

The Dutch Canadian Experience
A Study of Perspectives

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Department of English
Lakehead University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts

by
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this study is for
our immigrant parents,
who had the vision and
courage to begin again
in Canada

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Introduction

Although my family immigrated to Canada from the Netherlands when I was one year of age, I have always been aware of the fact that I have no birthright to this country which is my home. I have always been aware of two points of view in my life and have spent much emotional energy balancing this tension.

This dissertation provided me with an avenue to examine the visions of artists of Dutch Canadian heritage who, like myself, experienced this dualism. Their literary expressions of this dualism permitted me to explore the inherent tensions and determine what unique resolutions they may have discovered along the way.

The Canadian attitude to the ethnic and cultural diversity in our society is a changing one. Our federal government takes pride in Canada's multicultural mosaic, recognizing it as a rich resource in which all Canadians share. The ethnic dimension of Canadian society, past and present, is one that needs

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examination if we are to understand fully the contours and nature of Canadian society and identity. Studies of Canadian history and literature have been largely controlled by the people of British or French origin. Due perhaps to fewer numbers, difference in keenness of sense of origin and identity, the immigrant experience itself, and the sheer force of Canadianism, other groups have been relatively silent until quite recently. Groups such as the Dutch, who have established themselves in Canada within the last hundred years or so, have traditions, values and visions they cherish, and particular members of this group have begun to express those in imaginative works.

Recent government encouragement in Canada's social history and ethnic cultural expression has increased the interest in a variety of expression. The historical perspective is reconstructed by uncovering the facts of immigration. But, as Aritha van Herk points out,

... the facts are never enough. Over time and remembrance they melt and swirl, change. "The truth is -- "we say, when the truth is a wide, undefinable circle around the facts."¹

It is the intent of this study to discover some of the trails the imagination has followed, some of the truths

¹Aritha van Herk, "Introduction", To All Our Children: The Story of the Postwar Dutch Immigration to Canada, ed. A. van der Mey (Jordan Station: Paideia Press, 1983), p.11.

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circling the facts. Such imaginative expression of the Dutch Canadian experience, the voice I myself was unsure of, is increasingly being heard in Canada in addition to that of historical perspective.

This thesis is not a comprehensive survey of the literature written by Canadians of Dutch heritage which covers a range from poetry and prose, to film and drama. This study concentrates on three writers whose works, which include poetry, short stories and novels, are an exploration of Canada through the eyes of immigrant-strangers. Hugh Cook was born in the Netherlands and immigrated to Canada with his family at the age of seven, while John Terpstra and Aritha van Herk, both second generation immigrants, were born a few years after the settlement of their families. All are aware of the fortunate and yet difficult position of living in two cultures. Each has an understanding of the differences between what the Dutch immigrant left behind and what he found here, and of the process involved in the transplantation and transformation.² The tension created by this bifurcated awareness is at the centre of their writing and often the impetus behind it.

These artists most clearly confirm the pattern of

²I will be reverting to the use of the inclusive pronoun "he" unless the context states otherwise.

imaginative development as identified by Northrop Frye in the conclusion to Literary History of Canada and in The Educated Imagination. What gives rise to the imaginative voice, he believes, is the contest of a stranger trying to fit into an alien geography and cultural landscape: a "re-rooting" and "a re-routing".³ These writers have moved beyond the merely descriptive account, the lament for the lost homeland, and the struggle for Canadianization typical of the stage of physical survival, adjustment and building a home. Each has used his experience to reconstruct the metaphoric journey of an immigrant-stranger seeking a second homecoming. The re-created story is concerned with psychological, spiritual, and metaphysical becoming and change, the journey towards self-knowledge and regaining of identity.

This thesis is divided into four principal parts. The first chapter provides the context of immigration, outlining the idea both as physical fact and as metaphor for imaginative growth. It also identifies the specific attributes that distinguish both fact and imaginative growth in the case of Canadians of Dutch heritage. The second chapter examines in some detail

³Northrop Frye, "Conclusion", Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English, gen. ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), p.824.

the work of poet John Terpstra, who deals with the experience of the first stage immigrant and his perception of the physical leaving and arriving. The third chapter examines the fiction of Hugh Cook which reflects a transition stage between physical fact and the metaphoric journey. The writing of Aritha van Herk, studied in the fourth chapter, defines the immigration process as almost entirely imaginative.

The fiction made real by these Dutch Canadians is one of self-discovery, of what it means to be Canadian. Such knowledge can never exclude a sense of continuity with one's past. A study of the immigrant experience enables the reader to witness the displacement, that process of loss of identity encountered by the newcomer. He, too, learns what it means to lose everything but a dream. The physical reality found by the immigrant upon arrival on Canadian shores is incongruous with that which he had imagined. The immigrant journey is never complete. Upon adjusting his eyes to the physical landscape, the immigrant must set out again to explore the interior landscape in search of discovering for himself what it means to be truly Canadian and truly human.

Chapter I

The Immigrant Experience

One way of entering the literary work produced by Dutch Canadian writers is to see it in the context of the immigrant experience generally and to then sift out and clarify the vision and voice that are uniquely theirs. The danger to avoid is to explain the literature in terms of a specific pattern or end, for as Robert Kroetsch points out, "There is a kind of exegesis that is compelled out of writing"; yet in pursuing this exegesis there is no formula or absolute structure that can explain narrative, or the world for that matter. As quoted in R. Lecker, the critic's role, Kroetsch says, is to "elaborate the doubt that our stories were intended to contain," for what the work acts out is "not meaning, but the possibility of meanings."¹

The immigrant experience is a process of becoming

¹Robert Lecker, Robert Kroetsch (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986), pp.4-5.

and involves a dialectic, a balance between dying and casting off the old and painful rebirth, a transforming process. This experience is timeless and the feelings of strangeness and alienation associated with it are characteristic of immigrant literature.

The literature deals with a contrast between the view of the physical experience as a one time journey from Europe to Canada, a period of re-adjustment and eventual 'arrival' as bona fide Canadians, in contrast to the view which transposes this sense of displacement and adjustment into a metaphor of an on-going process in which one never truly achieves a sense of arrival and homecoming. The initial experience is a single straightforward movement towards arrival at a central dominant Canadian culture, a culture defined primarily by English Canadian values and conventions. The perception of the immigrant at this stage is that arrival will mean acceptance, permanence, and conclusiveness of identification. The succeeding metaphoric journey challenges such a framed reality and offers what Linda Hutcheon calls a peripheral "ex-centric" position with no definitive arrival.²

The immigrant experience can be visualized as a

²Linda Hutcheon, "Introduction", The Canadian Postmodern: A Study in Contemporary English Canadian Fiction (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.3.

continuously enlarging vision, expanding concentric circles always related to the axial life experience itself. The telling of the experience depends, then, on the writer's position and point of view as he or she grows, in Margaret Atwood's words, as "eye-witness" and "I-witness".³ The movement is a three stage process which is roughly, but not exclusively, aligned with first, second and third generation immigrants. That vantage is further determined by gender. It is primarily male writers and critics, such as R.E. Rashley, who see the immigration experience as linear, proceeding from removal to transformation to 'arrival' of the whole group in three perceivable and carefully delineated steps. Female artists and recent critics including Hutcheon, oppose such a centralizing tendency and view the entire process of immigration as on-going in a metaphorical sense, even after the landing. At least this is true for women who have to continue to define themselves as separate and different, which is in essence what the process of immigration is, for theirs is a history of asserting themselves against traditions in which they have been subsumed.

