls headfirst into the lilac bush. Arachne hauls him out and stretches him on his back on the gravel. She begins to empty his pockets methodically, putting everything in a pile beside her. (221)

She takes the rest of her money and also what is in his wallet and leaves him in the alley.

Dougall McKay is Arachne's male mirror-image. He is a rogue himself, immoral and jumping at opportunities when they present themselves. He is described as having a

“puckish, black-bearded face above a body type that she recognizes, powerful chest and belly dwindling to almost insignificant legs” (211), acknowledging both the type of coarse men she is often associated with on the road and her unrefined self in her pre-Thomas times. Curiously, Arachne displays no overt sexual interest in McKay; the only mildly sexual element of their relationship occurs at the end of the ambush, when Arachne, about to leave, “sees the soft bud of his penis barely nosing through his open fly [...] [and] cups her hand over it, then gently tucks it back inside the man’s pants, pulls up the zipper” (221). But this scene appears to show more of a protective than a sexual motivation for Arachne’s actions.

It is clear is that McKay seems to strike a more primal note within her. This becomes particularly apparent when she enters the miner’s shack, which is “dark and musky like an animal’s cave” (214). She is not really interested in McKay and his friend Frank “but their web of stories arouses in her a nostalgia for disorder and unwholesomeness, the satisfaction of a tattered life with no obligations or rewards” (214). While she sits and listens to the men talking, drinking what she is handed, Arachne “warms her hands on their lightless life. They have what she had always wanted” (215).

Dougall McKay’s function in the text is that of a mirror of sorts for Arachne, a mirror that stirs up childhood memories when she was still with the gang and took revenge on her first wrongdoer. This childhood scene is echoed in her ambush on McKay behind the bar, Arachne unconsciously repeating ingrained and long-forgotten – or rather suppressed – motions.

McKay also represents an alternative travelogue Arachne could have lived, had she not met Thomas in Vancouver and decided to travel. The discrepancy between Arachne identifying herself with McKay’s world and McKay calling her constantly “lady” and “sweetie”⁶ alludes to the difference between how Arachne views herself and the disguise she put on with the help of Thomas. At the end of the chapter describing her ambush, she in turn echoes McKay’s words: “Thanks, sweetie. Stay out of dark alleys” (221). By attacking him she has returned to her old self, living by her rules and not by any societal or legal conventions – just like Dougall McKay.

⁶ Compare van Herk, *Address* 215, 218-19.

Dougall McKay is highly important for Arachne's psychological development and the way her travelogue of independence continues after their encounter, as McKay is a mirror of an alternative life for Arachne, the alluring possibilities of which she recognizes. In my view, the encounter with McKay signals a turning point in Arachne's travelogue, because her violent tendencies resurface after she meets McKay. Thus, he shapes her psychological development up to the point where a return to ordered life is not possible without grave consequences and the only way to fulfill her travelogue of independence is to disappear off the map.

The Man on the Ferry

The man on the ferry only has a very short appearance, basically all of two paragraphs in the novel, at the end of which Arachne stabs him with the pin of her poncho and leaves him to die on deck. The reason for her reaction is the way he molests her:

[H]e brings his lips down against her neck, his cold hands finding their way under her sweater. [...] His rhythm against her is the same convulsive rhythm she has known all men to use. She elbows him again but he refuses to be deterred, only murmurs [...]. He is fondling her breasts now, his lips still mumbling the skin of her neck. (236)

Even though the man on the ferry occupies only a small space in the novel, his role for Arachne's development is very important. He represents the culmination of her criminal streak, murder being an unforgiveable sin and a point of no return. Arachne's crimes up to then could have been resolved, leaving room for a return to normal life. With the murder this option is not given anymore.

Considering van Herk's penchant for mythology, an alternative reading with Greek mythology in mind would also be possible: "Charon, Fährmann des Hades, setzte die Schatten der Toten, die ordnungsgemäß bestattet worden waren, über den Fluß Styx (oder Acheron) in den Hades über" (Tripp 135). When Arachne comes to and finds herself on the ferry, she is not sure whether she is alive or dead. The man on the ferry could well correspond to the mythological Charon, whom she defeats and continues to live afterwards.

Either way, the man on the ferry appears at a crossroads on Arachne's map. By stabbing him, she decides to follow a dangerous path beyond the boundaries of average society, leaving conventional travelogues behind. The only option left to her is escape,

both physically from the law and psychologically from her deed. Thus, her travelogue of independence can only lead to her disappearance off all conventional maps.

3.2 *The Tent Peg*

On the surface, *The Tent Peg* could be read as novel of development (*Entwicklungsroman*), as most of the characters will return home after the summer, having learnt their most important lessons for life. But there are crucial differences in the general perception of this genre, such as that the characters are not coming of age but are rather set personae who have different reasons to go North: to follow up on their professions, to earn money, to escape routine, and to gain experience.

In this difference lies the reason why I consider this novel to be a travelogue of independence and not a novel of development. The characters, above all the novel's protagonist J.L., use this summer to go on a personal quest. Beside the physical quest, which culminates in the finding of a gold mine, the characters' quest on a psychological level is even more prominent. Throughout the summer, they pass through a myriad of psychological landscapes mirrored in the beautiful but rough landscape of the Yukon Mountains. While in *No Fixed Address* the travelogue follows maps and roads, the travelogue in *The Tent Peg* takes place on a psychological level, with certain visible connections to the outside world. What is more, J.L.'s journey is one to the inside on various levels, one level being from the urban common space of a modern city to the isolated inside of the Canadian wilderness. Before taking a closer look at the various characters of the novel a short summary will serve as introduction into the plot.

3.2.1 Short Summary of the Novel

J.L. lives and studies in Edmonton and to her social environment she seems like a normal young woman of her age. Yet she is trying to escape from a world that does not make sense to her and to "run from an empty heart" (van Herk, *Tent Peg*, jacket text at back). By chance, she finds out through a friend that it would be possible to join geologists as a cook, and the "promise of aloneness" (18) appeals to her immediately. With a trick she circumvents the only impediment – her gender – and flies up to Yellowknife to join her future boss for the summer, Mackenzie.

Mackenzie is a seasoned geologist who has always spent his summers in remote camps, searching for valuable minerals and ores for his company. At first he does not recognize J.L. as a woman, but she confesses to him a day later. Contrary to her fears, he does not fire her but lets her make the preparations for departure. At breakfast the next day he introduces her to the rest of the camp crew. It is then that J.L. meets her adversary for the summer: Jerome, the second in command in the camp. Apart from him, the other crew members are doubtful that she will last all summer but other than that do not worry about her. Shortly before the crew is ready to leave for the Barrenlands, Mackenzie is informed by headquarters that they are not going to the Barrenlands; rather, they are to follow up on a promising showing of uranium in the Wernecke Mountains, a part of the Yukon. As compensation, a helicopter pilot and engineer by the name of Ivan will accompany them and fly them to the prospecting sites.

As soon as they are flown in, J.L. starts to set up her cook tent, which quickly becomes the heart and centre of the camp. J.L.'s cooking dissipates some of the worries the crew have, as she is the best bush cook they have had so far. Other than that, the men are intrigued by her silence and the distance she keeps to them. Slowly, they start to talk to her and find out that she actually is a very likeable character and is also strong enough to fend for herself, despite her slight physical frame. She proves this impressively when Mackenzie takes her outside and teaches her how to shoot a rifle. After a humiliating first try, the second shot hits the bull's-eye.

During the first weeks in camp however, J.L. realizes that her expectations of the North and of a camp full of geologists are not entirely realistic. The isolation and loneliness she was hoping for is shattered as she finds out that Cap, the expeditor, will stay in camp with her and also Ivan returns to camp as soon as he has dropped off the men in the mountains. In addition, Jerome's hostility, Cap's unrelenting lust and Milton wearily watching her all the time are beginning to take their toll on her self-assuredness. Just when she is about to quit, J.L. has an encounter with a female grizzly-bear which renews her inner strength and her resolve to outlast this summer. What is more, the scene is witnessed by Cap and Ivan who, as a consequence, tell the whole camp about it. This incident alters J.L.'s image within the crew, and it turns into a mysterious direction – some even believe J.L. is a witch. For J.L., the she-bear was sent by her friend

Deborah, the only female but very close friend she has in Edmonton, to give her the strength to survive this summer. Shortly after the scene with the bear, a rockslide descends onto the camp at night and stops only short of the tents. J.L. is the only one awakened by the mountains shifting and the only one to actually witness the rockslide. Everyone else sleeps through the incident and is unpleasantly shaken by the visual evidence of a near-death event the next day. Again, the incident is attributed to J.L., but they are unsure whether she is positively magical or is a witch who will bring their doom upon them.

J.L. slowly comes to the realization that she will survive the summer and starts opening up to the camp members. One evening, she even sets the crew up to play a trick on Jerome, an innocent prank that he absolutely misinterprets. After her opening up, the men also start to gravitate towards her and to ask her for help with their respective problems. J.L. helps them realize that the solutions are always within, provided they are willing to accept the truth. Alongside the uncovering of inner truths, Mackenzie also lays bare the secret of the mountain. He finds a showing of gold and the assay results confirm his educated guess. He even takes J.L. with him to show her, and they are surprised with a dinner cooked by the men on their return.

After a fistfight with his assistant Hudson, which is broken up by Mackenzie and does not have any consequences for Hudson, Jerome has had enough of the camp. He flies out for a week, also with thoughts of reporting Mackenzie and the crew to headquarters. On his return, on which he is accompanied by Mackenzie's boss P.Q., he is absolutely shattered by the gold find which the crew have already staked in his absence. P.Q. is convinced that everything is the way it is supposed to be in a geologists' camp and leaves satisfied. The good mood in the camp about the gold discovery, which made Jerome look like a fool, is the last straw for Jerome, who lusts for revenge on J.L., whom he sees as the sole reason for his miserable summer. At night he takes his gun and enters J.L.'s tent with the purpose of raping and hurting her. J.L. manages to disarm and overpower him. The novel closes with a celebration at the final campfire and with J.L. dancing on the cook tent table placed in the fire.

3.2.2 Structure and Formal Aspects

The structure of the novel is reasonably straightforward at first glance. It is divided into 106 chapters, the chapters themselves differing in length. Each chapter carries the name of the character from whose viewpoint the content of the chapter is written. The names appear with variable frequency, most often Mackenzie with 22 chapters, followed by J.L. with 17 and Thompson with 16 chapters. The other characters feature with ten chapters each, or less. According to the number of chapters each character rates, they can be divided into two groups, both featured in various texts of criticism discussing the novel.⁷ In relation to my topic, this division has not proved useful. Therefore, I have chosen an entirely different approach to the structure of this novel.

As I argue, *The Tent Peg* can be read as a travelogue in which the protagonist J.L. passes through different psychological landscapes – often mirrored in the physical landscape of the Yukon – to arrive at a solution to the problems in her life. When the structure of the novel is viewed with this premise in mind, an entirely new concept opens up, namely a structure resembling a labyrinth of possible paths J.L. may choose to take in the course of the summer. The starting point and desired destination are clear; the possible paths, however, differ greatly and are studded with more or less complex obstacles. The hurdles in this labyrinth are the various crew members, who each stand for different challenges J.L. has to meet and overcome over the summer. Both, the form of the narrative and the temporal structure, are supportive of the labyrinthine set-up of the novel.

Form of the Narrative

The structure of the narrative cannot be considered to be conservative, as there is a constant shift in the point of view when the different characters contribute to the story. With each shift of the viewpoint, a new possible path of action in her journey opens up to J.L. in the labyrinth of the summer's challenges.

Every chapter is told from a first-person point of view, the viewpoint changing with each respective character. Thereby, “[t]he first-person point of view makes for a

⁷ See Nischik, Zöbinger, and Davey for their structural analysis of the novel.

seemingly unmediated personal response of characters to the situation” (Nischik 116). As a consequence, the novel does not have one predominant narrator but rather features multiple narrative voices, corresponding to the number of characters that appear. This practice of drawing the reader into the events is again reminiscent of important forms of text in Canadian literary history, such as early travel accounts or biographies. It is also the appropriate choice to portray the development of the characters, especially the protagonist’s, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

Temporal Structure

The temporal structure of the novel is not absolutely linear. The main plot, which describes J.L.’s summer in the Yukon, is primarily chronological. However, it is segmented by flashbacks to situations prior to the summer, which are given as background information or for clarification purposes thus paralleling the provision of additional information in travelogues whenever their narrator feels such details are appropriate at certain points.

What is more, the time along the main plot line of the different characters’ contributions sometimes contain multiple reiterations of scenes already described by others, thereby conferring them further emphasis. By using multiple points of view, the author introduces events that actually are in the future for another character: “Ein weiteres strukturelles Element, das der mosaikförmigen Gestalt des Romans Kohärenz verleiht, sind Vorgriffe auf Ereignisse, die zu einem späteren Zeitpunkt stattfinden” (Zöbinger 74). Zöbinger assimilates the form of the structure to a mosaic. I would rather say the temporal structure supports the concept of a labyrinth with multiple pathways, at times returning to their starting point on the basis of a trial-and-error system.

Narrative Rhythm

The narrative rhythm, as befitting the novel genre, to which *The Tent Peg* can clearly be ascribed, nonetheless evokes travelogues through first-person narration and changing points of view.

If the profile of a narrative results from the sequence of narrative and dialogue blocks, the rhythm of a narrative can be determined from the succession of the various basic forms of narration which comprise the narrative part of a work (report, commentary, description, scenic presentation interspersed with action report). (Stanzel 69)

What is more, the text shows remarkable variation with respect to the different narrators, ranging from rather simple sentence structure and language when Milton is the narrator to complex sentences filled with specialist vocabulary when, for instance, Mackenzie is the narrator. The author also deliberately disrupts her prose by inserting other text genres, thereby constantly fluctuating the rhythm of the narration. Half of Mackenzie's chapters are interspersed with lists of all sorts, mostly with the purpose of organizing camp life and geological tasks at hand. One insertion is different from the others as it is not a checklist but a geological report describing the rock sample and confirming a potential gold find.

There is another exception to the prose: the chapter featuring Deborah's song, almost at the end of the novel. The text is in the form of a poem and its wording is completely different from the rest of the novel; the passage can be explained by an almost word-by-word reproduction of the original Bible verse found in Judges 5. The text in the novel has the same purpose as in the Bible: it celebrates Ja-el's/J.L.'s victory over her oppressor. In J.L.'s case, this is not only her non-violent overpowering of Jerome, which saves her from bodily harm, but also the successful completion of her own psychological journey and guidance of the men toward the realization of their ultimate truths, respectively.

The effect created by the form of the narrative, its temporal structure, and the rhythm of the narration is a very immediate participation of the reader in the story, not unlike in conventional travelogues. However, literary critics are discordant in their views on the structural aspects of the novel. In Frank Davey's view expressed in *Post-National Arguments*, the narrative structure comes close to overwhelming the reader with the novel's structure: "This fragmentation of the narrative act has the potential to create conflict and dissent, not only in terms of the interpretation of specific incidents but also in terms of what is considered narratable and what focuses the narrative should have" (177). Davey's view stands in stark contrast to the analysis of Reingard M. Nischik in "Narrative Technique in Aritha van Herk's Novels." She concludes her text with the following argument:

Narrative technique and structure of *The Tent Peg* thus produce a multifaceted mosaic of the changing constellation of human relationships in a group of people thrown entirely upon themselves. [...] This fullness [of the camp situation] is achieved, among other things, through the technical device of the same being treated several times from different points of view. [...] One of the chief attractions of *The Tent Peg* lies in this constantly fluctuating view of the psychological as well as of the physical events which take place within the group. (118)

In my view, the author made the right structural decision when it comes to drawing her readers into J.L.'s story and having them follow her on her psychological journey. Through the use of different viewpoints, J.L. automatically becomes the focal point of the story, as the narrations of the other characters constantly revolve around her. What is more, the narrative mirrors the spiral movement of the characters drawing closer to J.L. in the labyrinth, which in turn mirrors the course of the novel, before the spiral finds its culmination in Jerome's attack on her.

3.2.3 The Characters

For J.L., the protagonist of *The Tent Peg*, the summer in the Yukon represents her own travelogue of independence, a psychological journey with the destination of finding solutions to her problems in the city. The path leading to this destination is labyrinthine, with obstacles being hidden at every turn which challenge J.L. and force her to choose her future path from different options available.

Accordingly, it is not only the character of J.L. which shall be thoroughly discussed in this chapter. Also, a closer look shall be taken at the other characters, which can be classified into the following two groups, depending on their respective roles in J.L.'s travelogue:

- characters who exert direct influence on the protagonist in a positive or negative sense, and
- characters who stand for the obstacles in J.L.'s journey, posing challenges along the labyrinthine way, trying to distract her from reaching her destination.

J.L.

J.L., or actually Ja-el as is her proper name, is the protagonist of *The Tent Peg*. She is twenty-four, a student of sociology from Edmonton who hopes to find some quietness in the North to get away from the cacophony of voices of her lovers past and present and to regain some equilibrium. Already in the first chapter the reader receives information as to J.L.'s motivation for spending her summer as a bush cook when she is "thinking of that silence [she] heard out on the barrenlands" (5). The plans change and the camp is instead sent to the Yukon, which does not bother J.L. as her expectations of

isolation and quietness should be met there as well. Throughout the novel, the reader learns more and more about J.L. and her reasons for coming up North.