"Literature," says Frye, "is not a dream world: it's two dreams ... that are focused together like a

³Ibid. p.11.

pair of glasses, and become fully conscious vision."⁴ One dream expressed in literature is the physically grounded dream of possibility or "reality." This vision of ordinary life of the immigrant involves the physical leaving of home and arrival on new shores, building a home, adapting to the new landscape, and eventual acculturation or Canadianization. This version of reality is documented in the descriptive "factual" accounts of tourists, explorers and settlers. The letters, diary and autobiographical writing of Dutch pioneers, Willem de Gelder and Klaas de Jong, are examples of this mode of writing and deal strictly with the process of "re-rooting," a process entirely physical and complete once they arrived and learned to speak the new language.⁵ The second generation

⁴Northrop Frye, "The Keys to Dreamland", The Educated Imagination (Toronto: CBC Learning Systems, 1963), p.43.

⁵a) Klaas de Jong, Cauliflower Crown 1872-1959, ed. Martha Knapp (Saskatoon: Western Producer Book Service, 1973).

de Jong was a Dutch immigrant who came to Western Canada in 1893 and who, after years of struggle, triumphed as a famous market gardener. He was chosen the Cauliflower King of North America in the Cleveland cauliflower contest of 1926 (plate 9).

de Jong's daughter, Martha Knapp, edited this autobiographical account of immigration and settlement in the early 1900's. de Jong describes the culture shock upon arrival, the fight for survival, the feelings of alienation from both the former Dutch homeland and this new country, and the process of making Canada his permanent home.

writers, such as John Terpstra and Hugh Cook, have taken the physical realization of the dream and mythologized it.⁶ These two writers imaginatively recreate the experience of the first generation immigrants and move into an exploration of the second dream, that of metaphorical possibility. Both writers take the point of view of outsiders, of the immigrant trying to fit into the established Canadian structure. Their work reflects the pain of a generation in transition. The journey is often placed in the imaginative framework of biblical or classical myths of flight and exile, rebirth, gardens, and regaining of identity. Terpstra and Cook associate the immigrant experience with the spiritual journey towards the final revelation and homecoming.

b) Herman Ganzevoort, ed. and transl., "Introduction", A Dutch Homesteader on the Prairies Letters of Willem de Gelder 1910-1913. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973).

de Gelder's letters resemble the journals kept by Susanna Moodie. He provides practical advice to other would-be Dutch immigrants on matters of physical survival, homesteading, farm supplies needed, and recommendations on how best to adapt to this new culture and landscape. In many ways, de Gelder fits the stereotype of the hard-working, upright, intelligent Dutchman and represents the "desired" settler who is willing to be assimilated.

⁶Hugh Cook was a child at the time of immigration while John Terpstra was born in Canada. In order to differentiate these writers from those who arrived as adults, I shall call both of them second generation immigrants.

Aritha van Herk is a second generation Canadian writer who ventures yet farther into the periphery. For her, the fantastic becomes more real than the factual events. She has used the experience of displacement and alienation to chart the metaphoric journey of fellow Canadians, particularly women, within the Canadian landscape. In her essays and stories, women are portrayed as immigrant-strangers "re-routing" themselves in their own culture in order to define themselves as separate and different.

The literature growing out of the Dutch immigrant experience reflects the two dream worlds in the stages of imaginative growth beginning with the physical journey. Frye points out in the conclusion to Literary History of Canada that our literature is often more significantly studied as part of Canadian life rather than as an autonomous world of literature. The development of our imagination is an intrinsic part of the concrete world of our immediate experience. Our literature tries to lead our imaginations back to our lost identity, initially, as expatriated people, and finally, as whole human beings. From Canadian writing we learn of the literary imagination "as a force and function of life generally," he affirms.⁷ The

⁷Northrop Frye, "Conclusion", Literary History of Canada, p.822.

cultural history of Canada has its own themes of exploration, settlement and development. Frye points out that "these themes relate to a social *imagination* that explores and settles and develops, and the imagination has its own rhythms of growth as well as its own modes of expression."⁸ He believes that what gives rise to this imaginative voice is the struggle of a continually displaced people attempting to find a home for themselves in a hostile environment. Hutcheon would agree, pointing out that contemporary fiction in Canada responds to such social provocations as immigration and feminism and does so "very self-consciously in order to help us recognize that our contemporary culture is made up of events in which we participate as active agents; it is not something outside us that happens to us."⁹

The first way of dealing with the world, notes Frye, occurs at the moment of arrival when the immigrant sees the world objectively, "as something set over against you and not yourself or related to you in any way."¹⁰ Arrival in Canada is like "being

⁸Ibid.

⁹Hutcheon, "Introduction", The Canadian Postmodern, pp.18-19.

¹⁰Frye, "Motive for Metaphor", The Educated Imagination, p.2.

silently swallowed by an alien continent."¹¹ In this process the immigrant loses perspective of the world as it is because he has lost all frame of reference. His past points of orientation no longer apply and the new ones are unfamiliar and inapplicable.

This confrontation splits his mind in two, a split between intellect and emotion. The entire immigrant period is spent attempting to integrate the multiple realities deriving from this cultural schizophrenia and split vision. The language of this initial stage is that of naming, which is the first creative human act. For the mature immigrant this stage is even more intense because for him it first requires an unlearning and renaming. He is, thus, immediately alienated upon arrival because he does not have a language of self-expression and of practical sense. For the immigrant there is a sense of urgency to find a new language, new names to identify the unfamiliar landscape.

The problem of land and space is an obvious feature of the writing of the first generation. The vastness and unorderliness of the Canadian landscape were the first affront to the vision of a people for whom a cultivated, patterned landscape was the backdrop against which they defined themselves. The visual and

¹¹Frye, "Conclusion", Literary History of Canada, p.824.

mental adjustment required and the desire physically to transform the landscape in order to feel at home were additional tension-inducing elements of Dutch immigration. Klaas de Jong's autobiography and Willem de Gelder's letters give graphic accounts of this aspect of culture shock and process of acclimatization.¹²

To the Dutch immigrant, the feeling of identification with the Canadian environment was further delayed because the initial approach of most of

¹²de Jong, Cauliflower Crown, pp.51-52. de Jong describes the visual affront:

I gazed over the prairie from dawn to dusk. It was like the books said, only bigger. It was endless! Like the sky. Here and there names of places were to be seen. Just names, mostly no places. The names were nailed to a post with a board on it on a stationary, empty boxcar. It happened that a boxcar would be shunted some miles away ... ten or a hundred ... and it would take the name of the place with it. Little difference it made to the prairie or the maps, which were not completed yet anyhow.

de Gelder, Letter, A Dutch Homesteader on the Prairies, p.29.

It's very difficult for me to say if I would advise or dissuade S. from coming to Canada. It's easy enough to make someone aware of the disadvantages, or to convince him of the fallacy of the 'land of milk and honey' idea, but what should you do, advise or dissuade? Surely a person has a chance to get ahead here, as he has nowhere else, but in order to get that chance, he has to say goodbye to an awful lot (7 December 1911).

the Dutch Canadians was made under false premises. From his European frame of reference he held an illusion of Canadian life as it was defined for him by the land agents who appealed to his sense of adventure and economy, or by religious tracts which interpreted Canada for him as an empty wilderness to be filled according to divine will. Both presented "magic lantern shows" which defined Canada in a misleading romantic light.¹³ This view of Canada from European shores is inconsistent with that from the St. Lawrence, from the prairie train, or from the new chicken coop home.

R. E. Rashley identifies some of the earliest modes of expression by the first generation immigrants as "transient indicators of emotional disturbance." The British colonist produced a poetry which actively tried "to reduce the new experience to the familiar

¹³Ibid., viii, p.41.

We read the advertisement in the *Nieuws*, about the lectures to be given by Mr. Boer, the retired inspector of the CPR waterworks, those so-called 'irrigated farms.' What a swindle. Janus was there and met dozens of Hollanders who had walked into the trap. They were fleeced by a priest who got so scared he took to his heels. Believe me, those guys get a good salary from the CPR. I could go to the government too, and recruit Hollanders in Holland for emigration to Canada. They would pay me in land, so much land for, so many wealthy Hollanders (28 March 1912).

European terms and record it second hand."¹⁴ Such reluctance to change only impeded the emotional and mental change necessary for "Canadianization." Immigrant writers and writers about immigrants describe a period of existing in spaces between known frames of reference. Frye acknowledges the alienation effected by this stage, pointing out that, though occasionally there may be the feeling of identification, "your habitual state of mind is one of separation" and you feel this is not "the world you want to live in."¹⁵ You cannot remain at this stage of agitation for long for you have a strong urge to give shape to your life. What you want in this stage, says Frye, is a human world and you immediately begin to build a home out of what you see.

The second stage of the imaginative process is that of practical adaptation. The new Canadian reacts in one of two ways. In an expansive reaction, the immigrant retains his optimism, forms a bond with the land, and modifies himself to fit the environment. The immigrant changes from expatriate and foreigner to settler. An alternative is a protective reaction in which the arrival insulates himself in a garrison,

¹⁴R. E. Rashley, Poetry in Canada: The First Three Steps (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1958), p.2.

¹⁵Frye, The Educated Imagination, p.4.

creating a society similar to the one left behind. To maintain such separation results in homesickness and can even lead to madness.¹⁶ Many Dutch initially recreated environments based on what they had left behind, especially the Calvinist immigrants who immediately formed a distinct subculture with a religious centre. In this way they felt protected from their unease by attempting to maintain a Dutch frame of reference, the attempt at replication providing a temporary defence. The attempt at replication was a temporary defence against the unknown social, moral, physical, and psychological environment. Such a typical immigrant reaction is not unlike that of

¹⁶a) Ganzevoort, "Introduction", A Dutch Homesteader on the Prairies, xiii-xiv.

Ganzevoort describes de Gelder's inability to cope with the isolation in the new country and his week-long fits of drunkenness. Ganzevoort concludes that his eventual disappearance and possible suicide is a direct result of his homesickness and sense of displacement. He writes:

He and his fellows personify the toughness, the guilt, and the persistence of the western pioneer. The family traumas, the guilt, and the personal fears which culminated in his disappearance highlight the anguish that all emigrants, old and new, suffer when they take that almost irrevocable step to begin a new life, that very step which leads to a new Canadian identity.

b) Hugh Cook's short story "Homesickness", in Cracked Wheat and other Stories, portrays a woman who is unable to adjust to her new environment. Her depression continues to increase until she is placed in a mental institution.

Susanna Moodie in Roughing It in the Bush. In the case of Dutch immigrants, however, the writing about this pioneer period consists mainly of letters, diaries, and historical accounts.

Perhaps it is typical of an immigrant community that its priorities do not tend to lie initially in the area of fine arts. The first generation of Dutch immigrants was too busy with survival, acculturation and adaptation. It was carving out a place for itself and learning the actual verbal constructs for practical purposes with no time for imaginative writing in the usual sense.

When these immigrants did write, what they produced did not differ typologically from the writing of other ethnic groups. They wrote mainly autobiographical accounts, diaries and letters which described the leaving of the old world and the encounter with the new. As indicated earlier, the first stage of writing is that of naming and adaptation to the environment, trying practically to explain the new world. Similarly, expressions concerning values, such as the religious and theological expressions of faith of the Calvinist immigrants, were not unique in a literary sense. Journals such as "De Gids", for example, expound the virtues of immigration according to the cultural mandate of *Genesis*. Many years later

first generation writers like Tini Ameyde, Lini Grol and William Suk give evidence of such rhetorical achievements defined by Frye as "those that stressed the arguments of religion at the expense of its imagery".¹⁷

It is essential to note at this point that though the first generation was often not equipped to write, it is precisely those experiences with their concomitant conflicts, the feeling of rootlessness, and the feeling that they are trivial and less than completely human, that provided a rich backdrop for the artist in the ethnic community. The sense of being torn from the past and the resulting loss of continuity with one's former self is a recurring theme of exploration by first generation writers who were children at the time of immigration and by some second generation writers seeking to re-establish contact with their roots. Exploration becomes an essential image for the writers examined in subsequent chapters who now express metaphorically the physical journey of their parents.

Henry Beissel sees displacement as a primary reason for the initial silence of the immigrant and

¹⁷Frye, "Conclusion", Literary History of Canada, p.832.

writes, "I am without a country speechless."¹⁸ He firmly believes that the double exile felt by the immigrant, that of isolation from Canadian nationalism as well as from his country of patriation, is part of the Canadian experience. The main source of the immigrant's alienation lies in his inability to grow "that intricate network of roots that reaches far below the conscious mind" in a second language. He continues,

The consequences for the writer are grave, limiting his access to new experience, obstructing the transformation of that experience in terms of the perceptual systems and hidden myths of the community to which they belong, and perhaps most important of all, isolating him from his true potential readers -- the people about whom he writes.¹⁹

The immigrant is silent not only because he must first learn a new language but because he must also develop a new narrative voice to accommodate that new speech. The dilemma is compounded by the requirement that his Canadian audience grow simultaneously. Canadian readers may have to learn to make new associations relative to the Dutch European frame of reference, for example, images of World War II or images referring to the European landscape.

¹⁸Henry Beissel, "Introduction", W. Bauer, A Different Sun (Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1976), p.1.

¹⁹Ibid.

Most first generation Dutch immigrants felt that change was inevitable and tried hard to blend into the Canadian culture. The children were encouraged to learn English quickly. Families tried hard to learn the "Canadian way", strange as it often seemed. An emotional distancing from the Dutch model began to take place. What was not as evident, however, was the inner conflict that developed, a conflict between tradition and innovation which was played out on the inter-generational, family stage. A tension developed between an outer expressed life and desire to blend, and an inner secret "Dutchness" kept hidden as a source of guilt. Again, this tension becomes the theme for imaginative writing.

The most significant stage of imaginative growth, according to Frye, is that where consciousness and practical skill come together. At this stage Frye's stereoscopic glasses blend the two "dreams." Here the imagination has the power of constructing possible models of human experience and the writer compares what he does with what he imagines can be done. The immigrant has experienced a "homecoming" in the physical sense; he is "reborn" as a complete Canadian. Now the newcomer sets off again to reconstruct the concrete human world of immediate experience with its primary forces of love, death, passion and joy. At

this higher level of "becoming" the artist shares the immigrant's experience of simultaneous awareness, an awareness of both the practical and imaginative level. Inherent in this stage is an on-going balance between dying and casting-off the old while experiencing a sense of innovation and transformation towards a new identity of personhood.

The second generation writers studied here examine this antithesis, which is characteristic of change. It is part of the practical adaptation to the new country and involves tensions between parents and children, tradition and new habits, and the dying of the Dutchman and rebirth of a Canadian. It is equally a part of imaginative growth which requires a relinquishing of rational, conventional defining structures in favour of a fantastical transformation. Symmetrical images of borders, frames, photographic images, parallelism and maps emerge, setting one vision within another presenting the effect of spectral variegation. These images are both a spatial blending point between the 'real' and the re-created or imagined world, and a point of refraction where the text permits a possibility of multiple meanings.

To pass through the borders or create new maps enables a movement beyond private or pre-selected visions from one vantage point, which could be one

limited to the Dutch tradition, culture and religion, to multiple perspectives of archetypal dimension. It is at the moment of passing from one vision to another that metamorphosis takes place. The ability to see through the static, fixed photo, map or frame is the moment of freeing oneself up to transformation. These writers have captured the sense of split-personality and multiple realities by taking an imaginative look at the immigrant experience and the on-going process of re-defining a new selfhood from within, without being completely absorbed by the new culture. By examining a different experience they re-figure basic 'Canadian' conventions usually taken for granted.