Bush cooks are normally male, J.L. therefore resorts to a ruse to get the job: she disguises herself as a boy with short hair and a fedora hat, her slight frame and flat chest helping with the charade. When she meets her future boss, Mackenzie he thinks “he’s younger and softer” (6) than his previous cooks but does not suspect her to be a woman. J.L. however cannot keep up her disguise long because her conscience announces itself and she also likes Mackenzie instantly. At first, he is taken aback by her confession, but contrary to her fears he does not fire her. The crew’s reaction to J.L., the female cook for the summer, are manifold. Jerome, who will become J.L.’s fiercest opponent, instantly dislikes her and wants her fired on the spot. Most of the men are indifferent, or at least pretend to be. In the course of the novel it turns out that J.L. is an excellent cook, most likely the best a geologists’ camp has ever had:

Oh, you want to know my specialties? Beef Bourguignon, Chicken Kiev, Cote de Veau aux Champignon, Scallopine a la Vongole, Medaillons du porc, clam chowder so thick it can climb a ladder and curry so tantalizing it will make your tongue burn just to smell it. Of course, I prefer the Ukrainian method of making bread, the Oriental method for vegetables, the German method for soups, and there is nothing equal to Italian torte! (27)

Her abilities as a cook add to the mystification of her persona in the eyes of the crew. From the day of their arrival in camp, they sense something different in her, “an untarnished brightness to her” (44) that they cannot quite put their fingers on. It is also her silence that gives her a halo of mystery. Her refusal to tell the men much about herself or the life she has left behind intensifies this impression further. Her mysterious quality is reinforced by the events of the key passages in the novel: the rifle scene when she shoots the bull’s-eye, the encounter with the grizzly bear, the rock slide she alone witnesses, and finally the discovery of a gold deposit that she had intuited prior to the actual find.

But the men also feel “the warmth that she’s made” (109) in the camp, the natural center of the camp she has created in her cook tent and they are mysteriously drawn to her: “We look to her for focus. [...] Something makes you want to tell her everything, spill yourself for her. She never seems to listen, but she hears, she absorbs us through her skin, through the tips of her fingers” (144). When the men start to gravitate towards her, J.L. is at first desperate to get away from them, from their confessions, as she is preoccupied with her own problems. After all, “[i]t would be a

shame to spoil the silence” (59). She has escaped Edmonton and her unfulfilling relationships only to be confronted with the men’s stories again in the isolation of the Yukon: “I thought I could be alone here. Instead, I find I’m less alone than I’ve ever been. Here I’m everyone’s property, I belong to every one of these men” (99).

After her first moments of desperation she encounters the grizzly bear, apparently the spirit of her friend Deborah in animal shape. From her conversation with the she-bear J.L. draws renewed strength. She is unsure what to do about her situation. In the following night the rock slide occurs. The rock sliding on the earth’s surface seems to bring about a shift inside J.L. as well. For the first time, J.L. connects to the men, “they’re finally coming clear to [her]” (129), and she sees them and does not see through them anymore. As a result, the men ask her for her guidance “coming to [her] one by one, pouring their pestilence into [her] ears” (165). And J.L. points them in the right direction, uncovers the answers that have been buried in their minds all along, waiting to be brought to the surface. By listening to them, she has opened up to the men and becomes a true part of the crew.

J.L. starts the summer with the expectation of indulging in isolation, both physically and psychologically. As it turns out, her psychological journey lined out in her travelogue of independence asks the opposite of her. By opening up to the men and truly becoming a part of the crew, she does not only establish the center of the camp but also starts re-centering herself. Thus, her travelogue of independence leads her to help the men solve their most pressing problems, thereby solving her own problems.

Characters Exerting Direct Influence on the Protagonist

In *The Tent Peg*, four important characters can be found beside the protagonist J.L.: Mackenzie, Thompson, Deborah/the she-bear and Ivan. The characters support J.L. on her journey and help her reach her destination. I have also included a fifth ‘character’ – the Yukon/Werneck Mountains – as the mountains instigate important insights in J.L. and thus influence her at least as much as the human characters mentioned above.

Mackenzie

Earl Mackenzie, a forty-one year old reputable geologist, is the central male character of the novel. After more than fifteen years of field experience, he does not

spend the field season in a nice management office, like his boss P.Q., but still in camp. Mackenzie likes to be out in the field, “hearing the mountain shift” (55), and thinks that “[a] man could rest here, could press himself into the moss and let the mountain grow around him” (76). He feels connected to the landscape when he is in the field.

Mackenzie is a father figure of sorts to the crew and to J.L.,⁸ even though he failed being one to his own children. His wife Janice and children Sandy and Stevie are frequently mentioned, but the reader only finds out later that they left him ten years before and that he refused to sell the big, empty house in case they should return home. His only distinguishable negative character trait is his lack of understanding of his wife’s decision to leave him. This lack of understanding of the female also surfaces when he fails to recognize J.L. for a girl. When she confesses to him he is shattered – not by the fact that he was tricked but by the fact that he had not recognized her for what she is. He thinks that he “must be losing touch, any other man would have smelled her” (25), and this realization makes him quite uncomfortable.

People he meets along the way, like the bouncer and store owner in Yellowstone, describe him as a likeable character and J.L., who thinks “he’s quiet, he’s sensible, he doesn’t try to corner a person” (31) likes him instantly. In the camp, he is the unquestioned authority figure, whom even Jerome does not criticize or confront openly.⁹ Mackenzie, however, never abuses his position and sees himself as part of the team and not outside of it.

Mackenzie is an important influence on J.L. for her journey and therefore for her travelogue of independence. He serves as the voice of reason, exerting calmness and stability at times of distress in camp, such as when the fistfight between Jerome and Hudson takes place or when the whole camp is infected with cabin fever after days of rain. In return, J.L. helps him to an understanding of why his wife left him.

Mackenzie’s leveling influence prepares the ground for J.L.’s success in finding her path, offering her silent support and guiding strength by accepting her the way she is – quite like a father would. Thus, he is essential for J.L. so that she can follow up on her

⁸ Compare the scene when he rocks J.L. in her tent after Jerome’s attack in van Herk, *Tent* 215.

⁹ Compare Jerome’s criticism of camp and crew in van Herk, *Tent* 49.

travelogue of independence which eventually leads her to the destination of her psychological journey.

Thompson

Thompson is first introduced by Jerome:

Like Thompson. If you don't get after him he'll wander around theorizing forever. [...] He's been in geology for eight years, but he's got no drive, no instinct for success, doesn't run, doesn't keep up with hockey, talks to the secretaries in the office, goes to the symphony with his screwy girlfriend. I bet he even smokes dope. (21)

It is Thompson who first manages to exchange a few words with J.L. while building the table in the cook tent.¹⁰ In the same chapter, the reader also learns about Katie, who is Thompson's girlfriend and a dancer by profession. Thompson identifies greatly with Mackenzie and vice versa, as Mackenzie thinks that "he feels something like family to [him]" (55), and therefore is the first one to realize that something is wrong with Mackenzie this summer. In addition, Thompson understands earlier than the other characters that J.L. might be able to help him with his personal problems, with his doubts about his relationship with Katie. In his eyes, J.L. has a magic quality but he does not see her as – or call her for that matter – a witch or jinx like the other men do; later on in the story he even considers her good luck for the camp.¹¹ In his view J.L. "centers the whole summer" (119) for the crew.

Thompson is the only character who becomes a friend of J.L.'s. He is the first person to talk to her, the first who tries to give her moral support, and the first she opens up to. For J.L., he is also the only man in camp who "seems sexual to [her], the only one [she] can imagine responding to" (130) because she feels close to him. Thompson thus can be seen as her traveling companion on her journey, being there for her when she needs moral support but not interfering in her travelogue of independence. What is more, Thompson functions as an intermediary of sorts, adding information to scenes and characters whenever the travelogue requires further background information.

Deborah/ The She-Bear

Deborah plays an interesting and important role for J.L.'s travelogue. She does not actually appear in person – or at least in human form – in the novel but she is ever-

¹⁰ Compare van Herk, *Tent* 44.

¹¹ Compare his statement "I'm sure it has something to do with J.L. She's brought us good luck" in van Herk, *Tent* 46.

present during the whole journey. She and J.L. “[have] been friends for years, truly friends, trading [...] secrets and confession unfailingly” (33). Before the summer, it is also Deborah who senses J.L.’s withdrawal from the world and realizes that the reason for this lies in the many lovers J.L. has had. She confronts her with this and J.L. justifies herself by explaining that she is looking for a good one.¹² Deborah basically denotes the start of J.L.’s psychological journey and therefore her travelogue of independence.

J.L. thinks of Deborah whenever she needs consolation and inner strength to cope with the situation at hand or when the men start to gravitate towards her with their problems: “They are coming to me one by one, pouring their pestilence into my ears, trying to rid themselves of the poison. [...] They suck at me like quicksand but I have to listen” (165). Deborah answers her both by answering her letters, “the only letters [J.L.] sends” (73), and in the form of the she-bear.

The she-bear is a figure which appears time and again in the course of the novel, even in metaphors and figures of speech that include the word ‘bear’ pointing at its importance. It is Zeke, the bouncer at the bar in Yellowknife, who first mentions ‘bear’ in connection with a bear trap, a derogative term for a woman teasing men.¹³ The next time bears are mentioned, the crew is already in camp and Thompson has built a table that J.L. judges strong enough as if it is “supposed to hold ten dancing bears” (45). It is Cap who evokes bears again in his offer “to protect [her] from bears” (63) when he first talks to J.L. His words backfire on him later on when he is making advances towards J.L. and she tells him to “go find [him]self a grizzly bear” (99). This sexual connotation is echoed again when J.L. tells a story at the campfire, a “very strange and beautiful story about a woman who loved a bear” (147) and continues to give a short summary of the content of the novel *Bear* by the well-known Canadian author Marian Engel. Therefore, the motif of the bear is evoked from the beginning, even before it appears in physical shape later in the novel, establishing its importance for the protagonist from the outset.

The bear first appears in physical shape when Ivan takes J.L. on her first flight in the helicopter and points out a grizzly bear with two cubs on the mountain range below:

¹² Compare van Herk, *Tent* 106.

¹³ Compare entry 12 “A damsel that takes advantage of a boy when he least expects it.” on <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=bear%20trap&page=2>, 23 September 2009.

“It’s a grizzly, a huge goddamn mother grizzly, and running behind her are two cubs” (88). After the first sighting of the grizzly bear from a distance, the direct contact follows shortly after. It is Cap who witnesses the encounter between J.L. and the she-bear at the cook tent, adding an ironic backdrop to the scene in consideration of J.L.’s previous comment to him.

J.L. stands beside the cooktent, perfectly relaxed and easy, and facing her, twenty feet away and reared up on her hind legs, is a huge goddamn grizzly bear. J.L.’s face is tilted up and the she-bear’s face is tilted down and they’re looking at each other like they’ve met before. [...] for a moment they stand there as if in conversation. (101)

The last appearance of the bear occurs when the men and J.L. are waiting to be picked up by the helicopter after J.L. has staked her claim. J.L. registers a shadow against the darkening backdrop of the mountain: “[W]ith infinite leisure, the shadow lumbers across the mountain’s reach” (201) and in the movement J.L. recognizes the bear. This time, the bear does not get any closer and with “a low cry of despair” (201), she settles in the helicopter. Thompson is certain that “[s]he wants the bear” (201) and when he asks J.L. what she liked about the summer she also includes the bear in her otherwise rather short account.¹⁴

To J.L., the she-bear is the personification of what she sees as inherently female, the representation of Deborah: “I knew her. She came to me in the she-bear. She came to me and she reared herself up big and beautiful and wild and strong” (104). The appearance of the bear renews J.L.’s resolve to endure the summer and gives her new strength. The function of giving strength and protection can be paralleled to the bear being a “Native American symbol of strength, [...] the she-bear, also appears as a symbol of maternal strength, care and warmth” (Tresidder 21). Consequently, J.L. has successfully survived the summer by trusting her female powers and by opening up to the men. To celebrate her newly gained insight, Deborah’s own chapter then is a song for J.L., celebrating her victory over the men in the camp.

Deborah/the she-bear are sources of strength for J.L. on her journey. Whenever she feels unable to continue her journey, she invokes the help of Deborah who comes to her in the form of the she-bear. Thus, Deborah/the she-bear is instrumental in the success of J.L.’s travelogue of independence and will likely resume supporting her in its continuance after the summer in the Yukon.

¹⁴ See van Herk, *Tent* 159.

Ivan

Ivan is the helicopter pilot assigned to the camp to fly the men to the mountain ranges and back again. Ivan loves to fly, treats his helicopter with the reverence others reserve for their women.¹⁵ Of all the men in the camp, Ivan seems to have the closest connection to the supernatural. (I explicitly exclude Milton here as his religious beliefs are based on his upbringing and not on personal experiences). Through his fear of dying, he is constantly reminded that something bigger, more powerful than him exists. Even though he sleeps through the rockslide like the other men, he dreams that “[he] crashed, the chopper twisting to metal sculpture around [him]. [He has] always dreamed that [he]’ll be killed flying” (112). As a consequence, he likes to take J.L. with him because “[i]t makes [him] feel safer. She’s got luck. When she’s with [him] in the machine, [he] never gets that panicked feeling that suddenly everything will explode on [him]” (155).

Ivan is also the person who is with J.L. when she first spots the grizzly bear, stressing again the connection to the supernatural. He is present at all instances when the she-bear appears, most significantly as the second eye-witness when the grizzly approaches the cook tent.

Ivan’s character can be seen to function in two ways, in both cases his role can be regarded as leading to alternative worlds. On the one hand, Ivan represents the constant presence of death, which is more tangible in the isolation of the far North than anywhere else. One mistake could lead to the doom of the whole camp crew.

What is more important, Ivan shows J.L. a new world she has never seen before, a world she could not even have imagined. From his helicopter she sees the world from a different perspective: she gains distance to everything that has bothered her in her life and Ivan opens up a new avenue to her travelogue of independence, in an entirely new direction after the summer: he suggests to her that she could learn to fly, the ultimate independence for a human being.

¹⁵ Compare van Herk, *Tent* 85.

The Yukon/Wernecke Mountains

In the novel, the Yukon is frequently referred to in a personifying manner by the characters. Consequently, I have decided to view this landscape as an additional character of the novel, especially because it also has and takes influence on the characters, above all on Mackenzie and J.L., and on the direction of J.L.'s psychological journey.

The importance of the surrounding landscape becomes clear from the opening chapter, when it is attributed human characteristics: "As if the ground flings the reverberation of our passing back at us from the cracked and wrinkled face of the tundra, expressionless white but for a few black lines of water" (3). Mackenzie follows up in the same manner by attesting that the country "changes *her* mind the minute your back is turned" [emphasis added] (7). In this personifying manner, the characters refer to the landscape as female at various other times in the novel. When the photographer Hearne is flown into the area, for example, he takes pictures of "poses of the tundra from Yellowknife west into the Yukon" (47) and Mackenzie lies awake on his first night in camp "hearing the mountain shift" (55). J.L. also describes that she "feel[s] the flank of the mountain shift, feel[s] it rumble and groan as if settling the camp in its arms" (59) and then to "feel again the spasm, the earth gathering *herself*" [emphasis added] (113) the night the rock slide occurs. Mackenzie thinks that "the mountains have jinxed [him]" (77), attributing magical features to them, and Hudson, who feels threatened by the mountains because "they press you down, they laugh at you like teeth" (60), feels that at night "the silence of those mountains is so heavy" (61) he can barely sleep. Furthermore, the landscape is also attributed feeling when Mackenzie describes the Wernecke mountains as "an alpine valley that never feels summer, just varying shades of winter" (37).

Indeed, the mountains are an important character if one goes with J.L.'s personifying 'she' – in at least one key scene: the rock slide. The rock slide sets off a phase of realization for J.L. and the other characters. It induces J.L. to face her situation and it compels most of the men to actually face their problems and to talk to J.L. about them. In that sense, the mountain also plays an important, active role as it marks or even instigates the essential events yet to come.

In my view, the landscape functions as a character in a meta-dimension. It supports the establishing of a connection between the only woman in the camp and the landscape. J.L. describes the landscape as a 'she' and feels a natural attraction and connection to it. It helps her decide how she wants to live her travelogue of independence, helps her open up to the men. In addition, the mountains also present a super-human presence, a stillness and beauty which can turn its ugly, dangerous face on the humans the next moment. In my view, this super-human role has to be seen as part of the mythological references found throughout the novel. The mountains represent nature or natural forces as they can be found in many beliefs and mythological references of the First Nations of Canada.

Characters Representing Obstacles for J.L.'s Journey

A labyrinth equals one right way leading through and a lot more paths that lead you astray or towards obstacles. This also holds true for J.L.'s labyrinth. Apart from Jerome, who is her most dangerous antagonist in the camp, there are other characters featuring certain traits which challenge J.L. and could lead her astray on her journey. As the characters are rather one-dimensional in the way they are sketched, each one stands for a different challenge J.L. has to face during her travelogue of independence.

Jerome

Every hero – or heroine for that matter – needs a worthy adversary. Jerome is the true 'bad guy' in the novel, a character with no likeable features at all, and a man J.L. describes in the following manner: "If he can't shoot it or fuck it, he's not interested. That's all you can say about him" (130). Every one of the men detests him and none of them respect him, something he would have to earn from them. He displays bad judgment of people and obviously also bad professional judgment, considering he identifies the gold showing in the rock as fool's gold. As the reader learns, not only does he treat the people around him badly, but it also seems that his wife is scared of him, or so Thompson thinks.¹⁶

Jerome is introduced true to his character: "I know something would go wrong" (21) is the first sentence in his chapter. From then on he constantly criticizes whatever and whoever crosses his line of vision:

¹⁶ Compare Thompson's comment "No wonder his wife looks like a scared rabbit" in van Herk, *Tent* 65.