These writers have started with the world of imagination and worked towards the recognizable world of ordinary experience. The recreated Dutch immigrant experience continually emphasizes the story of flight which is due to the strong effect of a Christian life view in which the Dutch see themselves as descendants of Adam, Abraham and Noah, a part of the larger biblical pattern. The use of the flight metaphor also reflects their search for freedom from political and economic oppression and the effects of World War II.²⁰ Whatever the similarity in general pattern of

²⁰The greatest influx of Dutch immigrants took place immediately after the war years, from 1945 to 1962. See Gordon Oosterman, et al. To Find a Better

the immigrant experience, the working out of the war experience is one of the significant points of difference between writers such as Susanna Moodie and writers such as Hugh Cook, John Terpstra, and other Canadian writers of Dutch descent.²¹ These writers feel compelled to pass on the new meanings that war has given to words and images. Our vision is determined by our vantage point and the perspective gained from the black border of this death is part of our heritage forever and must be communicated.

The theme of flight gives the sense of a people living on an edge, never fully comfortable or at home. Rudy Wiebe points out that his family has been in Canada for generations and yet each Wiebe "awaits that knocking on the door he has always known will come."²² The hand of the persecutor is part of his heritage. The literature often expresses the idea that even though immigration was a personal choice the

Life, Aspects of Dutch Immigration to Canada and the United States 1920 - 1970 (Grand Rapids: The National Union of Christian Schools, 1975), pp.91-93.

²¹Maria Jacobs, a Toronto poet and stagewriter, has written three books of poetry which detail the profound effect the Second World War had on her vision. The volume entitled Precautions Against Death (Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1983) includes her best impressionistic poems.

²²Rudy Wiebe, "Sailing to Danzig", Dutch Quintet: A Collection of Poems and Stories by Dutch Canadians, ed. H. Ruger (Windsor: Netherlandic Press, 1988), p.19.

immigrant feels cheated by the process of expatriation since he is unable to escape old memories and must deal with the additional unexpected trauma of alienation.

Distance and space are recurrent symbols in much Canadian literature. The Dutch concern has a unique expression because of preoccupation with land and space in the motherland. This symbol is important in Aritha van Herk's writing, too, though she does not refer to the Dutch perspective. She examines the effect of vantage point on the charting of landscape in Canadian prairie writers.

As pointed out earlier in this chapter, the first generation Dutch immigrant exhibited a strong desire to harmonize with the Canadian landscape while maintaining an acute consciousness of land and space. This sensibility, coupled with the Dutch attribute of self-initiative, is transferred into metaphor by the second generation artist. The need to explore, map, subdivide, and garden the landscape is prevalent in the work of many Dutch Canadian writers. In particular, John Terpstra sizes up waterways, reclaims land, and looks beneath the earth; Hugh Cook watches with the critical eye of the child as his father gardens according to Dutch patterns; and Aritha van Herk charts unknown landscapes, re-routing roads and perspectives, searching beyond known boundaries. All three have an

urgent need to link the words and the land in order to come to terms with the physical space of the country.

Unique to the writer of Dutch heritage and his most powerful motive for metaphor is the force of Calvinism. Again the reader must discern the truly imaginative from the propagandistic. Two of the writers to be examined, Terpstra and Cook, are truly remarkable Christian writers who write from their particular conviction, offering a spiritual celebration in superb technical form. Their art embodies an all-encompassing Christian view of life in a perfectly natural way. Each examines the attempt of Dutch immigrants to live out their faith in public life and not restrict it to some private realm. Though the Dutch adapted to fit into the Canadian landscape, their principles and values did not change fundamentally. The tension derived from the attempt to live out these values in the larger Canadian culture, a tension increased by the generation gap, is an essential feature of both writers. van Herk was brought up in the Dutch Reformed faith but renounced institutionalized religion and what she perceived as its paternalistic attitudes and patriarchal theologies. The fact that she was raised on the Bible is evident in her recurring use of biblical images and patterns, and her occasional speaking out on such subjects as "Women

and Faith".²³

All of these components are more than ethnic stereotypes; they are part of the "folk-spirit", part of the internal landscape of the Dutch immigrant. Images of gardens, travellers, aliens, images of war and biblical allusions are the stuff of the analogies, metaphors and patterns used to understand the change brought by expatriation and to define the elements of both the physical and the imagined journey. The theme of dislocation, or what Hugh Cook calls "one culture rubbing up against another", is pervasive in the works of all three writers examined here.²⁴ In Terpstra's and Cook's writing it is just that confrontation between cultures, while van Herk draws on the immigrant experience to examine alienation in terms of a masculine/feminine landscape. The theme of transplantation and self-identification within the new landscape is a feature of the works of all three writers.

Some themes found in other immigrant literatures, such as the attempt to make a good living or the pain of assimilation, are not strong features in Dutch

²³I.S. MacLaren, "A Charting of the van Herk Papers", The Aritha van Herk Papers: First Accession, comp. S. Mortensen (Calgary: The University of Calgary Press, 1978), xl.

²⁴A. Dreschel, The Hamilton Spectator (June 28, 1986), p.C1.

Canadian writing. Both Terpstra's and Cook's writing bring out in a colourful manner the traditional Dutch values of thrift, cleanliness, industry, sobriety, level-headedness, and lack of display of intimacy.

Throughout immigrant literature generally there is a search for balance, for the continuing consciousness, as well as an on-going attempt to allay the guilt, discomfort and grief of a seemingly extinguished past. Dennis Duffy comments on the need to reconstruct the physical and spiritual landscape in Gardens, Covenants, Exiles: "Men must give shape to their lives, a shape that thrusts a possible future into their consciousness, a shape whose specific contours link it with past, hallowed forms of explanation."²⁵ This narrative shape makes people, says Wiebe, "aware of their unique and changeable and yet never-changing humanity."²⁶

This narrative shape is supplied to the writing of Dutch Canadians primarily by the narrative patterns of the Bible. For many Dutch writers, in particular the three whose work is studied here, the Bible is a "powerfully rich storehouse of literary material" and

²⁵Dennis Duffy, Gardens, Covenants, Exiles: Loyalism in the Literature of Upper Canada/Ontario (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), p.7.

²⁶Rudy Wiebe, "Introduction", More Stories from Western Canada, ed. R. Wiebe and A. van Herk (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1980), viii.

at the same time it affirms the validity of artistic enterprise.²⁷

The fact that the garden is such an important symbol in Dutch Canadian literature differs in substance and perspective from its widespread use by other immigrant writers. For the Dutch nation, the physical activity of gardening is an economic reality and many Dutch Canadians continued this practice in Canada. Secondly and more important is the perception of humankind's God-given task of gardening. The Dutch Calvinist, though opposed to Christian fundamentalism, affirms the cultural mandate, a concept learned from childhood. Cook explains it thus:

If it has been Catholics and Anglicans who have especially explored the artistic implications of *Genesis* 1, it has been the Calvinists, both in popular stereotype but also in reality, perhaps, who have most understood *Genesis* 3, namely the devastating effects of the fall. But some of the most important ramifications of the doctrine of the human fall into sin that form the heart of a Christian understanding of culture are that despite the fall man did not lose his creaturehood, nor did the fall abrogate God's command to "be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it." The cultural mandate, in other words, held. But the culture has become broken and fragmented, an end in itself, serving the creature instead of the Creator. The Christian writer experiences, as much as anyone, the reality of antithesis, the battle between the truth

²⁷Hugh Cook, "'To Find Just the Right Words'; Faithful Fiction", Inaugural Lecture presented April 1990 upon installation to full professorship at Redeemer College, Hamilton, Ontario, p.10.

and the lie in his art, and that his literary efforts only see through a glass darkly.²⁸

Genesis also contains the affirmation that "whatever was spoiled by the first Adam has been restored by the Second Adam." And it is this promise, says Cook, that permits the Christian cultural stance to be one of "optimism, hope and celebration".²⁹

Some types of religious writing mentioned earlier propagandize, presenting a restrictive view of Dutch Reformed Calvinism. Such a didacticism perpetuates the stereotypic view of Calvinism as bordering on fanaticism and takes a zealous and narrow view of the mandate.

The Dutch Canadian who hears the Bible as scripture and reads it as literature wants to be a gardener in all respects: affirming, symbolizing and celebrating creation. The ultimate motive of his art is his desire to associate and finally to identify himself with the second Adam, thus seeking to achieve a unity between his mind and his environment, seeking the restoration of the garden, as Frye would put it.

The search for continuity, for a sense of belonging in Canada but also for re-establishing a link with what was before, is an important element in much

²⁸Ibid., p.15.

²⁹Ibid.

immigrant literature. The first generation Dutch immigrant felt a sadness at the finality of his expatriation. The immigrant tried to look ahead with new hope for the future. Looking at old photographs and reminiscing about the past were painful. Homesickness was not something he could indulge in. In spite of his resolve, however, old images and patterns keep coming to mind. The second generation artist feels compelled to explore these old patterns of his forebears and rejoin the threads of thoughts, hoping to discover something about himself in the process, some of the truths surrounding the facts recounted by his parents.

Rudy Wiebe, also of Dutch ancestry, whose forefathers immigrated because of religious oppression, captures the continuity of the pattern in a short story "Sailing to Danzig":

This story and all the other stories I will hear from Peter Wiebe are already there in my mother's song as she sings until my father joins her, their voices singing this story which has already taken place but which they will never hear nor speak about sitting at the worn kitchen table in Alberta, Canada, my memory of them like their memories of Moscow....³⁰

It must be pointed out that these themes of dislocation and displacement, the story of flight and alienation, and the ensuing search for pattern and

³⁰Wiebe, "Sailing to Danzig", Dutch Quintet, p.19.

continuity are explored in literature other than that by and about Dutch immigrants, but the Dutch Canadian expression is unique and recurrent.

Through the fiction of writers like Wiebe, Cook, Terpstra, van Herk and others, the reader is able to rediscover lost stories and myths within contemporary time and space. In "The White Rabbit" Cook celebrates that rare moment of joy when he feels that though he may know in part, he is also part of what he knows. We are only recently in this final stage of identification. Many voices and visions of writers of Dutch Canadian heritage remain to be celebrated, thus leaving the Canadian story open to continuing change.

The examination of Dutch Canadian literature reveals a change from looking at the Canadian culture from without to seeing it as an active participant, and catches the rhythm of imaginative growth. Frye has this to say of 'immigrant' art: "the art of a Canadian remains the art of the country of his forebears and the old world heritage of myth and legend remain his heritage... though the desk on which he writes be Canadian." He continues, "...when he attaches himself to the world of literature he discovers, or rediscovers by doing so, something very vital and articulate about

his Canadian environment."³¹ What is elucidated in the art is a Canadian vision, a new way of seeing, unique and valuable because of the transplantation and transformation. The immigrant finds his identity within the literature itself; the writing is part of the process of identification. He withdraws from a country without a mythology and enters into a country with a mythology. Literature is a record of his imagination's transformative power. Naming and mapping, says van Herk, are two ways of making this place more real to the immigrant in some representative kind of way. The naming is a human imposition on the landscape. Mapping, like language, is an act of creation more than of representation. "The conception, the point of view, even the blindness of the maker are always present," she points out.

The only way a country can be truly mapped is with its stories, This is when, as Foucault says, we begin to understand the possibilities of juxtaposition, the proximity of the fantastic to the real.³²

In telling his stories, the Dutch immigrant, too, diagrams not only the world he sees, but his "own

³¹Frye, "Conclusion", Literary History of Canada, p.337.

³²van Herk, "Mapping as Metaphor", Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Kanada-Studien, no. 2 (Jahrgang 1982), pp.76-77. The reference is to Michel Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Science (New York: Random House, 1970), xvi.

vision and interpretation of that world." The story, or the resultant map, is not a mere "tracing of shape, but a means of shaping."³³ The immigrant writer and one who writes about immigrants, then, creates a country with him in it. That new Canada is seen from each person's peculiar cultural stance and unique perspective. His story is his re-creation of the Canadian mythology. He himself is part of the creation. His stories and experiences are a way of mapping the past and re-routing his way into the future. The physical facts of the process of immigration are not necessarily an accurate map for when juxtaposed against the imagined journey the resulting structure changes. There is always, believes van Herk, a tension between the fact and the imagination, an ambiguity between what is actually there and what one believes one will find there.³⁴ Because Dutch immigrants imposed their own visions on the facts, their imagination triumphed so that the imagined, interpreted Canada came back to them as fact. It is the story that we come to believe as reality.

Canadian culture is a moving, living entity. The literature produced by Canadians of Dutch background

³³Ibid.

³⁴Aritha van Herk, "Introduction" To All Our Children, p.11.

has something very significant to teach us about our time which is "an age of dislocation and mass migration in all parts of the globe", says Beissel.³⁵ Though we are very much a people needing a home, roots and identity, we are also increasingly a people of the global village, citizens of the world. The process of immigration and the charting of our progress is an on-going one in this country. Margaret Atwood writes, "We are all immigrants to Canada, even if we were born here".³⁶ The literature allows us to reach beyond our ethnicity, to tap the universal feeling of stranger in all of us, and to share the immigrant experience, thus making us more compassionate to a brother or sister en route.

Memories, stories, and poetry are the very processes through which meaning and identity are woven.

The Canadian writer, Kroetsch believes, is literally a fatherless orphan who must create his voice anew, originating it through the very process of writing it down. "In a sense we haven't got an identity until someone tells our story. The fiction makes us real."³⁷

³⁵Beissel, "Introduction", A Different Sun, p.3.

³⁶Leula Bailey, ed., The Immigrant Experience (Toronto: The MacMillan Co. of Canada Ltd., 1975), p.1.

³⁷Lecker, Robert Kroetsch, p.11.

In the best literature there must be a continual engagement with the problem of what it means to be an immigrant, a stranger, a Dutch Calvinist, a Dutch Canadian, a female Dutch Canadian, a Canadian, which among them amounts to what it means to be human. In Epigrams, Louis Dudek observes that "We have a completely new Canadian literature every twenty years. It just doesn't stand up any longer than that."³⁸

The contributions of new writers force the traditions of Canadian literature to re-evaluated periodically. Upon arrival on Canadian shores the settler strives to relate this objective landscape to himself. He struggles with bifurcated awareness of what he sees and what he feels. Once he chooses names for the new landscape and establishes some memories in this country, he is able to build his home here. Rather than the constant feeling of separation and displacement, the newcomer gains a sense of belonging when he has constructed a human world in the new country. This imposition of oneself upon the landscape is a process of adaptation which gives the immigrant the sense of physical arrival or homecoming, an achievement which is a dead-end in itself and the art produced at this stage serves merely to garrison the

³⁸Louis Dudek, Epigrams (Montreal: D.C. Booker, 1975), p.28.

landscape and centre the immigrant into stasis. Such a structure and the art representing it are restrictive. The immigrant must now move beyond that sense of homecoming towards a level of imagination in order to give multiple possible models of interpreting experience. This metaphoric stage offers the possibility of rare moments of complete vision in which "you feel that although we may know in part, as Paul says, we are also part of what we know."³⁹

When immigrant writing reaches the stage of change and constant "becoming", that art offers visions to other travellers. The physical homecoming is inconsequential in the search for true self-identification. To avoid fixed meaning, closure, conclusiveness, or arrival is to keep telling the story. The ensuing voices contextualize the Canadian landscape from fresh imaginative perspectives and work centrifugally to disperse complacent and conventional points of view. They are, as Hutcheon says, "marginal," "excentric" voices working on the periphery which is "also the frontier, the place of possibility."⁴⁰ The visions and stories of Dutch immigrant travellers permit the reader to explore and

³⁹Frye, "The Motive for Metaphor", The Educated Imagination, p.11.