And that damn Cap's set [the radio] up in his tent so that he won't have to get up in the morning for the sched [...]. Like Hearne, does nothing all day but take pictures. [...] And Franklin, shit, he's always taking ten minutes off to do his "meditation". [...] As for the kid Milton, he's so goddamn stupid he should have donkey's ears. (49)

He thinks that Mackenzie is too old and too soft to lead a program in the bush and that "assistants do the shitwork" (21), a conviction he lets Hudson feel throughout the summer.

When Jerome finds out that their cook for the summer is going to be a woman, he heavily criticizes Mackenzie for it. He thinks that "[w]omen just don't belong out there [...] [especially because] girls like her will screw anybody to get what they want" (24). If the relationship between Jerome and J.L. is miserable to start with, it turns utterly toxic over the summer. For anything bad – or what Jerome judges to be bad – in the camp, he puts the blame on J.L. He criticizes her cooking even though everyone else is more than happy with it and he thinks that "[t]he little bitch gets her own way about everything" (90). His irritation with J.L. grows steadily and finds its first culmination in the rifle scene, when Jerome, true to his manly self-image, gets to show off his .44 Magnum gun for the first time, but hits the target off-center. J.L., who has never shot a rifle before, hits the bull's-eye.¹⁷ Jerome also holds J.L. responsible for a harmless joke the men play on him and Mackenzie, pretending to be dead drunk in the morning.¹⁸

The situation rapidly deteriorates in the course of the summer, as the other men gradually start to connect to J.L. and Jerome is opposed by more and more of the crew members, most obviously by his assistant Hudson. Almost at the close of the summer, Jerome has had enough and plans to take a week's leave to complain at headquarters about the camp and the crew, a plan that backfires lamentably. And of course once again he blames J.L. for his humiliation, that "[i]t's her fault that [he] feels so rotten" (211), and decides that this would be the last time: "I, for one, think it's time she got put in her place, taken down a peg or two. The little bitch needs to be taught a lesson and I guess I'm the only one with balls enough to do it" (211). He takes his gun, enters J.L.'s tent at night, and is about to unbutton his jeans to rape her when she gets hold of the gun and reverses the roles. Jerome is lucky that J.L. does not shoot him, instead choosing to

¹⁷ Compare van Herk, *Tent* 67-9.

¹⁸ Compare van Herk, *Tent* 135-36.

alert Mackenzie and the rest of the camp by firing in the air.¹⁹ J.L. may not have castrated him physically, but she certainly has done so figuratively.

Jerome is the most disruptive force in J.L.'s travelogue of independence. His only aim is to dwarf her in any possible way so that she will give up and leave the camp, restoring the status quo he longed for. He presents the only real danger to J.L., not only because he is able to harm her physically. By constantly preoccupying her with his animosity, he could also throw her psychological journey off course, thus jeopardizing her development and the success of her travelogue of independence. In the end, however, he is expedient to J.L., because she emerges victorious from the confrontation with him, empowered both psychologically and morally, which provides her with additional stamina to follow through with her journey. Thus, in the end, Jerome actually puts J.L. on the right path for her travelogue of independence, instead of diverting her from it.

Franklin

"I like geology but I'd rather be a poet or a philosopher" (72). Franklin is a geologist but is always preoccupied with doing his meditation²⁰ or writing poems about J.L. and trying to convince her to see beyond her "outer shell into [her] soul" (74). It is also Franklin who analyses the relationship of the crew members to J.L. most clearly, even before she realizes that she also has to open up to them for change to take place: "She's like a pillar in the middle of the camp. We all shuffle around her, matrixed. But she refuses to listen, she twists between us and stays herself unmarked" (72).

Franklin represents the spiritual side of the camp and announces frequently that he senses a connection, "something deep and sensual" (161) to J.L. He wants to draw her into his own spiritual quest, which would distract J.L. from her own journey, from fulfilling her own travelogue. On the other hand, it is Franklin who frequently hints at the necessity for J.L. to come clear in her relationship to the men. Instead of providing her with his help as a spiritual guide, he only wants to further his own progress and thus has to be seen as a hindrance in J.L.'s development. Therefore, he has to be considered

¹⁹ Compare J.L.'s and Mackenzie's versions of the incident in van Herk, *Tent* 212-15.

²⁰ Compare van Herk, *Tent* 170.

an obstacle on her psychological journey and consequently for her travelogue of independence.

Hearne

Hearne is a photographer who documents the program, the camp and everything that happens there with his camera. He seems to see everything through his lens and is taken aback when J.L. “won’t pose, won’t stand still for the camera” (95) and thinks that “[he] would find the perfect picture, the one [he has] been trying to get for years” (140). Hearne thinks in pictures and therefore serves to give texture to the landscape and events described.

Hearne is the artist among the men, a self-absorbed character who also functions as a documenting force, taking pictures of important scenes such as the shooting practice or the claim staking. However, he virtually stalks J.L. with his camera, which causes her to be constantly alert. Hearne sees J.L. as instrumental to his success and does not back off, which in turn distracts J.L. from her own journey. Hearne therefore has to be seen as an obstacle to the success of J.L.’s journey and the fulfillment of her travelogue of independence.

Hudson

Hudson is a student from England who studies geology in Edmonton. He wants to gain some insight into “real geology in the Canadian North” (61) and joins the crew for the summer, working as Jerome’s assistant. But Hudson feels ill at ease at the camp from the beginning; he feels threatened by the Yukon Mountains, a landscape he has not been prepared for: “They press you down, they laugh at you like teeth. It’s almost June and they are still snow-covered” (60). What is more, the rocks and formations do not correspond to anything he has seen and learned in England: “the geology [...] is unreal, so complex it’s almost impossible to figure out. [...] [T]he rocks have mineral compositions [he has] never seen in England” (96).

In my view, Hudson stands for the colonial history of Canada and the attitude of the ‘colonial gaze’ with which he sees this alien land. Hudson does not feel comfortable in the foreign landscape and sees in it an inherently dangerous quality – not unlike British settlers had in earlier centuries. He presents a potential obstacle for J.L., as she

cannot turn away from his suffering induced by Jerome and the landscape. Letting herself be drawn into his world of fear and desperation would hinder J.L. in her own psychological development and thus in following her own travelogue of independence. Therefore, J.L. acts as a mentor of sorts towards him, providing him with the guidance he needs so that he can find out how to help himself and better his own situation, without being too deeply drawn into his world.

Milton

“Not one Christian. The cook is a girl. They said there weren’t any girls up north” (39). Milton is a young man from a small prairie town in southern Alberta who lives in a protected Mennonite community. He considers “the body [to be] the temple of the spirit” (60) and runs or does pushups every evening before reading the Bible, praying and then going to bed. Having assumed that there would not be any women in a geologists’ camp up North, he is quite taken aback when J.L. is introduced as the cook. Her presence disturbs him, as he constantly has to think about girls, especially because he has “never seen a girl like J.L. before. She is hard and angrylike instead of soft and still and holding inside the way a girl should be” (75). Furthermore, he disapproves of the crew’s drinking or gambling, which is also against his beliefs.

Milton represents the strictly religious and narrow-minded side of society. He has grown up well furnished with rigid convictions on how things should be in the world. His most adamant beliefs are about women, such as that “girls aren’t supposed to run, that’s why they have skirts” (154) and that J.L. “thinks she’s as good as any man. When girls get like that, they’re no good to marry” (171). His views on women echo anti-feminist and patriarchal views which fit his upbringing in a protected religious community. His belief is not spiritual like Franklin’s, but only narrow-minded and therefore dangerous for J.L.’s psychological journey. Milton’s constantly watching her has its effect on J.L.’s psyche and she needs quite a bit of reassurance from Deborah to come to terms with his disconcerting behavior. Therefore, Milton also has to be considered an obstacle to the success of J.L.’s travelogue of independence.

Cap/ Capital Kane

Cap’s most significant character trait is his almost uncontrollable lusting after women, especially J.L. When his first subtle advances do not get him anywhere with

her, he assumes that “she doesn’t like men [and is] probably a lesbian or something” (100) but nevertheless gives it another try. This time he is more direct and informs J.L. “I’m horny. [...] You’re responsible” (100-01). J.L. is not at all impressed by his show and tells him – not very ladylike – to “go find yourself a grizzly bear” (101). With superb timing, a grizzly bear appears in the camp after the scene and Cap witnesses J.L.’s conversation with the bear. By then, Cap is convinced that J.L. has to be a witch but the fact “[t]hat she’s so strange makes her even more interesting” (118) to him and, true to his nature, he wonders: “How does it feel to screw a witch?” (118).

Cap embodies the male sexuality of the camp. A camp populated by nine grown men would be unimaginable without a fair amount of sex-talk – and it is all centered around Cap, who displays some inherent male stereotypes: men constantly – and even exclusively – think about sex; they lust for any female in the vicinity; and they react badly to being put down by women, readily considering them lesbians.

J.L. is occupied with fending off Cap’s advances so frequently that he has to be seen as an obstacle. It would not be difficult for her to sleep with Cap and take the easy way out with him, leaving her path towards independence. But she persists and follows through with her journey to the last consequence.

As I have tried to show in this chapter, the protagonists of the two novels are faced both with characters supporting them in following through with their travelogues of independence, but with difficulties and hindering characters as well. Whether they are successful in the fulfillment of their respective travelogues of independence and their development shall be discussed in chapter 5.

3.3 A Short Digression on the Naming of the Characters

A short digression on the choice of names of the novels’ characters offers a further link between travelogue and novel relevant for this thesis, even though this may not be obvious at first sight. Vivid facts and detailed background information instill travelogues – or any kind of travel literature for that matter – with the sort of colorful liveliness appreciated by readers of such genres. Without them, they would rather share closer kinship to sober reports than to travelogues.

What is more, Aritha van Herk likes to blur the lines between different concepts, as already shown in the structural and formal analysis of her novels, including the lines between fact and fiction. Correspondingly, she uses the naming of the characters in her novels as one more instrument to achieve this disruption. While the plots are entirely fictional, historical facts and information offer fertile ground to introduce ‘old’ characters in a new setting. Thus, van Herk draws on old sources when seeking inspiration for new stories, or rather, characters whose stories need a modern-day re-telling. The Bible, mythological texts of different origins, often Greek mythology, but also historical accounts of explorations, especially the ones taking place in what is today’s Canada, supply her with a wide range of strong and inspiring characters and names.

The naming of her characters, especially the ones I am discussing closely in this thesis, also betrays a certain feminist agenda subliminally present in her texts, as her characters tend to rewrite history which previously excluded the women in question. Van Herk “seeks to restore to women a sense of the numinous through reshaping traditional myths of female divinity” (Jones, “Restoring” 417) and thereby to empower the mythological women through their modern-day equivalents. Further feminist implications of the novels are discussed in chapter 4.2.

No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey

Aritha van Herk consistently chooses names for the protagonists of her novels that more often than not carry a deeper meaning. This also applies to various characters of *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey*. In this novel, the author has frequently chosen names from mythological sources. The protagonist’s character traits often mirror those of the source character, though not always. In contrast to earlier works by van Herk, only a small number of names in *No Fixed Address* can be successfully traced back to historical sources, including Arachne, Thena, and Gabriel, and also one of the minor characters, namely Basilisk.

The name of ***Arachne Manteia*** carries suggestions of various possible sources within it. The most prominent is the connection to Greek mythology, the story of Arachne, described in Book VI of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.

Arachne was the daughter of Idom of Colophon in Lydia. [...] Arachne was highly skilled in weaving and was so sure of her preeminence in the craft that she dared to challenge Athena to a contest. Arachne outdid herself, producing a piece of cloth depicting the love life of the gods. When Athena could find no flaw in the work and had to admit its perfection, she tore the piece to shreds. In terror and despair at this unfair treatment Arachne hanged herself. Athena undid the rope and saved the girl's life but, still smarting from the insult to her divine status, changed the rope into a web and Arachne into a spider. (Bell 58)

It is not only the name that builds a connection between the novel's heroine and the mythological character: "Arachne kommt aus kleinen Verhältnissen und wird dennoch von den Menschen bewundert. Sie hat Talent, ist fleißig, ausdauernd" (Rieken 149) – in short: she is good at her job, just like Arachne, the underwear sales representative. But the main character of the novel may be based on other mythological sources as well. "Arachne also appears in Native American religious myths in the figure of Spider Grandmother or Thought Woman who also weave stories" (Bloomberg 2), a role she takes on when she is in the company of Thena. Another possibility, as pointed out by Coral Ann Howells, is that Arachne is "named after the Spiderwoman of Homeric myth" (Howells, "Writing" 204). It is interesting to note that all the above-mentioned myths could be attributed to Arachne. If one combines the first two mythological ancestors especially, it can be seen that this combination describes Arachne's character better than one of them alone could.

Another noteworthy parallel can be found with the heroine's mythological counterpart. While the mythical Arachne was the "motherless daughter of a wool dyer" (Miller, "Arachnologies" 272), the novel's Arachne pretends to be motherless as well, which would suit her better than the real situation of having Lanie as a mother. In *Graphies and Grafts*, Eva Darias-Beautell points out an interesting analogy in Arachne's last name, which "qualifies her already improbable first name by reminding the reader of the surreptitious activities of the female mantis" (230). A mantis is a species of insect especially known for its practice to consume her male partner while still engaged in the sexual play.²¹ I find this idea quite fitting, especially when one considers Arachne's sexual hunger, which literally leads her to consume quite a number of men in the course of the novel. Arachne may not display the virtues of her mythological namesakes; she does, however, feature the same headstrong attitude found in her literary ancestors.

²¹ Compare the entry for mantis on <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mantis#Behavior>, 23 September 2009.

Thena is Arachne's best and probably only true friend in the novel. This presents an interesting contrast to her mythological namesake, Athena, who "was one of the great Olympian divinities, goddess of reason in war and peace alike, intelligent activity, arts and literature, and useful arts" (Bell 84). She was also the daughter of Zeus, born from his head²² and "first taught the science of numbers, and all women's arts, such as cooking, weaving, and spinning" (Graves 96). In her capacity as expert weaver, she encounters Arachne, who dares her to prove her superior weaving skills. Incensed by Arachne's tapestry, Athena strikes the other woman and turns her, after the other has attempted suicide, into a spider.

In the mythological text, Athena and Arachne are rivals because of their art. In the novel, Thena is the only person Arachne confides in and who learns all about her adventures. Thena features some character traits that can be associated with her mythological namesake, including her status as an unmarried woman.

Thomas Telfer echoes associations already exploited in the earlier novel *The Tent Peg*, namely historical namesakes associated with exploration. This connection also found its way into this novel, both through the geologists and Thomas's historical namesake. Like Thomas in the novel, Thomas Telford works with maps, being "the famous Scottish civil engineer and road builder" (Hutcheon, *Postmodern* 123). His occupation as a road builder allows for another linkage with the novel, as Arachne loves to travel the roads planned by such engineers.

Fittingly, the one reliable male character in Arachne's past, **Gabriel Greenberg**, has a famous and benevolent namesake with a strong religious background. In Christian religion, Gabriel "is one of the archangels and the herald of good news (Dan 8:16, Luke 1:26)" (Darias-Beautell, *Graphies* 229). This name fits the novel's Gabriel well as he is only associated with good deeds. He helps Lanie earn some extra money when she is pregnant, protects Arachne when she is a child. Also, he bequeaths her his Mercedes, supplying her with her first means of transportation apart from her bike and with her only personal possession.

²² Compare Tripp, 113-15.

Interestingly, another minor character bears a rather telling name associated with Greek mythology: **Basilisk**. “Der Basilisk (griechisch *basiliskos* für ‘kleiner Schlangenkönig’) vereinte nach gängiger Vorstellung Vogel- und Schlangenelemente. [...] Aber das hervorstechendste Merkmal des Basilisken war sein giftiger Blick“ (Walker 317). One stare of the Basilisk and the affected person would be seriously harmed.

This also applies to the effect the meeting with Basilisk has on Arachne. He does not have a poisonous or stinging stare and is not violent in any way. On the contrary, he “seems only interested in looking at Arachne” (van Herk, *Address* 52) when they end up in his apartment. But when she sits in the audience during his last concert, she feels the “razor blades of his damnable breeding, his culture, his learnedness” (van Herk, *Address* 56) and for the first time clearly becomes aware of her own social inferiority. And this is an injury even more painful than a real wound.

The Tent Peg

In the case of *The Tent Peg*, van Herk chose to draw primarily on two cultural and historical reservoirs in the naming of her characters: the (Canadian) colonial exploration history and the religious heritage. While the first source shows a clear connection to the topic of travelogues, as extensive travel literature was produced during Canada’s colonial history, the connection is less tangible with the latter source. In my view, the connection in the second case has to be established with feminist considerations in mind. In travel literature, including travelogues, as well as in the Bible women are conspicuously absent both as authors and frequently also as characters.