⁴⁰Hutcheon, "Introduction", The Canadian Postmodern, p.19.

discover new territory, inevitably leading to moments of self-discovery, moments when immigrant, artist and reader become part of the creation.

CHAPTER II

An Unmapped Land

Initially the narrative voice of a people has an inward looking energy directed at self-identification. John Terpstra's poetry is a reflection on this process of self-definition by the Dutch Canadian immigrant. Terpstra's search for a voice outlines the tension between old and new, discovery and loss. He examines the contradictions, ambiguity, and turmoil of living in the undefined space between realities, between knowing and not knowing, and crafts a personal narrative poetry.

John Terpstra was born in Brockville, Ontario two years after his family immigrated from postwar Netherlands. His first language was Dutch and his earliest literary influences were Dutch syntax and the Heidelberg Catechism. A graduate of the University of Toronto, Terpstra has published two collections of poetry, Scrabbling for Repose, 1982, and Forty Days and Forty Nights, 1987, as well as numerous articles and reviews. Terpstra lives in Hamilton, Ontario, working

as a craftsman in wood and words.¹

He is presently completing a series of "liturgical poems", verse he creates for the celebration of the seasons of the church calendar.

Terpstra's primary motive for writing is not to elucidate the immigrant experience but rather to explore the human response to the physical environment, particularly in a spiritual sense. In an interview with the Christian weekly, Calvinist Contact, he says:

More recently, even though I never considered myself to be a religious or virtual Christian writer, I've been struck by certain things in the theology I grew up with in the Dutch Calvinist tradition, and I want to write about that way of seeing scripture or that way of seeing the world.

He continues to discuss the question of Christian poetry:

... I think that doing poetry is no more a Christian activity than swinging a hammer is. By itself, a poem is no more a Christian object than the hammer or the house that was built. But, my being a Christian will make a difference to what I am writing and how I am writing it. I like a more angled approach to Christianity, some thing that comes out of the bushes or from under the porch, not driving down the four lanes of correct doctrine. Often a poem that looks like a Christian poem really isn't a poem at all -- it's not well enough done to be considered a poem.

... When you're writing, you're writing out of a spirit, or maybe you're writing the

¹John Terpstra, Forty Days and Forty Nights (Windsor: Netherlandic Press, 1987), p.61.

spirit out.²

Terpstra calls himself a pragmatist and believes his poetry has a role: "I would like to be given the grace to enjoy God enough so that the way I write would give that same enjoyment to others."³

Terpstra's poetry reflects an all-encompassing Christian view of life, which is to a great degree the human response of his own family, and of the ethnic and religious Dutch immigrant community in which he grew up. By choosing this particular vantage, he clarifies the process of self-identification which began with the actual immigrant journey of Terpstra's own parents. The title poem, "Forty Days and Forty Nights", and "Pedlars of the Practical", two poems from his second collection, are clear examples of Dutch ethnic writing. Here Terpstra specifically concentrates on the dialectics inherent in the physical and spiritual process of change and the ensuing fracture in identity. He sensitively and playfully celebrates the change in the events of life and the corresponding change in perspective. He is always cognizant of the intergenerational rift and uses an ironic tone because, though he chides his father's generation of Dutch

²John Terpstra, Interview, Calvinist Contact, Feb. 3, 1989, pp.10-11.

³Ibid.

immigrants for an often narrow point of view, he loves better than he hates.

Two movements are expressed in these two poems. Initially each poem rotates in a centripetal motion towards discovery of the subject's inner self. This is followed by a centrifugal force as the narrator recognizes reason for celebration despite despair, thus enabling both himself and the reader to watch the world through this spiritual sense. The title, "Forty Days and Forty Nights", immediately identifies one of the key immigrant themes of displacement and alienation. Terpstra's comparison of his family's immigration experience to the archetypal story of flight in the biblical story of the flood, the Israelites' escape to the wilderness, and Christ's sojourn in the desert, is typical of a Dutch Calvinist perspective. For many immigrants Canada was seen as a "Promised Land", a dream of better things, but for the Dutch this vision was heightened by a somewhat dogmatic sense of following the cultural mandate expressed in *Genesis*. Terpstra adopts a gently mocking tone in this poem against such an expression of religious fervour and identifies the reality of the culture shock upon arrival in this "chosen land":

this is not, I thought
my father's world
the *dorp*, and in the middle of things,

with family, friends, with her [my wife] out visiting.⁴

The double meaning of both heavenly and earthly father underscores the reality versus the dream. It is at this point that the emotional estrangement intensifies into a feeling of exile.

The journey is described as a Noah-type quest. Words and phrases such as "two by two we walked the gangway", "the flood", "our Ararat", "the land the third dove found her branch of olive in", and the "band in the sky" are indicative of this association.⁵

Terpstra enables the reader to follow the process of immigration and permits one to take the perspective of the immigrant. The poem's physical structure repeatedly resembles the fault-line between the two realities experienced. Some lines of poetry stop halfway across the page only to resume midway on the next line, representative of the scission in perception. When read about, the discontinuity, the fracturing of syntax is even more apparent:

. . .
and leaning on the deckrail watched the sea
rise up behind us, top the dikes and take the
lives of loved ones, still waving their
raised arms at last drowned in the flood of
the horizon.

⁴J. Terpstra, "Forty Days and Forty Nights", Forty Days and Forty Nights, p.10. "Dorp" is a Dutch word meaning village.

⁵Ibid., pp.9-12.

Choosing to go, we should, you'd think
 be happy
 but added to that ocean
 our own salt⁶

The spatial detachment of the last phrase accentuates the emotional isolation. The sudden immersion into the vast monochromic sea instantly nullifies the land as a standard of judgement and previous ways of seeing are suddenly useless. For the narrator, the dream turns into a nightmare of strangeness and disconnectedness. Perception is undone to the point where people on shore appear to be drowning. Paradoxically, at the same time, the narrator conveys a feeling of security that those on board are the 'chosen' while those left on shore are the 'damned'. Superimposed on the image of the traveller on an ark moving towards a new beginning is the more recently experienced reality of exile. Terpstra uses the metaphor of cattle cars to describe the trains which

 took us all to destinations
 pinned onto our shirts
 male and female
 we had no names, just places we were sent
 like mail from overseas.⁷

With this image he brings to the fore the hidden undercurrents of another fear, that of the traveller on

⁶Ibid., p.9.

⁷Ibid.

the way to his doom. Terpstra, Hugh Cook, Maria Jacobs, and other Dutch Canadian writers, re-interpret the journey in terms of their own images reflecting their understanding gained through spectres of Nazi cattle cars. Each has had either a personal war experience or had heard the accounts of their parents. The immigrant experience thus gave a powerful sense of *deja vu*.

The stark reality of the boat passage becomes in a sense a journey into the self. The unmaking of their lives resembles the peeling of the onions they were forced to eat:

as layer by layer
our former lives were peeled away, until
there was left the small sweet core
with which to land upon our Ararat, Quebec⁸

Everything was left behind -- their history, culture, relatives, language, and identity -- "we had no names".⁹ The Dutch immigrant is traumatized by the realization that everything that defined him did not come with him. This de-personalization is complete upon arrival and receipt of nametag, number, and destination pinned to each person's shirt.

Terpstra's entire poem is one of double exposure. Everything has a double meaning but one is always

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

slightly a-synchronous with another. One meaning is relative to Holland, one to Canada. His use of expressions such as "evergrowing" trees, rather than evergreen trees, clearly exemplifies the traumatizing perception of the tall, pointed Canadian trees. Use of Dutch words, such as "dorp" and "luyden", and awkward translations, such as "lucht in de band", translated "sky in the band" and its later reversal to "band in the sky", add to the sense of misperception.¹⁰ This lack of clarity increases the dream-like quality of drifting and rootlessness repeated in such phrases as "in the middle of things" and "we had no names".¹¹ Terpstra describes immigration as a total detachment from traditional forms of significance, the Dutch ideal of arrangement, configuration and stasis. Now everything is in motion.