Consequently, van Herk establishes an interesting link between different historical and thematic layers and the present, doubtless wanting to achieve a conscious effect in the mind of her readers. Thus, for van Herk, the Bible was an obvious choice as a source of inspiration:

No one can deny that the Bible is the source of innumerable and archetypal stories that continue to resonate even though our world is very different from the time when those stories were originally written. [...] For all of us, stories serve as the greatest of examples, as metaphors of advice. (“Faith” 109)

A similar thought lies behind the choice of explorers as namesakes for many of the male characters, establishing the link to her Canadian upbringing.

Canada's explorers compose some of the most interesting historical writers. [...] I used them as the models or prototypes for those men who are the last explorers we have, the surveyors, geologists, geographers, biologists who work in the Canadian north [...]. These men are special characters, almost emblematic Canadian. ("Picaros" 280)

Accordingly, Mackenzie, Thompson, Hearne, Franklin, Hudson, Cap, and Milton all have famous historical namesakes. **Mackenzie** echoes "Sir Alexander Mackenzie (1764-1820), a fur trader and explorer" (Lutz 55), while his long-time assistant and friend in the novel, **Thompson**, is "named after Canadian fur trader, explorer and map maker David Thompson (1170-1857), who travelled widely throughout the North" (Lutz 55). The photographer in the novel, **Hearne**, who is always in search of the perfect picture, is derived from his historical namesake "Samuel Hearne (1745-1792) who searched for a western passage by land" (Lutz 55). The most illustrious and therefore most unlikely character to be found up north is "the poet and yoga-dreamer **Franklin** [who] is fittingly named after a particularly mysterious figure in Northern exploration, Sir John Franklin (1786-1847), who was lost in the ice searching for the Northwest passage by sea" (Lutz 55). Jerome's mistreated English assistant, **Hudson**, "bears the name of [the] famous Henry Hudson, who explored the Hudson river in 1609 and in 1611 lost his life in the vicinity of James Bay after having been set adrift in a shallop by his mutinous crew" (Lutz 56). **Cap**, who mentions to J.L. that his full name is Capital Kane, "establishes his kinship with artist/explorer Paul Kane (1810-1871)" (Lutz 55). However, there is another historical namesake whom I believe to be even more relevant as prototype: Elisha Kent Kane (1820-1857). He was an "American physician and Arctic explorer who in 1850 led an unsuccessful expedition to north-western Greenland to search for the British explorer Sir John Franklin" (*Britannica*), thereby establishing a more relevant link than Paul Kane does. The last one who falls in this category is **Milton**, whose historical pendant can be found in "Viscount Milton, who, together with W.B. Cheadle, searched for a Northwest Passage by land (1865)" (Lutz 56).

Milton is not only a curious character in the novel: he also represents the connection point of the two layers of sources mentioned before – religion and exploration – for the naming of the characters. The more famous Milton, who could also have served as namesake for the character's name, is the "famous Puritan poet" (Lutz 56) John Milton. The novel character called Milton displays a very strict religious upbringing in his views and thoughts, an upbringing reminiscent of the Puritan beginnings on the continent and thereby establishes a further connection to the character's religious roots.

Interestingly, the only true villain in the novel, **Jerome**, has a religious namesake in the person of Saint Jerome. Ian McLaren captures Jerome's essential character trait perfectly:

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. (McLaren qtd. in Goldman, *Paths* 150)

The religious sources become very distinct when one looks at the two female characters of the novel: the heroine **J.L.** and her friend in the city, Deborah. The two women do not only share a companionship in the novel, but their historical counterparts also have a connection in the Bible, more exactly in the Book of Judges 4 and 5. What is described there is the ongoing conflict between two clans and a third clan which has remained outside the conflict:

Heber, the chief of the seminomadic Kenite clan, had remained neutral in the Israelite/Canaanite war but was favorably inclined to Sisera. Sisera, after having fled on foot, was followed by Barack in hot pursuit and reached the tent of the attractive, beautifully clothed, and bejewelled Jael.²³ (Knapp 63)

Sisera was invited into Jael's tent, as was the custom, where he was given food and drink, after which he fell asleep on the floor. "Dann nahm Jael [...] einen Pflock von dem Zelt und einen Hammer in die Hand und ging leise zu ihm hinein und schlug ihm den Pflock durch seine Schläfe" (Ruether 287). As a result of her actions, the previously antagonistic clans experienced a 40-year-period of peace, the longest period of peace in quite some time. When one takes a closer look at Jael's representation in the Bible and how her story was passed on in religious history, the appeal to van Herk becomes apparent. She was a strong-minded woman who decided what would be best for the future of her husband's clan and followed through with her resolve. This is also mirrored in the novel's heroine, J.L., who sticks to her decision in spite of antagonistic conditions, survives and even defeats the novel's villain Jerome with – at least mostly – non-violent means. However, it is symptomatic "that the Bible itself praises Ja-el's action; only Biblical scholars condemn her" (van Herk, *Tongue* 281). I think that this is one reason why van Herk chose this particular figure of the Bible and turned her into the heroine of *The Tent Peg*.

In the novel, **Deborah** is the only female friend J.L. has, or at the least the only one ever mentioned. Deborah only appears in connection with J.L. The reader does not

²³ Various spellings both of the names Ja-el and Deborah can be found in literature. For the sake of correct quotation I have used the different spellings as they occur in the respective texts.

learn anything about her life apart from her friendship with J.L. In the biblical text, the relation is inverted: Jael is mentioned in connection with Deborah's life and successes.

Deborah, featured in the Book of Judges (4, 5), looms unique among female biblical figures. Not only did she possess compassion, wisdom, and the courage and capacity to adjudicate, but her profound faith in the covenant with God put her in direct communication with the infinite cosmic power. (Knapp 45)

But what is even more important in consideration of her counterpart's role in the novel, "Deborah may also be considered a singer of tales and a skilled poet" (Exum 84). She does not only represent J.L.'s only visible connection to the outside world, but she also acts as a source of strength and advice for her. And when J.L. has fulfilled her task, overcome all obstacles, and survived the summer, including the villain Jerome, "J.L.'s friend, the singer Deborah, sends her a victory song that is almost literally taken from the Bible" (Verhoeven 67). The only deviation occurs in the middle of the song, in two consecutive lines, when the text reproduced in *The Tent Peg* reads: "She put her hand to the *tent peg* / and her right hand to the *workman's mallet*" [emphasis added] (216). The words 'nail' and 'hammer' from the original Bible text are exchanged with the words 'tent peg' and 'workman's mallet' in the novel's version, relating it to the content of the novel set in a geologists' camp.

As far as the names of the other characters are concerned, I could, in the course of my research, find no references in the secondary sources that indicated any special historical, biblical or mythological correspondences. In the naming of the other characters mentioned, they cannot only be successfully traced to various sources, they also offer insight into a further, if not a more subtle connection to the novel's kinship with travelogues. In my view, it is hardly a coincidence that many of these sources have a connection to historical facts establishing a link with Canadian exploration history.

4 Traveling the Maps: Landscape and Maps in *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey* and *The Tent Peg*

Canada “is a nation that exists not because of geography but despite it” (Martens 26) and is thus strongly shaped by the influence the surrounding landscape has on its inhabitants. Two areas play an especially prominent role in this respect: the prairies of the west and the North. These two areas have not only exerted great influence on the daily lives of the Canadian population, but have also conquered vast space within Canadian literary imagination.²⁴ Therefore, it is not surprising that Aritha van Herk is also influenced by the geographical reality of Canadian landscape in her writings, especially in the two novels discussed here. In this chapter, I aim to show how central landscape and maps are to *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey* and *The Tent Peg* and what implications this has for a possible feminist and postcolonial reading of these travelogues of independence.

4.1 Mapping

If one looks at a definition of landscape, the concept seems straightforward enough: landscape signifies “the relation between the natural environment and human society, or, to rephrase, between Nature and Culture” (Rose 86). In other words, it is a circumscription of the dichotomy of nature as the outside while the urban is understood as the inside, putting the garrison mentality into a modern frame of mind. If one takes the definition a little further to describe place, it has to include concepts “both concrete and symbolic [such as] buildings, field systems, roads and railways, as well as [...] myths and legends” (McDowell, Introduction 2). Consequently, the concept of place does not only depict the physical features of a landscape, but also notions and ideas that reach beyond the physical realities of a place. It is this “sense of place [that] may be articulated in art, literature and histories” (Sharp 201) and is more relevant to my

²⁴ Compare Chapter 2 “Traveling Canadian Identity.”

analysis than the physical reality of places mentioned in the novels, because its influence is often experienced more clearly.

In her book *Geografiktionen in der anglo-kanadischen Literatur*, Tamara Pianos writes: “Besonders für Autoren aus dem kanadischen Westen hat ‘A sense of place’ eine große Bedeutung” (27), which I fully agree with. Aritha van Herk is a western Canadian author and she is aware that “[t]he impact of landscape on artist or artist on landscape is unavoidable” (“Women Writers” 15). To many literary critics and writers, the prairie is not only a geographical feature, but more of a state of mind, rather.²⁵ Thus, Canadian literature of the west shows the prairie to be of predominant importance to its writers. Henry Kreisel takes up this argument in his essay “The Prairie: A State of Mind”: “All discussion about the literature produced in the Canadian west must of necessity begin with the impact of the landscape upon the mind” (257), and he continues to explain that this is because “[t]he prairie, like the sea, thus often produces an extraordinary sensation of confinement within a vast, seemingly unlimited space” (259). The seeming apparent opposition between vastness and confinement is therefore seen to inhabit the same physical space, namely the prairie.

The attributes of vastness and confinement can also be ascribed to the second landscape that plays a role within the two novels of Aritha van Herk, and that is the Canadian North.

To a Canadian, North is more than a point on the compass. It is a region, a territory, a vast intimidating part of the country somewhere beyond easy comfort. Officially, the North extends from the 60th parallel of latitude all the way to the Pole: the Yukon, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, the Arctic archipelago. Unofficially, it occupies our imagination, filling it with dreams of high adventure and fabulous wealth. To a Canadian, North is an idea, not a location; a myth, a promise, a destiny. (Francis 152)

It is interesting to see that in most texts of Canadian literary criticism, the North is always given space and possibilities of interpretation, most likely because Canadians generally see themselves as living in a northern country, no matter where their specific geographical location within the country can be found:

To say, as many have, that the north is a state of mind, is to speak as a southern Canadian who has never lived north of North Vancouver or North York, let alone north of sixty, or as a southerner who has vacationed in, worked briefly in, and passed through the vast hinterland of taiga, tundra, and ice that stretches north of the industrial, urban, agricultural Canadian base line. (Grace, “Gendering” 165)

²⁵ Compare Aritha van Herk’s comment that “being a Northerner is a state of mind” in the unpublished interview with Nicole Dargent et al in Trier in 1994.

This typically Canadian attitude reflected in much of the country's literature is given prominence not by the Canadian context itself but rather by its North American context. In the process of building a Canadian identity, which is still continuing today, the North plays an important role because, as opposed to the United States of America, "Canada's physical borders are unconquerable. The 'idea of the North', a notion of infinity, precludes any definition of, much less closing of, the Canadian frontier" (Hébert 21), attributing thereby a special northern marker to the concept of Canadianness. And why is this so important to Canadians? Daniel Francis sees the answer in the potential for differentiation: "Thinking of ourselves as northern gives us a unique place in North America [...], the one sure thing that makes us different from the United States" (153).

Frontier, border and its opposition – infinity – are concepts that need to be given form to be understood and this also holds true for landscape. From early history on, humankind has been trying to get a grasp of its surroundings, on relations between different places, and the means of choice have been maps.

When we communicate with someone by describing a spatial relationship, we want our description to evoke a similar image in that person's mind. The best way to be sure that will happen is to provide a visual representation of the image. This graphic representation of the geographical setting is what we call a map. (Robinson et al. 9)

And it is generally assumed that "[m]aps seem to be scientific, objective, impersonal, even mechanical images" (Phillips 70).

But maps transcend this notion in a way that is important to the literary imagination, as Aritha van Herk states: "Maps are representations, yes, but as such they do not define and fix so much as they symbolize. [...] Maps are more than simply a location of some things with respect to others; they are abstractions, surrogates of space" (*Tongue* 57). A map can therefore never be an adequate impression of the reality of a place; it can only be a mirrored image. One such mirror can be found in writing, as "[l]iterature is not only a mirror; it is also a map, a geography of the mind" (Atwood, *Survival* 18-19), describing a reciprocal influence between literature, mind and map. This connection is also visible in the way the word "map" is ingrained in the English language:

Indeed, the term *map* is often used metaphorically to explain other types of knowing and communicating. In everyday conversation, the word *map* is used to convey the idea of clarification: someone maps out a plan or maps out his future or, if he seems to be a little dense has someone ask him, Do I have to draw you a map? (Wilford 13)

Aritha van Herk is aware of these different literal and metaphorical uses of maps and mapping and pairs them with the typical Canadian mindset of the prairies and the North in her novels *No Fixed Address* and *The Tent Peg*.

No Fixed Address is not what the reader would generally describe as a prairie novel, but it nevertheless has to be seen within its tradition, or at least as belonging to its sphere of historical influence. The reader enters the novel when Arachne has begun her travelogue of independence and is already touring the prairies as a sales representative, where she “refuses to drive west, circles north and east and south from Calgary but never west” (35), thereby blocking out the direction she came from. Until she drives east with Thomas, Arachne has not seen anything of Canada beyond Vancouver city limits. This may be one of the reasons why she is overwhelmed by the significant changes of scenery that take place in the course of her journey. Both instances also mark a change of her situation. The first instance occurs when she drives with Thomas in her Mercedes in the direction of Calgary, and “she is caught between her surprise and a sudden wrench to be part of this undulating plate of land” (80), having never before seen the vast flatness of the prairie. The second instance in the novel happens when Arachne has already fled from her life in Calgary and from Thomas and turned her car north, seeing Bear Glacier for the first time: “[S]he is not prepared for Bear Glacier spearing the darkness. It has been misty for so long she cannot take the fist of blue lunging down the mountain” (251). The suddenness and the intensity of the glacier overwhelm the inexperienced traveler Arachne, the landscape too large for her to grasp. Aritha van Herk has even more in store for her character in this situation: “When she goes up north into the Yukon the effect of the landscape becomes overwhelming. The moment when she sees the glacier outside of Stewart and she falls on her knees: the experience is one of ecstasy” (Kirkwood 87).

Landscape does not only influence the protagonist of *No Fixed Address*, but also impresses the main characters of *The Tent Peg*. J.L. starts to wonder at her own decision when she realizes that “[they]’re in the middle of the Yukon mountains with only tenuous radio contact to the outside world” (51), thereby acknowledging an isolation she longed for to fulfill the psychological journey of her travelogue of independence, but does not feel comfortable with it now. She is not the only one who is not accustomed to camp life in the wilderness; Thompson also thinks that the Yukon is

different from any other landscape he has seen so far: “The Yukon is a magic place. [...] It’s a place where reality is inverted, where you have to take strangeness for granted” (119). Throughout the novel, his view of the mountains does not seem to change significantly, as he later describes this landscape as “so stony bare you come to think it alone exists” (189), stressing again the almost surreal character of the landscape. Even Mackenzie, the seasoned party chief, does not remain untouched by his surroundings: “We’re here. The middle of the Wernecke mountains in an alpine valley that never feels summer, just varying shades of winter. [...] We’re above tree line, above everything it seems” (37). But he longs for the field season every year and soon realizes “[he]’d forgotten how it gets a hold of you” (76).

Hudson, on the other hand, hardly comes to terms with the landscape, as his only reference lies in his native English landscape: “Bloody hell, but this country is barren. I hardly dare to think of the way England will be green now, the way the country lies soft and lush under the summer rain” (122). And Milton, the Mennonite from the prairie, equally lacks appreciation for the ruggedness of the Yukon, especially after the rock slide: “The mountains lie uneasy after the slide, they’re not peaceful and far like the prairie is. I miss the prairie, the unrolling land” (141). It has to be noted here that Milton uses the word ‘unrolling’ in reference to the prairie. This is of special significance, as his statement follows shortly after the rock slide has sent a large amount of boulders and stone fragments down the slope in the direction of the camp. Thus, Milton’s choice of words not only stands for the contrast between his native landscape and the present landscape of the Yukon, it also mirrors the way his feelings and beliefs are unsettled after the rock slide, a key passage in the novel.

Apart from these direct allusions, the landscape is continuously prominent throughout the travelogue of the two protagonists and at times even instigates the development of the plot, such as in the case of the rock slide.

Cartography, landscapes, and maps are prominent topics in the novels discussed, as they are also relevant to the development of the protagonists within their travelogues of independence. When the reader of *No Fixed Address* follows Arachne in her job as sales representative, he/she can also trace her route on the map. The names of towns Arachne visits on her tours are mentioned in 15 chapters and almost all of them actually

exist. One town by the name of Redland does not exist – maybe not anymore – which is also hinted at in the text: “Redland, the sign says. It isn’t on the map, it isn’t on any map she has in the glove compartment [...]. She’s been through here six or seven times and never heard of it, never seen it” (25). And as to confirm the investigating readers’ suspicion, “[s]he never sees Redland again. Next time she passes that way she tries to find the town and can’t” (26).

Apart from mentioning town names, van Herk often makes use of descriptions of landscape and natural formations. One of Arachne’s first encounters with Thena takes place on a school outing at Battle River, while she meets Josef at a graveyard where Chief Crowfoot is buried. When she takes Josef on their final journey together, they visit a stone formation in southern Saskatchewan called “Wild Woman.”²⁶ The details depicting landscape become more abundant towards the end of the novel, when Arachne leaves Vancouver behind, drives to the end of the Trans-Canada highway and then heads north. In my view, this is a strategy the author employs to literally string along readers who – like Arachne – do not know the new setting. Details such as the “Cathedral forest, the oldest stand of trees on Vancouver Island” (237) or her visit to an elevated part of the island named Radar Hill, close to Long Beach are details of a seemingly intimate knowledge of the area. When reading the novel, the reader can never be entirely sure whether the places and landmarks described actually exist in reality or are part of the fictional elaborations of the author. They certainly seem real enough within the text. Nicola Renger has therefore suggested viewing Arachne’s travels as part of an alternative mapping process: “It might be helpful to differentiate here between mapping that does not necessarily produce a permanent graphical object and mapmaking that produces a map” (32). This can also be seen as a difference between Thomas’s occupation as a cartographer and Arachne’s traveling work, where she in a way produces her own maps dictated by the towns she has to visit. Arachne does her own mapping within the framework of the novel: her map does not necessarily correspond to existing maps of the areas she drives through, but rather depicts the path she takes in her travelogue of independence, especially in the latter part of the novel.

Maps are also symbolic of the love relationship between Thomas and Arachne. They are not only the tie between the two lovers – but it almost seems as if maps hold

²⁶ I was not able to verify the actual existence of this stone formation.

the secret to how their love relationship works: Arachne is the one who demands and takes what Thomas offers, Thomas being the more passive one. Accordingly, Arachne travels – not to say consumes – the maps Thomas draws in his study: “He is the author of those maps but he has never known their ultimate affirmation, the consummation of the pact between traveler and traveled. He only draws them; she traces them for him” (132).

Fittingly, it was also a map in a tube left on Arachne’s bus in Vancouver that led her both to Thomas and a new life in Calgary. In many instances in the novel, maps act as a sort of catalyst for Arachne’s feelings. When Arachne first comes to Thomas’s house, she is attracted by a map on the wall, though her longing is directed towards Thomas: “On one wall is a framed map. The paper is creased gray, yet it is beautiful, the lines pure and sweeping, the colors poignant. It makes her want him even more, the maps, the beautiful maps” (93). Consequently, the room with the maps becomes her favorite room in the house, a place where they often make love among the maps and where Thomas “maps her body with the same intricate detail he uses on geography” (162).

Maps also help Arachne deal with her pre-Thomas life. When he shows her his collection of old maps, Arachne thinks that they can help her overcome her imperfect past. “They could lead you into the past so easily, lead you through history to another frame of time. With these maps around, she would be able to transcend her own past, its rude, uneven measure” (94). It is a similar strategy she uses when Lanie, her mother, comes for a surprise visit and Arachne needs some solace, something to distance herself from her present situation with her mother: “Arachne thinks of maps, their legends, their size, their measurement of distance. She sits through her mother’s expostulations on her past and her future by imagining the shape of the map that would lead her straight home” (37).

As Arachne is associated with maps in positive situations, it only seems logical that mapping imagery also occurs in connection with problems. Arachne, unlike other people, does not blow up at Thomas or withdraw from him after the disastrous evening at his parents’. She rather engages in a practice of erasing everything with “a very large eraser, pink and rubbery, that she scrubs across her visual memory, sweeping the edge

back and forth, erase, erase, obliterate.[...] She will erase Thomas too, only allow herself to remember the maps, their comely ravishment” (107). Like unwanted lines on a drawn map, Arachne can banish unwanted memories from her mind, leaving behind only what she chooses to keep.

As a consequence, her disappearance at the end of the novel also happens in relation to maps. Arachne drives her car as far west as the road would take her, up to Tofino Inlet, where the road ends with the sign “*Pacific Terminus. Trans-Canada highway*” (240). Since going back east is not an option, she turns the car north, following the road again as far as it will take her. When the maps do not suffice anymore for her to fulfill her travelogue of independence, she leaves the roads behind and “watches the roadless world” (253) from a helicopter, as the novel ends.

In *The Tent Peg*, cartography and maps are an intrinsic part of most characters’ jobs. As the novel is set in a geologists’ camp somewhere in the Wernecke Mountains of the Yukon, the geologists spend a fair amount of time poring over maps, planning how to explore the surrounding landscape. Within the first paragraph of the novel, the importance of maps is made clear when J.L. describes her first outing with Mackenzie and he is sitting in the plane with his “finger on the map” (3). In the very first sentence in Mackenzie’s chapter, this impression is further reinforced: “I’m sitting in my hotel room, as close to the window as possible so I can get some light to fall across these maps” (6). Mackenzie refers to or works with maps at numerous points in the novel; not surprisingly, as his occupation as a geologist requires this. Other characters are also mentioned in reference to their handling maps, but none as often as Mackenzie.

Jerome, as the assistant party chief, asserts his place in the hierarchy in the first chapter when he is the one “to take a quick look at the maps” (22) together with Mackenzie in his room, so that he will not miss out on any important information as he wants to further his own standing in the company. “To him, the map represents immutable truth, providing a set of rules and directions within which he can confine his own activity and which he tries to impose on others” (Jones, “Centrique” 73). Interestingly, Jerome also uses the map-metaphor in relation to J.L.’s cooking, stating you “[p]ractically need a road map to get through it” (90). In contrast to the other characters and Mackenzie especially, Jerome uses map metaphors predominantly to

emphasize a derogatory comment or to assert power relations with the other camp members. This stresses the fact that Jerome never finds his personal life map during this summer, as he is so concerned with correcting everybody else's maps, so to say.

Thompson, colleague and friend of Mackenzie's, describes the process of mapping the rock samples that are shipped to be assayed in his conversation with Cap. The situation also gets him to think about Mackenzie's future and the fact that he "can't see him as an office geologist, formation and contours nothing more than the lines and colors on maps" (81). In his view, Mackenzie needs to relate the real landscape to the maps and not the other way round.

Franklin adds many details to the description of J.L.'s character throughout the novel, his visual mapping of J.L. fitting his job in the camp well: his task is "adding details to the big map" (74).

Milton, on the other hand, does not only see maps as part of a geologist's job. Rather, he considers maps in combination with vices he abhors and witnesses in the camp members, like when he sees "them drinking while they draw on the maps" (94).

Soon it becomes clear to the reader that the maps do not only have a literal meaning in *The Tent Peg*, but they become "a central image in the novel for the way an individual perceives experience and for the ways in which human beings relate to one another" (Jones, "Centrique" 73). It is J.L. who first hints at this, even before she realizes herself that her journey, the course of her travelogue of independence, is closely connected to this thought:

The door to the room is open and through it I see him hunched over his spread maps, studying them as if they could reveal something, as if they might protect him. Those maps seem to chart the outline for his life; he handles them so carefully, so lovingly, refers to them again and again. (33)

The maps slowly gain an alternative meaning throughout the novel. They do not only chart the physical territory of the landscape and show the men where to do their work, but the maps and the mapping process also mirror the process of the men solving their innermost troubles with the help of J.L. It is Ivan, the pilot, who hints at this symbolic meaning: "Only Mackenzie doesn't seem to be listening. He's working on the big map" (125) while the others are relaxing after a hard day's work. As if J.L. picks up Ivan's train of thought, a little later she comments on the same situation: "Every once in a

while he presses his fingers to his eyes as if it's not maps he's seeing" (129). At the end of the novel it becomes clear that the men do not only map the landscape where they have found the gold mine and stake their claims. What is more important is that an inner mapping process has taken place with the help of J.L., and this process has shown the men a new layout for the maps that represent their lives and the way their lives relate to the lives of other people around them, both the ones in the Yukon and the ones left at home awaiting their return. What is more: while J.L. helps the men with their mapping process, she gradually fulfills her own journey, her own travelogue of independence.

If the reader is familiar with both *No Fixed Address* and *The Tent Peg*, it becomes clear which novel was written first. While in *The Tent Peg* the references to maps and mapping processes predominantly refer to actual activities at a geologists' camp, a significant shift to the alternative meaning of maps and mapping becomes apparent in *No Fixed Address*. Both novels, however, have in common that landscape and maps exert a strong influence on the novel's characters. Maps are not only used in their literal meaning, showing the characters their way, such as Arachne's road maps when she travels the country or Mackenzie's, when he decides where to assay the ground.

Furthermore, map metaphors used by the characters point the reader towards a more subtle meaning of the maps, namely how the underlying story delineates the development of the characters in the course of the novel, depicting the map to follow in their travelogues of independence. It is the characters' destiny to follow these maps and free themselves of various layers of bonds, both literal in the sense of personal relationships and on a psychological level in the sense of fears, self doubts and other psychological hindrances. As a consequence, the maps in the two novels are used as recurrent themes in travelogues that offer independence as the desired destination and prize at the end of the journey.

4.2 A Feminist Reading

It is no coincidence that geographical representation and the representation of women, especially in literature, have been brought in connection in feminist discussions. Among other things, notably "the implications of *space*, [...] intertwine

physical, social, and political territories, [and thus] offer particularly rich material for feminist analysis today” (Higonnet, *New Cartographies*, an Introduction 1). Both the female representations of women and those of landscape or space have to deal with the female subversive appropriation of male territories to counteract historical developments. Thus, landscape in *No Fixed Address* and *The Tent Peg* cannot be read properly and comprehensively without taking a feminist perspective into consideration, as I will attempt to explain.

Aritha van Herk has chosen the landscapes she depicts in her novels with care and also with a feminist agenda in mind. Both the west and the north of Canada have been labeled as inherently male throughout the history and its representation in colonial and exploration literature. The cultural concept of the west “as a place dominated by the contingencies of survival, privileging those biological, social and psychic characteristics commonly associated with the male gender such as physical strength, hardihood, inventiveness, determination, and rationality” (Verhoeven 63) is well known and can be widely found in literature. The basic givens of this concept also apply to the north: “The North has provided a narrative space for the realization of manhood, male fantasy and a test of masculinity” (qtd. in Mott 100), Aritha van Herk notes and goes on to state that “[n]arratives about the North inevitably parallel American westerns” (qtd. in Mott 100). Thus, she places her heroines J.L. and Arachne within these ‘virile’ landscapes to subvert the male appropriation of both physical and narrative spaces. Van Herk thus “continues to develop this concern regarding the need to reterritorialize the terrain of female identity from a feminist perspective” (Goldman, *Paths* 147). As an afterthought, van Herk may have also looked into other cultural areas such as “the Chinese [who] see the south as male and the north as female” (Ardener, “Rules” 5) and thereby allowing her heroines to reclaim an inherently female territory and not a territory generally considered male.

In *The Tent Peg*, the author counters the stereotypical descriptions of landscape as being passive and beautifully calm which are often associated with the female waiting to be conquered, mapped and exploited by the male. In the novel, the men certainly follow their business as geologists and chart the territory, but they are themselves mapped and penetrated by J.L. who, as a consequence, makes them realize

their fallacies as “one by one, she pierces their phallogocentric assumptions” (Goldman, *Paths* 149).

As J.L. successfully rebuffs takeover by her male companions, the landscape in the form of the mountain also refuses to lie passively and await their exploration. The rockslide shows the men that they are constantly at the mercy of the landscape and not the other way round. The author thus rejects “the image of a passive landscape charted, penetrated and appropriated by male discovery. In this novel the land shifts and changes and will yield up her treasure only to those who are prepared to observe and respond to her movements” (Jones, “Centrique” 78). Acceptance of the active character of the mountain, of the landscape, awards the ‘reformed’ men with finding a potential goldmine, both in the literal sense of the word, but also in discovering the most precious knowledge a man can unearth within himself.

For women in literature, including Canadian literature, the possibilities used to be traditionally limited and they could only “enter fiction [...] fixed [to the roles of] mothers/saints/whores” (van Herk, “Women Writers” 143). The role of the saint was clear: to be the good wife, mother and homemaker who lives up to the expectations of her husband. This concept can also be placed within the dichotomy of nature and home, which is frequently found in prairie literature:

The basic grammatical pair in the story-line (the energy-line) of prairie fiction is house: horse. To be *on* a horse is to move: motion into distance. To be *in* a house is to be fixed: a centring unto stasis. Horse is masculine. House is feminine. Horse: house. Masculine: feminine. On: in. Motion: stasis. A woman ain’t supposed to move. (Kroetsch, “Fear” 76)

The woman in this reality is expected to stay at home, tend to the household chores and the children, while the man is away and on the move. Unlike Arachne, the traveling underwear sales representative of *No Fixed Address*. She cannot conceive of a life bound to the house and thereby to a fixed address, a life filled with an unhappy marriage and household chores. Thereby, “*No Fixed Address* challenges established representations of Woman [sic] through its portrayal of Arachne, an amoral underwear salesperson, who indulges in the pleasures of a nomadic existence” (Goldman, “Earth-quaking” 36).

The novel has to be read with the feminist agenda of the author in mind when examining the character constellations and the overall layout of the situation, as Marlene Goldman notes in her article “Earth-quaking the Kingdom of the Male Virgin”:

“Unlike the prairie fictions in which the little woman waits at home, in *No Fixed Address* the situation is reversed, and Arachne’s faithful lover, Thomas, [...] chastely waits for her” (27). She continues to depict Arachne as the opposite of the saint so much favored in prairie literature: “Most obviously, her trade as a salesperson allows her to indulge in a life-style antithetical to the type of fixed existence that women are encouraged by the State to adopt” (Goldman, *Paths* 155). In Goldman’s analysis, state stands for the general view of the commonly male-dominated society, the law and rule makers.

But the novel does not only question role models, it also tackles other male-dominated areas as “the texts engage in a feminist, subversive appropriation of the motifs of mapping and exploration to effect the deterritorialization of maps plotted by established, patriarchal discourses” (Goldman, *Paths* 134). Exploration and mapping are historically associated with men, women being omitted on the explorers’ side and often on the side of the explored as well. What can be found more and more in feminist literature dealing with landscape and its geographical representation is that land has often been equaled with being female, e. g. in phrases such as ‘the virgin land’. Thus, Arachne “also eventually manages to undo the woman-as-land trope, mostly by appropriating *its* region; namely, the male map of the Canadian prairie” (Darias-Beautell, *Graphies* 156). True, Arachne uses man-made maps at first to awaken her lust for traveling, is even induced by Thomas, a man, to head for the prairies. As soon as she has found her own road, though, she leaves the prescribed maps behind and, as a consequence, the boundaries of the text as well, to follow the map drawn by her own travelogue of independence. The only trace that can still be found of Arachne at the end of the novel is inherently female: panties lying at the side of the road where the researcher follows them in hopes of finding her. This final trace holds a deep irony, since Arachne always refuses to wear underwear herself, thus adding one more feminist facet to her character. The researcher, however, does not understand the feminist irony in this panty-trail. To her “[t]here is no end to the panties; there will be no end to this road” (260).

J.L., on the other hand, represents a rather saintly figure in the pristine and spiritual landscape of *The Tent Peg*. It is not the life she leads in Edmonton, where she goes to university and dates various men that is saintly; rather, it is the way she handles

the challenges this summer in the Yukon that bestows saintly attributes upon her, in the widest sense of the word.

First of all, she does not take advantage of a camp full of men who would be more than willing to share their sleeping bags with her. Rather, she helps the men understand that it is not her they want, but rather to solve their problems, to answer their innermost questions with her help. In some instances, she even fulfills a mothering role, for example, when she cradles the weeping Cap in her arms²⁷ – or when she listens to Hudson’s self-doubts and consoles him. Even when J.L. is threatened with physical violence and rape by Jerome, she overcomes her rage with superhuman willpower and does not shoot him but disarms him and alerts the rest of the camp, thereby gaining a “moral victory over Jerome and male chauvinism in general” (Verhoeven 69).

Also, J.L. does not merely take on the role of the cook and thereby the task of taking care of and nourishing the men, which is generally considered a female role. Contrary to the female stereotypes connected with ‘normal’ cooks, bush cooks in the north are traditionally male and thus linked to the concept of masculinity, because bush cooks have to be able to deal with the special circumstances of camp life in a remote part of the world with all-male geologist crews. J.L.’s role as a cook is thus an effective ‘double reversal’ of traditional gender roles. Therefore, “the story celebrates J.L.’s escape from her gender role, and locates this subversive feminist practice in the northern landscape” (Goldman, “Go North” 34).

And last, she takes on magic qualities with the encounter of the she-bear and the rock slide, which are both hard to believe for the men. They would rather believe that she is a witch than that she has an ancient connection to the earth, a shared female wisdom that will always stay concealed to men, unless they accept the female fully, no questions asked. Modern myths of encounters with bears or of surviving rock slides by a hair’s breadth can usually be read in adventure stories, which feature a brave male hero who counters the adverse landscape for a noble cause. Aritha van Herk attributes these traits to her heroine, who sees the north as “a place to seek renewal in contact with elemental nature” (Francis 170) while the men are condemned to watch from a distance or miss the key events entirely.

²⁷ Compare Cap’s description of the scene in the shower in van Herk, *Tent* 186.

A feminist reading of the novels *No Fixed Address* and *The Tent Peg* is certainly required to gain full insight into the alternative subtexts Aritha van Herk incorporated, which “challenge fixed positions of women in the geographical, historical, and social landscape of a patriarchal society. The author employs maps and explorations as motifs and central themes” (Renger 175), thus superimposing female concepts over traditionally male themes. This also holds true in consideration of the genre of travelogues and of how van Herk employs it to draw the protagonists’ travelogues of independence beyond the limitations of a male-dominated life.