Terpstra's poem does not, however, succumb to a pathos. The tone of the poem remains light and Terpstra employs a gentle parody and humour to poke fun at both the emotional and physical experience. It was previously pointed out that he gently berates his compatriots who envisioned themselves as pilgrims to a promised land where God's creation was still waiting to receive man. He also pokes fun at the immigrant's

¹⁰Ibid., pp.9-12.

¹¹Ibid., pp.9-10.

hubris through the narrator's self-evaluation.

And yet we walked one Sunday into town
and standing on the lawn of someone's house,
took the photo we sent home, and without
saying *This is where we live*, told them
about indoor plumbing, how everyone had
a car.

Was it the foolishness of pride, or
faith, that focused the Kodak Brownie
on our family? We even smiled. Who knew
if it would be a snapshot of our future?¹²

Although the old home was no more and life looked
dismal for the Dutch immigrant, Terpstra affirms the
determination and faith of the newcomer. His artist's
eye catches the truth of the image of the immigrant as
a "second Adam naming" in a strange exotic land though
the immigrant narrator himself now dismisses this as a
foolish dream.

In this poem, Terpstra skilfully manipulates words
to create the sense that the human vision is rarely
synonymous with God's vision and omnipotence. Man is
often incapable of seeing reality from his basal
perspective. This point is illustrated by the
narrator's humbling work as an immigrant labourer
shovelling coal. As he stands in the coal-cellar
shovelling "those lumps of black through the window,
until I couldn't breathe" and as pouring rain further
restricts his vision, the frame of the coal-cellar
window confines him totally. All previous frames of

¹²Ibid., pp.10-11.

reference are inapplicable here. Instead of the Promised Land, Canada has become a "selected prison", chaotic, unconventional and unrelated to any known reality. Immigration, like the flood, seems only to isolate, distort, delude and destroy.

While the narrator recounts that which resembles a "Job-like" experience, he is unaware that through it all he is being re-educated. His experience forces a confrontation between himself and his God. First he is stripped of all traditional modes of seeing to the extent that even his language becomes useless as a means of identifying his surroundings. Words like "dorp" and "lucht in de band" lose their original meanings and connotations. "I've never come so close to cursing", he says, and what prevents him is the universal sign of the rainbow, a fresh interpretation of the band in the sky.¹³ He suddenly realizes that the flood had a rejuvenating power, washing away the old and useless spectacles. The rainbow signifies for him the one consistent frame of reference which applies even in this country.

As his ego asserts itself, the narrator's physical stature diminishes in perspective. The claims of his culture do not save him either on the water or in the new land. Beginning to realize his insignificance, he

¹³Ibid., p.12.

comes to the aspect of self-knowledge that is the philosophic core of Terpstra's poetry. He realizes the ultimate reality of life that is man's frailty after believing himself a victim of forces beyond his control, that he suffered unjustly and he begins to doubt God's faithfulness: "And this may have been the land the third dove / found her branch of olive in, but it didn't / look it."¹⁴

From his lowly and humbling point of view through the frame of the coal-cellar window the narrator suddenly sees through the opacity, recognizing the familiar truth of God's assurance. The sign of the rainbow represents the overriding permanent order of things. It is the earthly sign of an eternal covenant. From his egocentric vantage he earlier saw the Canadian landscape as only malevolent. Once he raises his eyes to a symbol of hope and rebirth, he comprehends that it is a land of promise, a land where transformation is possible. His celebration includes a recognition of the fact that though people are displaced, God's glory is not. The sign of the rainbow is an affirmation that this legacy is continuous.

I'd wanted all along
 to tell myself
 to tell
 the kids, so someday they'd tell theirs
 that He had saved, protected us for this,

¹⁴Ibid., p.10.

that we could show his glory, not displaced
in people who'd been moved from there to here
like shining stones of coal
starting from below.¹⁵

The narrator can now anticipate passing on this truth to succeeding generations. So Terpstra, too, concludes that it is not simply a matter of asserting tradition over innovation, but rather a matter of celebrating the conjunction of old and new. Though exiled in one sense, there is a simultaneous consideration of the fact that we are all involved in a continuity, a web that ties us to the first Adam. Or as Kroetsch says, "There's a sense in which you could never exile yourself, and maybe that's what you discover after you think you've been in exile."¹⁶ Terpstra comes to see immigration as an opportunity for change, for a new life, but one that is firmly secured to a past.

Terpstra's poem touches on some of the very practical aspects of immigration. Language, as was mentioned earlier, is a key issue. Without the ability to name and integrate his environment he is at a point of stasis. To begin the rebuilding, re-creative process, the immigrant must begin to re-interpret. He must begin to name in the new language. Terpstra

¹⁵Ibid., p.12.

¹⁶R. Lecker, Robert Kroetsch, p.35.

smiles at some of the struggles of this naming process. He chuckles over the thought of asking the garage attendant for "air in his sky", a misinterpretation of "lucht in de band", which should be translated "air in the tire." Terpstra makes use of Dutch idioms, sentence structure and words throughout the poem to exemplify this point.

The immigrant's way of experiencing is to proceed from one unit to another, relying on perceived similarities, analogies, and metaphors to understand the new situation. He searches for interpretative practices which can reveal the parts and their relations. Space, weather, food, and language are immediately obvious. His original language has lost its communicative power and he must begin again, naming as he goes. Maria Jacobs defines that difference between "knowing and "not knowing" in a poem entitled "Displacement":

Being Dutch
 I get along, get by
 but it is not the same.
 You *know* and I can only *guess*
 how to express sentiments
 with that required finesse.¹⁷

The immigrant desperately tries to acquire some of that "finesse" in order to blend into the new environment. Picture-taking symbolizes a means of

¹⁷Maria Jacobs, "Displacement", Iseult, We Are Barren (Windsor: The Netherlandic Press, 1987), p.9.

establishing a sense of control and represents the first attempt at creating a new self. To the onlooker, however, the result reflects a two-dimensional illusion of a Canadian. These photographic images have no real frame of reference and are not true indicators of direction. This attempt to manipulate patterns and force the adjustment to Canada fails, as does the effort to use the photo as an accurate reflection of identity. Terpstra laughs now at his eagerness to show his relatives back home how well his family had adjusted to Canada by posing in front of someone else's house.

The narrator in "Forty Days and Forty Nights" learns through his career as coalman and rock hauler that if there is one thing the immigrant knows well it is to be nameless, classless, an expatriate, "a dirty D[isplaced] P[erson]", a "stinking foreigner", and a nobody. F. R. Scott's question, "Where are the coolies in your poem, Ned?", in his poem "All the Spikes but the Last", should include immigrants like Terpstra's narrator and like Klaas de Jong, who cleared the farmland, cut for the C.P.R., and worked in the lumber camps, in the mines, and on the pipeline in their efforts to settle this country.

+ +

The second poem from Terpstra's collection to be

examined is entitled "Pedlars of the Practical" and focuses more specifically on the aspect of land and space. What is most obvious is the fact that the way of seeing the geographical landscape in Canada is diametrically opposed to perspectives in Holland, where distance and space are clearly defined like lines of a grid. This symmetry provides the Dutchman with an acute sense of here as opposed to there. Such a visual definition of space and distance offers a corresponding feeling of control of the land. Terpstra concentrates on the implications of this assumption to the immigrant. Even the physical construction of his poem echoes this idea of domination:

God created the world
and one step down from sea-top
 they the Netherlands
impounded salt-water's bottom
 behind a continuous mound
cross-cut the farmland
 sent fresh in ditches
tidied up (*netjes gedaan!*)
and sit in victory, round a table
 tea-time from the fields.¹⁸

In Canada, on the other hand, one is ever conscious of space. The resulting feeling for the Dutch immigrant is one of unconnectedness and of being lost in the vastness. Terpstra expresses a sense of anxiety produced by referring to the landscape as an

¹⁸Terpstra, "Pedlars of the Practical", Forty Days and Forty Nights, p.13. ("Netjes gedaan" translates "neatly done".)