The maps also stand for the connecting link between feminism and postcolonialism, especially in the Canadian context, as Barbara Godard points out: “To be Canadian, as to be a woman, is to inhabit a colonial space from which one perceives discourse as a form of power and desire” (46). Thus, for a feminist writer, like van Herk, scratching the surface of postcolonial discourse is not so unusual. A possible postcolonial dimension in her novels *No Fixed Address* and *The Tent Peg* shall be briefly discussed in the following chapter.

4.3 Is Canada postcolonial? – Postcolonial Mappings Revised

On an impulse, one is certainly tempted to say: no, of course not, especially when you have pictures of today’s Canada in mind, which includes modern cities and such model legislation as the Multicultural Act. And after all, you cannot compare Canada to other countries which belonged to the Commonwealth and still struggle with the manifold inheritances left over from colonial times. Therefore,

Canada and Canadian literature are often omitted from discussions of postcolonialism, in a kind of post-Commonwealth Studies context, on the understanding that you simply cannot compare Canada and Nigeria, for example, because of the vastly different histories, relationships with imperial power, contemporary social and political environments, and current relationships to globalization. (L. Moss, *Introducing* 2)

It is certainly true that the differences are more easily found than any possible similarities. Still, Canada shares some legacies with other postcolonial countries such as recognizing Canada as a “settler-invader society [or] healing the colonial wounds inflicted on Indigeneity” (Brydon 59).

Another issue that Canada has in common with other postcolonial countries is the question of identity. For postcolonial countries this is not an easy matter, as they had to live a basically schizophrenic life during colonialism. In colonial terms, they were part of the colony but represented the ‘other’ at the same time, depending on who was considering this question. As a result, “Canada had to make itself known to itself, to develop a distinct self-consciousness, to conceptualize its ‘here’ in relation to a colonial ‘there’ always regarded as more sophisticated” (Boehmer 205). One could term this a nation-wide inferiority complex which has certainly influenced Canadian literature.²⁸

The discussion on whether Canada is a postcolonial country is an ongoing one and, in my view, not likely to be thoroughly solved in the near future. The response given by Diana Brydon seems quite fitting, as it provides a plausible mirror image of reality:

Is Canada Postcolonial? Canadians know the expected Canadian response. It depends. It depends on the definitions; it depends on who is asking the question, and from what position, in space, time, and privilege. [...] This is not a bad answer and may be the best we can provide. (Brydon 49)

An important instrument of colonial practices and thus relevant in a postcolonial discourse is cartography. In their work *Elements of Cartography*, Arthur H. Robinson, Joel L. Morrison, Phillip C. Muehrcke, A. Jon Kimerley and Stephen C. Gupitill state that “maps portray only the information that has been chosen to fit the use of the map” (11), defining thereby a subjective process of selection before the map is turned into its – as it is generally considered – objective self. The influence of the map-makers on the communicative purpose of the maps has thus to be seen as quite strong. They “always played a rhetorical role in defining the configurations of power in society” (Harley 303), including the information in the maps which fit their purpose and omitting other information for the same reason. Similarly, Joanne P. Sharp states in *Feminist Glossary of Human Geography* that “[p]laces were mapped and named in colonial exercises, hence awarding the mapper (or his state) ownership and knowledge” (25). No consideration was given to the prevailing social or cultural reality connected to the landscape being mapped, thus eliminating any trace of a pre-colonial existence. Naming and mapping therefore become acts of possessing the land, representing a central issue in the postcolonial discourse.

²⁸ Compare Chapter 2 “Traveling Canadian Identity”.

On the surface, *No Fixed Address* and *The Tent Peg* are not what one would consider examples of postcolonial literature par excellence, as the texts do not revolve around topics which stand for the

basic tensions which exist in all post-colonial literatures. The three major issues they raise are the relationship between social and literary practices in the old world and the new; the relationship between the indigenous population in settled areas and the invading settlers; and the relationship between the imported language and the new place. (Ashcroft et al., 133)

These issues certainly are of no importance, or at least not in the way they are important in imperialistic exploitation journeys. But I agree with Eva Darias-Beautell, who states that “the use of maps [...] given the Western exploitation of cartography for colonial ends, appears as a constitutive element of postcolonial counterdiscursivity” (*Contemporary* 135). And the themes of cartography, maps and mapping are of central importance in the novels, which, in my view, can be considered to be postcolonial as they “suggest a link between a de/reconstructive reading of maps and a revisioning of the history of European colonialism” (Huggan 130).

As I have attempted to show in this thesis, landscape and maps are important to the protagonist of *No Fixed Address* and for her travelogue of independence. Aritha van Herk is aware of the historical dimension of maps and how they have to be seen in a postcolonial discourse and therefore inverts the process of cartography: Thomas is the cartographer and in colonial times he would have exerted his power of ownership through the mapping of the land. In the novel, however, it is Arachne who actually uses the maps to explore, not Thomas. She is the only one to really gain from the maps, but only for herself personally. “Arachne’s appropriation of Thomas’s maps illustrates the extent to which van Herk subverted the colonial practice of cartography” (Goldman, *Paths* 154). She maps her own, personal territory, traced by her travelogue of independence, which defies the existing maps and even goes beyond what is possible through cartography. Instead of clearly defining the roads she travels, her journey rather blurs the reality of the maps. Her ultimate road then leads into invisibility, which would be impossible to map even if someone – like the researcher following her – tried to do so, defying any colonial consideration.

In *The Tent Peg* cartography and maps again play an important part in the experiences of the characters. Aritha van Herk carries the concept of cartography further than its physical reality: “Cartography can be construed as a realm of imaginary

geography: maps can represent a geography of mind as well as a geography of place” (Mott 105). Beside the actual mapping geologists have to engage in as part of their occupation, the mapping of a geography of the mind gains more and more importance in the course of the novel. The protagonist re-inscribes her mind-maps with new insights and geographies of alternative formations and paths, thereby drawing her personal map to guide her in her travelogue of independence.

Aritha van Herk, however, does not follow a possible postcolonial agenda through to the last consequence. The geologists succeed in finding a potential gold mine and therefore have to repeat an old, colonial pattern: the claiming of the land through the practice of staking. And it is J.L. who names the find the ‘Midas claim’. It becomes most obvious that van Herk has left her postcolonial avenue when J.L. also takes part in the staking. Goldman argues that “[b]y participating in this venture, J.L. becomes complicit with imperialist practices which historically depend on acts of naming and claiming” (“Go North” 35). In my view, J.L.’s taking part in the staking can be read as moving beyond postcolonial conventions to reach the destination of her personal travelogue of independence. This is supported by the text, as Hearne states that “this staking has another importance to her, this is her farewell ritual to the Yukon” (van Herk, *Tent* 203), marking an important turning point in the travelogue, which has at that point almost come to a close.

Van Herk in turn inverts the imperialistic practices once more when she names many of her characters after historical persons connected to the exploration of Canada (see chapter 3.3 for details), thereby re-appropriating the explorers’ names in a postcolonial setting. And, as if to further emphasize a certain postcolonial attitude, van Herk inserts a character who is Dene into the novel, a member of “the Athabaskan Indian people of the Northwest Territories” (*Webster’s New World College Dictionary* 368). However, he remains the only distinguishably native character in the novel.

With her novels *No Fixed Address* and *The Tent Peg*, Aritha van Herk did not indulge in postcolonial views, but she certainly employed postcolonial elements relevant for the travelogues of her two protagonists. These elements, though, remain below the surface and never shift the focus away from the central issue at hand: the development of the protagonists along their travelogues of independence.

5 Travelogues of Independence: Escaping or Finding Oneself

When considering travelogues the notion of movement is central to the plot and frequently functions as the single focus of the protagonists. Movement, in most cases, describes a physical action but it can also mean a psychological journey which leaves the protagonist similarly if not even more altered in the end than the protagonist of a physical journey. The trigger for the journeys in both cases initiates movement, the reason and the destination, however, are likely to differ greatly.

While the tools for traveling – cartography and its maps – and their importance in *No Fixed Address* and *The Tent Peg* have been discussed in the previous chapters, this chapter will serve as the connection between the journeys of the protagonists and the effects on their identity achieved by their respective travelogues of independence.

5.1 *Traveling, Desire and Identity*

“Travel is a quest. Travel is a passion. Travel is escape” (Amoia and Knapp, Introduction 1). Basically, the possible concepts of traveling, which are ingrained in my thesis, are condensed in these three sentences. People engage in movement, in traveling, for different reasons as Caren Kaplan points out: “Travel is very much a modern concept, signifying both commercial and leisure movement” (Kaplan, Questions 3). What her definition lacks, though, is an urgency to escape which is inherent in all traveling. For most people, traveling is also a possibility to escape the normal routine of daily lives, to transplant themselves into an alternative reality, to escape to somewhere else. “Travel, for all its seeking, acts out an evasion. One can travel to the next room as well as to the far side of a continent” (Kroetsch, “Fear” 82), but most people, given the choice, rather travel to another location or country.

For Northrop Frye, the desire of movement, of traveling, is something inherently Canadian, rooted in the country’s history: “The sense of probing into the distance, of fixing the eyes on the skyline, is something that Canadian sensibility has inherited from

the *voyageurs*” (Frye 222), referring to the French explorers traveling extensively on Canadian soil and waterways. What he describes is a desire that can rather easily be followed. But the traveler has to consider why he/she wants to travel, because “not only is travel typically fueled by desire, it also embodies powerful transgressive impulses” (Porter 9) that carry a danger with them. Transgression also stands for a sort of invasion into a different space and thus an influence – conscious or not – on the space itself. This transgressive force allows for an alternative remapping of space, both physically and psychologically, hence its frequent incidence as a motif in literature.

For a long time it was commonly assumed that “there is something *intrinsically* male about travel” (Wolff 184), the few women mentioned in connection with travel mostly acting as free-willed ‘accessories’ or out of marital duty or true companionship to the traveling men. In the history of travel writing and travelogues, women are conspicuously absent, a fact that has often been noted by various writers.²⁹ It does not come as a surprise that feminist writers have thus taken up the idea of traveling and related topics to subvert this male-dominated area. “Movement is therefore an important concept for the novels’ remapping of space, place and body” (Kaplan, Questions 31), introducing new readings of travel narratives. As a result, feminist writers have frequently chosen to let their characters travel through different parts of the world – be they fictional or real –, which has thus led to an interesting and new collection of fictional travelogues. In these travelogues, the physical travels of the characters are often of secondary importance, compared to the journeys they undertake on a psychological level, “combin[ing] exploration in the world with self-exploration. They submitted themselves to the challenge of travel and, in the process, managed if not always to make themselves over, then at least to know themselves differently” (Porter 5).

In both *No Fixed Address* and *The Tent Peg*, Aritha van Herk chose to place her heroines in travelogues of independence which involve landscape, mapping and, as a consequence, journeys undertaken for different reasons. In this chapter I aim to establish the connection between the fact that the female characters went on a journey – one traveling physically, the other concentrating on her psychological journey – and have

²⁹ Compare such writers as Margaret Higonnet and Caren Kaplan in my bibliography, who have dedicated many of their works to women travelers and women travel writers.

thereby achieved a character development. In this process, I will take a closer look at the sort of journeys the protagonists set out to make, their respective motivations and the effect these journeys have on their characters in the course of their travelogues of independence.

No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey

“But so powerful a force is desire that it influences every act of creation and by extension, the whole syntax of region: place, time, background, sex, form” (“Stranded” 79), says Aritha van Herk. And she must have had this very concept in mind when she created the character of Arachne Manteia, who is a person purely motivated by desire. She is not the great plotter, which becomes evident with her unplanned flight in the latter part of the novel, and she is not driven by ambition. In essence, her inner motivation can be reduced to two elemental desires: sex and movement, resulting in the condition that “she has to keep herself amused” (8) either way. Both of these elemental desires are already hinted at in the subtitle of the novel: *An Amorous Journey*.

Arachne is uncompromising when it comes to her sexual encounters: the text is very clear about that. “Arachne’s sexual fantasies are incorrigible” (10), and she indulges in them whenever she feels like it, even at a prairie graveyard on a hot summer day. Arachne is not very fastidious in her choice of sexual partners and Thena, the only person she tells about her sexual adventures, does not quite understand “Arachne’s lack of discrimination” (24) in the men she has sex with. But Arachne is pragmatic in this respect: “They’re just bodies, you could put a paper bag over their heads” (24). To Arachne, sex is not a desire to achieve comfort and closeness with a specific partner, it is a physical ‘desire’ her body expresses indiscriminately, just like drink or food. As a consequence, “Arachne has learned to get her pleasure fast, catch what she can, has trained her body to pleasure itself” (53).

In the novel, her desire for sex only surfaces completely when she moves to Calgary and gets the job as a sales representative. Before that, the mention of sex only occurs in the chapters “Driving, Driving,” in which she meets the piano player Basilisk, and “Rerun,” which depicts her first sexual encounter at the age of fifteen. In my view, the structure of the novel shows that her desire for sex is closely connected to her desire for traveling. Both themes only surface dominantly after her move to Calgary, where

her actual quest for independence starts to emerge. To stress the connection between her desire for movement and for sex, the two chapters “Driving, Driving” and “Rerun,” which are the exception in her pre-Calgary years, are headed by titles that depict movement.

The association of traveling with sex becomes clear right at the beginning of her travel adventures, when the reader finds that “Arachne is giddy with travel” (75), only to learn a page later that Thomas and Arachne “find themselves driving toward Princeton together, wet and aching” (76). It is from the first moment of Arachne’s experience with traveling that this new idea is associated with sex, stressed by the essence of traveling when “[n]either of them wants to think of arriving” (79), when they stop again at a motel for the night to prolong both the traveling and their sexual activities.

“Arachne travels to travel” (132), the reader is informed, and this is also emphasized by the title of the relevant chapter: “Traveling to Travel,” thereby hinting at the travelogue of independence inherent in Arachne’s story. After her move to Calgary “[s]he is learning to travel, the pace and progression of journey, the multifarious seduction of movement” (132) she has not known before. Her desire for movement is inborn, her desire to travel its manifestation made possible by her move to Calgary and by meeting Thomas, the cartographer. Thena also plays an important role in Arachne’s traveling, she is her only audience: “Arachne returns from the road with a store of chronicles for [her]: tales, description, narrations, expositions” (118-19). She is absolutely honest with Thena, spares her no detail of her adventures. Still, Arachne is unsure about the one thing she does not think she can ever properly elucidate to Thena: “How can she explain her inordinate lust to drive, to cover road miles, to use up gas? There is no map for longing” (138) she can resort to in order to help explain the design of her travelogue of independence to Thena. And Thena alone learns all about her sexual escapades, as she is “privy to all of Arachne’s current indiscretions, the road jockeys” (114), another longing Arachne cannot quite explain to her.

Arachne’s flight from the law can be regarded as a turning point in the novel, for the focus of the narration shifts to a darker side of the protagonist. By becoming an outlaw, Arachne also leaves behind her aforementioned desires and replaces them with

darker versions of them, effectively changing the direction of her travelogue. The two instances of sexual encounters in the last part of the novel end fatally. In one case, Arachne finds herself on a ferry and stabs the man who molests her, who “is fumbling her breasts now, his lips still mumbling the skin of her neck” (236), leaving him to die while she flees again. The other instance occurs when she is on an elevation on Vancouver Island called Radar Hill at night and encounters a soldier, his clothing wet from swimming in the sea. She has sex with him because “she has to find out if she’s still alive, if she inhabits the same body as she always has [...]. But her body is the same, [...] the impulses recognizable, the pleasure familiar” (244) after her confusing realization that she must have lost three months worth of memory. Ironically though, when Arachne returns to the motel room, the understanding dawns on her that the soldier must have been one of “several men who drowned while swimming at night” (245) – in 1944. Consequently, the sexual encounter meant to reassure her of being alive lead Arachne to actually question her conclusion when it becomes clear who it was she presumably encountered. Both sexual encounters at the end of the novel thus leave the men involved dead, one presumably killed by Arachne and the other because he had already been dead in the first place.

The only desire left to Arachne then is movement, the inherent precondition to her travelogue of independence. Merely the traveling mode and her starting point change. Aritha van Herk phrases the essence of her heroine when she states: “Arachne has no home. She is totally homeless. Even when she gets a home with Thomas she rejects it in the end” (Dargent et al. 9). She simply has a fixed starting point for her travels, a place to return to if she wishes. The moment she decides to skip bail, the reasons for her movement are altered because “[o]nce you don’t have a fixed address the game has changed” (Sellery 26). It is not traveling anymore, but simply driving.

Where is she going? If she stopped to answer that, she would stop moving, the irrevocable and intractable hum of the tires, the swish of wind through the open window, the hot smell of the car’s upholstery and the pedals under her feet providing the impetus, the urgency to continue, continue, follow the carved pavement, the twist of metal guard rails on and on and on. Farther, not toward but away. (van Herk, *Address* 222)

The reduction of movement to the basic motivation of getting away from somewhere, of escaping, mirrors Arachne’s childhood, where the foundation of her urge to escape lies. This association is reinforced by Arachne’s westbound movement, in the direction of her childhood home in Vancouver, where “[a]t three Arachne climbed the fence” (30) to explore the neighborhood and to escape the boredom of her parents’ backyard. At the

age of fifteen “[s]he roamed the streets with her surly friends” (156) of the gang and walked the back alleys at night, where “[s]he had learned the backs of houses intimately” (229), always eager to escape her family home.

With her escape from Calgary, she does not only leave behind Thena and Thomas, she also leaves behind her cartographer and her confidante, both relevant entities for a traveler. In exchange, she can draw her own map consisting only of the places she chooses to go to, ignoring everything else. In the end, Arachne has outdriven the roads leading up north and has nowhere left to go. All of her desires – sex, movement and driving – are left unresolved, unfinished at the end of the novel. And this fits the novel’s heroine well, because “[o]nce desire is fulfilled it no longer exists. It exists only as long as it is deferred” (Clayton 168). As long as Arachne continues to drive, she follows her own map – the map depicting the desires embedded in her travelogue of independence. Once the road ends, she has to change perspective, to find a new map, a map showing “the roadless world” (253) she has arrived in, she has all along been looking for.

The Tent Peg

In *The Tent Peg* the desires of the protagonist are not obvious at first sight. And, in contrast to *No Fixed Address*, it is not only the desires of the heroine which are of importance in the novel, but the ones of the male characters as well.

J.L. has only one desire when she applies for the job as a bush cook, namely “to find [...] silence, a relief from the cacophony of sound, of confession that surrounded, that always impinged on [her]” (51). J.L. has had enough of the non-committal and nonreciprocal love relationships she has experienced with different men over time. Therefore, she has chosen the isolation of a geologists’ camp in a remote place of Canada to regain her mental balance and reconfigure her travelogue of independence, especially the independence from her relationships.

A few weeks into the summer, however, J.L. realizes that this summer is not unfolding the way she had envisioned it. She spends a lot less time by herself than she expected and she is faced with a camp full of men with different characters and problems, which surface more frequently the longer the summer lasts and which

threaten to seriously impinge on her. A rainy spell inspires J.L. to comment on the scene before her: “Mackenzie absentminded, Jerome snipping at me, Franklin either asking me to read his poetry or describing the color of my aura, Hearne with that pesky camera, Milton staring at me all the time” (98) and Cap making passes at her with ‘subtle’ remarks such as “I’m horny”(98). She is ready to give up and cries for the first time, admitting to herself what is going wrong: “I’m tired of being weighted and watched and judged and found wanting every minute of the day. I thought I could be alone here. Instead I’m less alone than I’ve ever been” (99). It is only when J.L. acknowledges that she cannot separate her life from the life of the people surrounding her that she finds the solution to her problems, and comes to terms with her life. In the scene after the rockslide, when she realizes what she has to do and the men are “finally coming clear to [her]” (129), the reader understands that she has to help the men solve their problems, as the men and their problems mostly stand for obstacles J.L. has to overcome to find the right path in her labyrinthine travelogue; her attitude towards the men and how she helps them to solve their problems are essential for the progress of her own travelogue of independence.

Desire and Identity: From ‘Who am I’ to ‘Where am I’

Desires are a singular motivation for characters to pursue certain activities, be they worthwhile or harmful actions. The outcome of these actions, however, can often be registered in a development of the characters and their identities, thus altering their respective paths in life. Consequently, the identity of a character is influenced by his or her experiences and actions and these, in the case of the two novels under discussion, involve traveling and journeys with the aim to fulfill the protagonist’s travelogues of independence. What is more, identity and the self are not concepts that are fixed and remain untouched by personal experiences both positive and negative. As identities and selves evolve, so does their representation in literature.

As I have noted previously, identity – read ‘Canadian identity’ – is an issue to this date. The discussion, however, has a different starting point, as the concept of identity has changed over time, it may even be considered rather fluid. Always depending on which school of thought stands behind the concept of choice, identity is either seen as a more or less interrelating series of experiences or a sort of band on which one’s experiences are aligned, like pearls on a string:

Yet, at heart, much work on the self can be placed on a continuum between the Lockean-Humean understanding of personal identity, in which 'I' cannot be considered as an *a priori* unity of experiences, but refers simply to a series of experiences, and a Kantian-Cartesian understanding of personal identity, in which self-awareness is part of a continuing biography that tags each experience belonging to a distinct self. (Pile and Thrift, Introduction 6)

Personally, I tend to agree more with the second school of thought attributing experience to a distinct self. This is also important in view of reading authors such as Aritha van Herk, because identity is not only constructed out of positive experiences. Rather on the contrary, "identity is riddled with – and even formed through – mistakes, misrecognitions, fantasies, instabilities and contradictions" (Rose 6). This I find especially important when one questions the actions of characters such as Arachne or J.L., when the consideration of identity and "[t]he old question 'Where is here?' is transformed into 'Where am I?' or 'Who am I?'" (Howells, "Writing" 209) to open up a new avenue of interpretation, aligning identity and self along the same concepts as landscape and identity in the 'where', opening new possibilities for development, especially within the framework of a travelogue.

What also needs to be mentioned in relation to Aritha van Herk's two novels is that women were not only excluded from the picaresque genre – as already thoroughly discussed – but also from the genre of the Bildungsroman. "The traditional *bildungsroman*[sic] also takes on different forms and emphases when its subject is female [and] has actually wrought changes in the novel, in its traditional forms as well as themes" (Hutcheon, "Shape" 226), offering a stage for feminist subversions of traditional concepts in this genre.

Such avenues have been of prime importance to many women writers, as Patricia Waugh notes:

In my view, many twentieth-century women writers (whether consciously feminist or not) have sought alternative conceptions of subjectivity, expressing a definition of self in relationship which does not make identity dependent axiomatically upon the maintenance of boundaries and distance, nor upon subjugation of the other. (Waugh 22)

In other words, the social structure in which the female character lives is not the relevant dimension for defining the identity of the character. Also, the construction of female identity cannot be placed on the same level as male identity, as it follows different rules. Male identities are generally perceived as more or less stable and are hardly influenced either by love or tragedy. For Judith Kegan Gardiner, this is the essence of difference between the identities of the genders: "Thus I picture female

identity as typically less fixed, less unitary, and more flexible than male individuality” (183), allowing for a formation process that does not follow predetermined processes or models. Gardiner, however, sees the most critical influence on the formation of the female identity in the bond between mother and daughter. Accordingly, the identity of the female develops “in response to the expectations implicitly expressed by its first caretaker, usually the mother” (Gardiner 180).

This premise is heavily undermined in *No Fixed Address* when one considers Arachne Manteia and the relationship to her mother – or so one would think. Lanie is often mentioned saying that Arachne should finally settle down and marry Thomas or that she credits Thomas with saving Arachne. She vociferously wants to direct Arachne into a stable and socially acceptable life, but she never follows up on her admonitions. The important message, however, has long since been implanted in Arachne’s identity, in the concept of her self ingrained in a travelogue of independence: “She travels to travel: to get away from her past, which she invariably associates with imprisonment and the mother’s power; and to get away from her future, which appears as the inevitable ‘happy ending’ with Thomas” (Becker, *Gothic* 231).

Like Lanie, Arachne treasures her freedom, the choice to move when and where she wants to. Both women have found men who, in their own different ways, do not restrain the will of their women. While Toto tries to stay out of Lanie’s way and they have found a comfortable arrangement with each other, Thomas supports Arachne in her desire to move, even finds her the most suitable job for her personality. But Arachne does not allow herself to see any similarities between her mother’s life and her own, because this would endanger the identity she has manufactured for herself over the years: from paper delivery ‘boy’ to leader of a gang, from bus driver to underwear sales representative. She always places her female identity as close to the edge of her self as possible, continuously transgressing invisible boundaries. She also tries to disassociate herself from her family by convincing herself that she “was either adopted or stolen” (91), negating the mother-daughter bond mentioned above. “Arachne’s refusal to recognise her family as a basic ‘given’ amounts to another one of her line-crossings: the ‘unfixing’ of her origins” (Becker, *Gothic* 227), which also leads to a certain unfixing of her own identity, when one considers Gardiner’s theoretical concept.

In the end, her identity moves beyond any possible concept because “Arachne has finally managed to shed all that used to tie her down to an identity, a job, a relationship” (Verhoeven 73), in short anything that would help define her identity in any way and thus limit her travelogue of independence. This does not only follow the quintessential concept of subverting the established patterns of thought – and thereby of interpretation – frequently used by women writers, it also adheres to picaresque identity dynamics typical of the eighties, as Reinhart notes: “Mit einer stabilen, gefestigten Identität können die pikarischen Helden der 80er Jahre allerdings nur selten aufwarten; statt dessen durchlaufen sie gelegentlich [...] qualvolle Phasen der Selbstaflösung” (579). This holds especially true for Arachne, who basically disappears from the novel after all her ties to a stable identity have been severed and she realizes her ultimate travelogue of independence in simply disappearing off the map.

5.2 *Arachne: Escaping from Herself*

As noted further above, Arachne is a character driven by desire, motivated purely by egoistic reasons. If a situation or relationship does not correspond to her ideas anymore or threatens to limit her mobility, she changes the situation, disentangles herself from the relationship. Arachne’s identity thereby remains focused completely on her self-reliance; friends, family and relationships are only accepted as long as they do not become threatening to her own definition of the self, to her travelogue of independence. “Arachne remains restless, seeking scope for greater self-development than even her present existence permits” (Jones, “Restoring” 425) and therefore escapes her existence altogether in the end.

Arachne starts out as an unwanted child who learns early how to get through life with a streetwise attitude and by constantly moving to avoid impending danger, be it her mother who is coming down the street or other kids chasing her. She develops into a young woman who abhors the idea of immobility or, even worse, sedentariness, and therefore works in jobs which offer constant movement and also do not require her to show her femaleness openly. Her attitude helps her cover up her insecurity as a teenager at first and develops into a protective layer later on in adult life. Once, Arachne comes close to being hurt beyond salvation when she meets Basilisk. Through him, Arachne

catches a glimpse of a world that would have been reachable in a *Bildungsroman* and with a protagonist like Eliza Doolittle,³⁰ meant to be introduced to a better world. Arachne, however, feels threatened in the fragile equilibrium of her identity by a world, an identity, which are not meant to be hers. As a result, she concentrates on her job as a bus driver with a vengeance; her work offers her the possibility of constant movement, which in turn gives her an illusion of moving beyond her uncompromising childhood.

When Arachne meets Thomas, she actually cuts the umbilical cord to her grubby and despairing childhood and leaves Vancouver to live in Calgary with him. She also leaves behind her childhood self, which unpleasantly resurfaces at the dinner at the Telfers' home, where she spills her glass and does not know which piece of cutlery to use for which dish. Once again, Arachne's movement has not been successful in outrunning her identity, her self.

It is Thomas who presents her with the means to actually further her development and escape from her past identity, pointing her travelogue into an entirely different direction. Thomas teaches her the little tricks – not unlike Prof. Higgins teaches Eliza³¹ – so that she would be able to pass as a respectable person. But Arachne's true development starts when she takes on the job as underwear sales representative and thereby literally finds new roads to develop her identity by, “a spatialized identity based on a constant sway between discovery of new places and their abandonment” (Paillot 168), an identity not fixed but constantly in motion, fluid. Thus, Thomas introduces her to an effective means to re-inscribe her travelogue and move in the direction of independence, a direction Arachne has longed for from the beginning.

Surprisingly – most of all to herself, probably – she is good at the job. This job offers Arachne enough freedom to be reconciled with her lust for driving and her need for sexual encounters. “Arachne's travels could have been read as quest, through the various flashbacks even as formal exploration of an extended *Bildungsroman* [...]. However, Arachne's travels do not end [...] [in a] positioning of the subject with a ‘stable’ and balanced identity” (Becker, *Gothic* 237). Rather, Arachne inverts her

³⁰ The reference here is to George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*.

³¹ The reference here is to George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*.

development again to flee from this balanced identity, driven once more by the longing to follow up on her travelogue of independence.

With the decision to skip bail and to break the law, Arachne leaves behind her respectable self and by and by regresses into her previous identity as an outcast, a self-reliant criminal trusting only her own instincts of survival, independent of all societal conventions and expectations. This regressive process becomes definitive once she attacks Dougall McKay behind the bar, echoing a scene in her life as a leader of a teenage street gang.³² Her actions after this attack lead to a new facet of her identity. Instead of developing her balanced identity further and evolving into a respectable woman with a loving man by her side, she chooses to discard respectability and follow the path that leads her to a criminal identity, a route already engraved on her cortex by her upbringing.

Arachne's identity and her unstable development are mirrored in her travels, manifested in her travelogue of independence. "Aritha van Herk promotes no definite identity [...]. Arachne's identity is intensified by the confrontation with the multiple spaces she discovers; she transforms herself according to new places and situations" (Paillot 171). She travels from the gentle landscape of the prairie, where she lives in relative stability with Thomas, to the rugged and wild northern landscape, a visual indicator to the reader that her life is in the process of changing dramatically with the change of scenery.

Her flight north is necessary, since it is the sort of landscape that offers the perfect backdrop for her disappearing act. Aritha van Herk has chosen this landscape with care, as she "hears the silence, feels the cold, recognizes the mystery and power of North to erase, efface, invisible her" (Grace, *North* 40) – describing the ultimate destination in her travelogue of independence.

It can be said, in a nutshell, that Arachne's character does have the possibility of a positive development. Her travels help her not only to explore regions she has not seen before, but also support her with an occupation which allows her to make the most of her talents and her idiosyncrasies. When Arachne is at her best, however, when she has

³² Compare van Herk, *Address* 156.

won the sales award and life with Thomas is going really well, she sabotages her own life by making a series of faulty decisions, starting with Josef's abduction. From that point in the novel onwards, Arachne's travels do not serve anymore to develop her character, but are simply acts of escape in a spiraling journey which has to lead to her ultimate independence and its inborn fulfillment. Arachne does not only run from the law, but actually runs from the possibility of a respectable life which would have been the consequence, had she continued to follow the previous road of development. And for Arachne, respectability would have been equal to the death of her self. Thus, "*No Fixed Address* encapsulates escapism from prescribed limits and Arachne's liberation coincides with oblivion and the erasure of borders" (Paillot 171), leaving a completely new option of following up on a travelogue open to the character. In the end, "Arachne escapes the (en)closure of her story in [an] incessant process: she 'arrives' in motion, in a helicopter, beyond the spiderweb of roads – and the web of the text – that have contained her movements" (Becker, *Gothic* 236). Thus, the travelogue depicting the development of her identity, of her character, has led her on the only possible road: the road of unconditional independence.

5.3 J.L.: Finding Herself

If one considers Arachne's travels and her subsequent escape from a freezing of her identity as one end of a spectrum, "the psychological and sexual frontiers that J.L. has to overcome" (Mott 99) in *The Tent Peg* to find and establish her own identity can be seen as the other end of the spectrum of a travelogue of independence.

As noted previously, Gardiner's concept of female identity formation can partly be used to consider questions of identity of literary characters as well. It finds its limitations, however, in characters such as J.L., as the reader never learns much about her forming years or the outside world beyond her experience in the Yukon. Thus, in *The Tent Peg* the development process is concentrated on a "young woman's efforts to establish her autonomy portrayed in terms of a spiritual quest" (Jones, "Restoring" 416) to find access to a balanced identity through her personal travelogue of independence.

When J.L. decides to apply for the job as a bush cook, she is looking for a possibility of escape, an escape not only from urban life but from a life she finds more and more demanding and complicated. She does not want to deal with the realities of imperfect relationships but does not give up men completely because “[she is] looking for a good one” (van Herk, *Tent* 106). In addition, she is not happy with her life as a student, is not really interested in sociology. The only positive experience mentioned is her friendship to Deborah, who is her complete opposite, and who finds it difficult to understand J.L.’s disillusionment, thereby unwittingly initiating J.L.’s travelogue of independence.

In the course of the novel, it becomes clear that J.L. is actually trying to escape from her life in Edmonton, as well as from herself. She believes that she can find peace up north by being alone and by not being constantly confronted with men and the problems they create.

However, J.L. has made a crucial mistake in her assumptions and her journey into isolation actually confronts her more acutely with the true problems that are bothering her, with the essential challenges of her travelogue of independence. While outwardly hiding her true identity behind a boyish appearance, always pulling the fedora hat low over her brow, J.L. tries to convince herself inwardly that the problem lies with other people around her and not within herself. When she is forced to deal with the limited life in the Yukon, the “inner development partly substitutes for the lack of outward distractions in the daily routine of their isolated lives” (Nischik 116). She has no other option but to live with the situation one way or another, coming to terms with the obstacles and hindrances she is faced with in the course of the travelogue. At first, J.L. tries to isolate herself from the camp crew, keeping everyone at a distance so that she does not have to deal with them – and herself for that matter. Scenes like the rifle shooting, the rock slide or the appearance of the bear show her the interconnectedness of things in the Yukon and instigate processes of inner development. It is, for instance, after the rock slide that J.L. sits down to cry and allows something from deep inside her to surface. After the rock slide and the inner realization that has begun to grow within her, J.L. starts to connect to the men as “they’re finally coming clear to [her]” (129) and starts to acknowledge their roles within her travelogue, her psychological journey. The men in turn feel the change in her attitude and start to ask her for guidance “coming to

[her] one by one, pouring their pestilence into [her] ears” (165) in hope of being absolved by her – which J.L. eventually does by helping them to see the truth.

The characters of *The Tent Peg* do not only have – as already noted in chapter 3.2.3 – direct or indirect influence on the outcome of J.L.’s travelogue of independence, they are also in turn subjected to change instigated by her. This summer’s experience has a strong and lasting influence on the men, allowing them to finally solve problems that have preoccupied them for a long time. As a result, the encounter with J.L. leaves a permanent mark in their lives, changing it to the positive:

For the last ten years, **Mackenzie** has been troubled by the question why his wife left him, taking the children along. This unresolved question stops him from looking into the future and holds him captive in the past, a condition revealed by the fact that he still lives in the big family home he built. J.L. helps Mackenzie realize that he could not have done anything to stop his wife from leaving, because it was not his decision to make. “She left for herself. You were a good man but you couldn’t give 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. [...] The very idea that you could allow her or prevent her. That’s why she left” (195). J.L. helps him with another problem as well. Mackenzie thinks that he has lost touch with the reality of women because he did not recognize J.L. as a woman. One evening, J.L. follows him to his tent “so that [he] could get a sense of it again, a woman, the way a woman feels” (206). She allows him to undress her slowly and lets him feel her skin, her body before concluding with “a great groaning circle of a kiss” (206), thereby acknowledging their connection as “the kiss is a religious symbol of spiritual union” (Tresidder 115). And Mackenzie is certain: “I will never forget” (220).

Thompson equally struggles with his relationship back home. His girlfriend Katie is a dancer and he does not want to choose between his work as a geologist, which involves long field trips in summer, and his girlfriend at home. J.L. assures him that he can negotiate the two worlds with each other and tells him to “[b]e happy with her when [he has] her, be happy with the mountains when [he’s] here” (151).

Ivan is the only one who is not consumed by a desire since he lives it: his flying. However, he is consumed by his fear of dying in a crash. But J.L. is quick to reassure him, that “[he] won’t get killed flying. [He]’ll die in bed” (180), and he believes her, letting his fear dissolve.

Franklin is the most spiritual of the characters, thus, his most pressing desire is to introduce J.L. to his spiritual world, but she refuses. Instead, she leaves her own version of a spiritual reminder of this summer with Franklin. J.L. has made little cloth squares filled with dried moss and left one in his bag: “The small red square smells the way she smelled, it has that faint lemony scent of the tundra. [...] [It] makes me see that in something so small, so pure, there is perfection” (217). At last, J.L. has allowed him to see a little piece of her spiritual view of the world.

Hearne is consumed by the desire to take the perfect photograph, stalking J.L. with his camera all summer long. He finally succeeds in taking it when J.L. hammers a stake into the ground at the claim staking. He captures “the tableau of her movement [...] hammering the stake into everything [she has] ever known” (203).

Before the summer in the Yukon camp, **Hudson** was sure he wanted to be a geologist. But in the course of the summer he is ready to give up and return home and asks J.L. for advice. After their talk, Hudson realizes that “[he] let [Jerome] think that [he] won’t resist. [He doesn’t] have to do anything, [he] just [has] to make him understand that [he] would resist” (163) – which he then proves to Jerome in a fight shortly after. Hudson is so focused on the overwhelming enormity of the landscape and the problematic working relationship with Jerome, that he does not realize he has to re-establish his self-worth, both as a man and as a geologist. It is by not allowing Jerome to abuse him any further that Hudson regains his emotional equilibrium and also earns his place among the camp crew.

Milton is at first taken aback by the presence of a woman in camp, which was supposed to be all male. But as time progresses, he also sees the potential in the situation of having a girl around: “I’m waiting for a chance to ask her how you kiss a girl. She could tell me” (192), Milton is sure. He never gets a chance to ask, but one

night he bears silent witness to the intimate scene between Mackenzie and J.L. and the “terror and joy hammered in [him]. That is how you make a kiss” (205).

Cap tries to seduce J.L. from the first moment she is mentioned to him. One day, when she is in the shower, Cap joins her there. To his surprise “she opens her arms [... and then] her face is cradled against [his] chest and her hands caress [his] back, moving softly” (186). Cap does not react the way he intended, but he just cries as “[f]or a moment only the silken feel of her body hammers in [his] temple [and he is] not even remembering sex, not even getting a hard-on” (186). Cap realizes then and there that J.L. will always be there to hug and comfort him, but also that he will “never make love to her” (186).

By the process of opening up to the men’s problems and helping them work out the solutions to them, J.L. also opens up new avenues of development for herself. She thus sets out on a psychological and spiritual journey, traced by her travelogue of independence, that leaves both her and the other camp members permanently altered. All of them grow with their respective psychological quests over the summer.

The action of *The Tent Peg* involves a journey from ‘the outside world’ (57) to ‘the Wernecke mountains’ (33), from the outside to inside, from down to up, from town to field, from context complex in its social and cultural structures to one dominated by raw nature and ritualized and simplified by severe limitations on time, number of people, and supplies. (Davey 173)

J.L. finally finds her peace, the true destination of her travelogue of independence, when she becomes aware as well that she had issues that needed to be solved. She must realize by traveling through a myriad of psychological landscapes that are mirrored in the rough beauty of the Yukon valley, that her travel to the north was an attempt to escape both her life and problems in the city. Her journey north develops into a journey towards herself when the men in the camp have come clear to her and so has she. On the last evening, J.L. is “celebrating [her]self, victory, peace regained. And in their faces [she sees her] transfiguration, themselves transformed” (218). Thus, J.L.’s travelogue of independence does not lead her to an independence from the people surrounding her, as she had thought at the outset, it rather leads her closer to these people and consequently to herself. She gains independence from her psychological misconceptions that kept her trapped inside herself.

The problems of the men J.L. encounters during the summer stand for the different paths and turnings which appear in her labyrinthine travelogue. She decides on

how she wants to continue her journey in the way she reacts to the camp crew, each decision representing a crossroads in her labyrinth. J.L. does not only succeed in reaching the destination of her own journey, her personal travelogue of independence, she also leads the men onto their respective right tracks. As a consequence, the camp crew undergoes a psychological development in different areas as well. "Such moments of self-recognition are a form of exploration and discovery paralleling the survey for a mineral wealth to which the team devote their working hours" (Jones, "Centrique" 75), and in which they also succeed with the finding of a potential gold mine.

6 Conclusion

No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey and *The Tent Peg* are novels exemplary of modern Canadian literature and the inherent process of identity-finding in a country highly influenced by its vastness and the geographical realities connected to it. Even though both novels can hardly be considered to be westerns or ‘northerns’ by either setting or plot, the literary ancestry of these Canadian genres continuously hovers between the lines. The same holds true for another genuine Canadian genre: travel accounts.

The two novels discussed in this thesis draw on this literary ancestry but develop it into an entirely new direction, the fictional travelogue. What is more, van Herk carries the concept of traveling as a basis for character development further and allows her heroines to follow travelogues which lead them to independence – though independence means something different to both of them:

Arachne Manteia finds her ultimate independence in leaving a structured life, personal ties and generally conventional maps behind, to disappear into the vastness of northern Canada and off the map all together. She thereby effectively escapes from herself and a possible progressive development in a societally accepted future with a loving man at her side.

J.L., on the contrary, is induced by her travelogue to overcome a multitude of obstacles to find her independence in the end by unearthing her true self and acknowledging the relationships to the people around her. She has to learn that she cannot ignore the people around her; otherwise their problems are eventually bound to crush her as well. Emotional stasis and escapism are left behind, and she is rewarded with fresh insights and reciprocal relationships to the other camp members, preparing the ground for a successful return to her life in the city.

The novels have in common that landscape and its mapping are crucial for the plot and for the development of the characters: “[t]he slippage between topographical and mental maps surfaces increasingly as the chapters multiply. Cartography becomes

the articulation between the land, the body and the self” (Paillot 172). Arachne travels a large portion of Canadian landscape in an effort to free herself from societal conventions and eventually succeeds and leaves mapped territory behind altogether. As the development of her character evolves, so does the landscape, stressing the concept of the reader following her in her travelogue.

J.L., on the other hand, stays within the confinement of the Yukon Mountains. The landscape in the case of *The Tent Peg* is not a passive backdrop, but acts as a supportive character in the novel. J.L. is induced by the mountains to face the source of her problems, which triggered her escape into this area in the first place, and to succeed in finding the right path leading her to fulfill her travelogue of independence.

Aritha van Herk likes to re-inscribe existing texts, ideas and myths with new meanings, most likely with a feminist agenda in mind. In *Mapping and Historiography in the Contemporary Canadian Literature in English*, Nicola Renger accordingly states that “Aritha van Herk’s earlier novels *A Tent Peg* [sic] and *No Fixed Address* challenge fixed positions of women in the geographical, historical, and social landscape of a patriarchal society” (Renger 175). The protagonists of the two novels, Arachne and J.L., invade male territory and slip into male occupations to disrupt preconceptions and create new paths. In the case of J.L., even postcolonial practices such as claim staking, are inverted in the plot. Still, the novels remain what they were intended to – namely pieces of fiction and not textual criticism – and never overstress either feminist or postcolonial conceptions.

Postmodernist techniques offer a myriad of possibilities for van Herk to include different ideas and rewrite them, inserting different genres. This is also frequently attributed to feminist writers as “women writers claim their textual space by disruptive tactics, subverting conventions of realism by shifts into fantasy or romance, by mixing genres so that one code is superimposed upon another” (Howells, “Gender” 72), creating entirely new approaches to texts. This is mirrored in the narrative and temporal structure of the novels and presents an interesting link to how travelogues are structured and told.

To conclude, Aritha van Herk has created two novels in which the character developments of the heroines coalesce with the physical features of the landscape they inhabit to create two entirely different, but equally demanding travelogues of independence.

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Summary - Zusammenfassung in deutscher Sprache

Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit befasst sich mit den Romanen *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey* und *The Tent Peg* der zeitgenössischen kanadischen Autorin Aritha van Herk. Die beiden Romane erzählen in einer Form, die in dieser Diplomarbeit als fiktive Reiseberichte bezeichnet werden, die Entwicklung der Protagonistinnen der beiden Romane hin zu deren Unabhängigkeit.

Bevor aber die beiden Romane einer genauen Analyse unterzogen werden, wird in Kapitel 2 der literarische Hintergrund für die Analyse bzw. für die beiden Romane etabliert. Die Frage von kanadischer Identität ist nicht zuletzt in der Literatur eine bis dato ungelöste und soll auch in dieser Arbeit nicht versucht werden zu lösen. Dennoch gibt es in der Literatur besonders hinsichtlich postmoderner Tendenzen bis hin zum sogenannten ‚Magischen Realismus‘ eine Art roter Faden, der sich durch die moderne kanadische Literatur zieht. Dieser ist auch in den beiden vorliegenden Romanen klar erkennbar und inhaltlich relevant.

Kapitel 3 beginnt jeweils mit einer kurzen Zusammenfassung der Romane, bevor die formalen Aspekte, wie deren Struktur, die generelle Art der Erzählweise sowie Erzählzeit, Erzählrhythmus und Erzählperspektive analysiert werden. Auch die Rolle der ‚Notizbücher über eine vermisste Person‘ als Stilmittel im Roman wird besprochen. Durch die Analyse werden auf dieser formalen Ebene vorhandene Parallelen zu Reiseberichten hervorgehoben, bevor dies über den Inhalt der Romane erfolgt. Zusätzlich werden neben den Protagonistinnen die anderen relevanten Charaktere analysiert. Der besondere Fokus liegt dabei auf der Rolle, die diese Charaktere in Bezug auf die Entwicklung der Protagonistinnen im Rahmen ihrer „Reise in die Unabhängigkeit“ (Travelogues of Independence) spielen.

In Kapitel 3 findet sich zusätzlich ein kurzer Exkurs, der mögliche literarische Vorfahren von *No Fixed Address* in den pikaresken und Schauerromanen (Gothic novels) des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts identifiziert. Diese Genres finden jedoch auch in deren Ausprägung in einem Roman des 20. Jahrhunderts ihre Grenzen.

Ein weiterer Exkurs in Kapitel 3 beschäftigt sich mit den Hintergründen der Namen, die die Charaktere in *No Fixed Address* und *The Tent Peg* tragen. Neben Quellen, die sich auf die Entdeckerzeit in Kanada beziehen, verwendet die Autorin auch die griechische Mythologie und die Bibel als Quellen und Inspiration, immer mit einem feministischen Hintergedanken dabei.

In Kapitel 4 wird anschließend die Bedeutung von Kartographie im Allgemeinen und die Bedeutung von Landkarten im Speziellen für die Reise der beiden Protagonistinnen beleuchtet. Arachne Manteia, die Heldin in *No Fixed Address*, verwendet für ihre berufsbedingten Reisen als Unterwäschevertreterin reale Landkarten, und ihr Lebensgefährte ist von Beruf Kartograph. Im Gegensatz dazu hat J.L., die Heldin in *The Tent Peg*, wenig mit Karten im physischen Sinne zu tun, da sie Soziologie-Studentin ist und im Sommer als Köchin arbeitet. Vielmehr durchlebt sie einen Sommer lang die psychologischen Landschaften mit allen dazugehörigen Hindernissen, während sie physisch in einem Geologen-Camp im isolierten Yukon festsitzt. Sie nutzt diesen Sommer, um sozusagen die Landkarte ihres eigenen Lebens umzuschreiben. Den realen Bezug zu Landkarten bieten die Geologen, mit denen sie sich im Camp befindet, da ihre tägliche Arbeit von Karten geprägt ist.

Kartographie hat neben der offensichtlichen Dimension allerdings besondere Implikationen für eine Autorin, noch dazu wenn sie Kanadierin ist. Auf der einen Seite stellt van Herk einen feministischen Bezug her, in dem ihre Protagonistinnen männliche Rollen übernehmen und diese völlig umschreiben; auf der anderen Seite bringt van Herk post-koloniale Blickwinkel ein, in dem sie immer wieder Bezüge zu Beispielen von kanadischem Kolonialismus und der Entdeckerzeit herstellt.

Kapitel 5 konzentriert sich auf die Essenz der Reiseberichte: die Bewegung und das Begehren, das der Bewegung, der Reise vorangeht. Dieses Begehren, das letztendlich die Bewegung auslöst, ist untrennbar mit dem Selbst der Reisenden verbunden. Arachne und J.L. haben unterschiedliche Beweggründe, warum sie sich auf ihre Reisen begeben. Bei beiden hinterlässt die Reise allerdings unauslöschliche Effekte in ihrer Identität, die schließlich das Ziel dieser Reise definieren. Während Arachne von einem geordneten Leben in ein undefiniertes, unkartographiertes Nichts verschwindet und sich durch ihre Flucht effektiv selbst von der Landkarte ihres Lebens löscht, findet J.L. aus dem psychologischen Labyrinth dieses Sommers, mit all den Hindernissen in Form der Männer, die sie im Camp umgeben, heraus und startet damit eine Entwicklung hin zu einem neuen Selbst, einer neuen und stabilen Identität.

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6/2008	Projektmanagement – Schwerpunkt Arbeitstechnik und Projektorganisation für Allgemeinbedienstete, Personalentwicklung der Universität Wien
10/2007	Typo3 Einführung für RedakteurInnen, Zentraler Informatikdienst Universität Wien
5/2007	Teams organisieren – führen – motivieren, WIFI Wien
4/2007	Gewaltfreie Kommunikation am Arbeitsplatz, WIFI Wien
07/2003	Quark Xpress – Fortgeschrittene, WIFI Wien
04 - 05/2003	Quark Xpress – Einführung, WIFI Wien
02 - 03/2003	Macromedia Freehand, WIFI Wien

BERUFSERFAHRUNG

Seit 04/2005	Universität Wien , DLE Öffentlichkeitsarbeit und Veranstaltungsmanagement im Bereich Publikationen & Corporate Design
07/2002 - 07/2007 (Selbstständig)	DAS ZIEGELHAUS PR- und Marketingbetreuung
04/2004 - 01/2005	Fiebinger, Polak, Leon & Partner Rechtsanwälte Betreuung des Bereichs PR und Marketing/interne u. externe Kommunikation
04/2002- 02/2004	DORDA BRUGGER JORDIS Rechtsanwälte GmbH PR und Marketing/interne und externe Kommunikation
02/ - 04/2002	OSZE – Organisation für Sicherheit und Zusammenarbeit in Europa Volontariat in der Press and Public Information Section
02/2001 - 02/2002	Steps Ahead Language Forum Kurse für Englisch und Deutsch als Fremdsprache; Mitarbeit im Marketing
10/1998 - 01/2001	International Language Services Kurse für Englisch, Übersetzungen; Mitarbeit im Marketing
07/2000 - 08/2000	Fernsehstation A-Channel, Winnipeg, Kanada Praktikum im Bereich Promotions/Sales & Marketing
07/2000 - 08/2000	Radiostation CKUW 95.9fm in Winnipeg, Kanada Praktikum (Moderation von einstündigen Livesendungen; Gestaltung eigener Beiträge; Produktion von Station Ids und Jingles)
07/1999 - 11/1999	Schiklub Rottenmann Erstellung der Broschüre „70 Jahre Schiklub Rottenmann“
08/1998 und 08/1999	Blick – Regionalzeitung in der Obersteiermark Recherche und Verfassen von Artikeln

SPRACHKENNTNISSE

Deutsch	Muttersprache
English	Verhandlungsfähig; fließend in Wort und Schrift
Französisch	Durchschnittlich in Wort und Schrift
Spanisch, Italienisch	Grundkenntnisse

EDV-KENNTNISSE

Microsoft Word, Excel und Power Point und entsprechende Macintosh-Programme
Adobe InDesign, Photoshop, Acrobat Professional; Microsoft Expression Media
Microsoft Outlook und Internet Explorer, Mozilla Thunderbird und Firefox
Typo3