"untended glacier." He speaks of clearing someone else's land "somewhere remote off highway 5 / or 2, or 53." He describes it as "this whole world feeling forced upon / the land itself."¹⁹ Here perspectives are too long as if the camera lens is set wide and unfocused. Such haphazardness is disconcerting to an eye familiar with a controlled, defined landscape:

and everyone, at random
 flung to farms, to towns
 and only slung together, idly
 by all that wire
 dip rise dip rise
 guiding the endless two-lane
 that brought us to this place.²⁰

Dutch eyes are trained for meticulous detail, neat, squared parcels of perfection. The fresh untamed earth, the endless distance, the wide meandering rivers, and the Rockies "like a sea of icebergs" are cause for consternation. The immigrant does not have control of the land and waterways in the same way as he did in the Netherlands, "... for this is not so mannered well/a waterway/creation's not as engineered." Nothing here is quite so predictable as back home where government control and

the latest laws
 require
 that the future come in stages

¹⁹Ibid., pp.15, 16.

²⁰Ibid., p.16.

and the Zuider Zee be pensioned off
in lots.²¹

Again Terpstra emphasizes the point by his spatial distribution of the lines on the page which are released in neat controlled packages of words. Despite initial disorientation, the Dutch adapted to their new country with a certain aggressiveness. They came with a willingness to reinvent themselves, demonstrating a toughness and resilience. That Dutch quality of headstrongness and practicality comes through clearly in "Pedlars of the Practical." They greeted this "unruly" country with a stubbornness that quickly changed to the ingenuity for which they were known in Europe. Terpstra singles out the uniquely Dutch pragmatic outlook which demands the creation of symmetry in the landscape. He draws on the Dutch folktale which says, "God created the world / and one step down from sea-top / they the Netherlands."²² The Dutchman sees himself as almost beating God at his own game. The Dutch immigrant pedlar, this travelling salesman, proudly brings with him his practical powers of transforming the landscape. He immediately takes things into his own hands and begins to practise his skills in this unordered country. Terpstra speaks with

²¹Ibid., p.15.

²²Ibid., p.13.

tongue-in-cheek, not taking his characters entirely seriously, because he knows the trouble to come when the "winds will weigh the scales."²³ His imitation of Dutch speech patterns exaggerates the newcomer's actual alienation. The reader objectively beholds a little man who is subject to the vastness of the natural landscape.

The ostentatious images the Dutch elders tended to arrange for and of themselves during their coffee "klatch" discussions are ultimately illusory and rooted in self-deception. Terpstra reveals this hubris inherent in the desire to control one's destiny in an expression of Prufrockian insight in "Pedlars":

like rain
so much depends
they say
on faith, a more or less
reliable inclemency.²⁴

The contradiction in terms serves to verify the Dutchman's habit of using his beliefs for his own convenience. He hopes these "elders of economy" will learn to differentiate between man-made guarantees and those from God.

While he reprimands his Dutch ancestors for their

²³Hannah Main, "Walking by Faith", Dutch Quintet: A Collection of Poems and Stories by Dutch-Canadians, comp. H. Ruger (Windsor: Netherlandic Press, 1988), p.19.

²⁴Terpstra, "Pedlars of the Practical", Forty Days and Forty Nights, p.14.

arrogance, he simultaneously betrays a pride in their determination and stubbornness. Even though nothing remained rooted in their world and everything was in motion, they seemed unafraid of change. Terpstra's Calvinistic perspective assumes that everything has a purpose and change is as it should be. At the same time he admires the Dutch willingness to push predetermination somewhat in order to elude its hold:

Faced with gusts these headstrong Dutch
 bow head over handlebar
 slow the genuflection
 spontaneous to the blow
 Gods will be gods, and in their element
 precipitate humility
 but tension shows in these who resist
 who dicker the wind's direction
 who'd rather not walk
 pedlars of the practical
 the polder.²⁵

Terpstra's admiration of the Dutch engineering prowess resembles Rudy Wiebe's admiration of his ancestors in "Sailing to Danzig." Their ingenuity took the winds, mountains, distance, and all other adversities into account and yet built bridges that withstood time, wars, and immigration. Survival was ensured because through faith and hard work the bridges were internalized in verbal constructs and still form the lines of communication for which they were intended. Terpstra's poem is just such a word bridge.

As the immigrant adjusts to the new landscape and

²⁵Ibid., p.13.

changes it to incorporate elements of the garden he left behind, he works out a unique relationship to the land and finds it is possible to keep some of the heart memories alive and replant them here.' What he discovers is that home, the metaphor for belonging, can be anywhere that unity and companionship, happiness and solicitude create that essential spiritual atmosphere. Home becomes here when the immigrant begins to build memories based in the new country. Perceptions change as mental attitudes change.

In the second half of "Pedlars of the Practical" Terpstra describes the beginning of a new type of garden. In it the children are playing with pebbles in the stream. When he looks through the children's eyes he begins to recognize the silliness of the habits of the parents. The image of the first generation always remained somewhat incongruous and at odds with the Canadian environment. Although most Dutch immigrants realized that the ties with the homeland would loosen, few considered the changes that would occur. Complete assimilation never took place for most of the first generation. They remained in a transitional stage. Terpstra visualizes the child's parents strolling arm in arm in the European fashion along the North Saskatchewan to the ravine through

the perfectly undeveloped way of foot
through stands of second growth, or third

this garden of bush
 maar net alsof
 ze in de Prinsentuin liepen
 lived still within
 the Sunday stroll of several generations
 the whole town arm in arm.²⁶

The child, though, quickly discovers a bond with the
 land as he plays, creating patterns, dams and
 waterways. Both the child and the artist are conscious
 of the musical pattern present in this bush garden and
 are not caught up by the illusion of safety in the
 constructs of the parents. The artist and the child
 know that order is momentary, like a child's game

 and water welled
 behind a pebble dike
 where we practised, played
 claiming a little land.²⁷

The child's game spans two generations, two worlds.
 The perspectives of the children and the artist help
 the first generation and all others to live in a
 present context of the physical and spiritual
 landscape. The children form the bridge between old
 and new worlds. Learning the language links the past
 and the future. Language and communication are the
 link to survival.

As the immigrants begin to see from within the
 culture, "the bars of my selected prison" fall away,

²⁶Ibid., p.18. Translated as "but just as if they
 were walking through the Prince Garden" (a historic
 garden in the Netherlands).

²⁷Ibid., p.20.

the trees become less threatening and space more manageable.²⁸ The "untended glacier" comes to resemble a garden, a place where the son can become a steward in his father's world. Such creativity seems even more possible here than in the man-made, government-parcelled land of the old world.

Old Jack in "All That Counts", a short story by Madzy Brandis, explains the process of adaptation to a young girl searching for her identity:

'Tell you why', he said. 'I knew this place here. Somewhere I read: to know Canada is to love Canada... But this here country she does not just give herself. Matter of fact, she holds back, like a she girl. She never shows her best side first, you have to go and look for it. But when she gives, she gives all, and you are trapped.'²⁹

Terpstra's narrator in "Forty Days" feels a negative type of entrapment by this country when he first arrives. He too must go looking for the other side and makes his discovery when he looks beyond the frame of the coal-cellar. The narrator of "Pedlars" finds the affinity through the vision of the child tossing stones across the creek. Only a total involvement in the new country frees the immigrant to move across the threshold into familiar space.

²⁸Terpstra, "Forty Days", p.10.

²⁹Madzy Brender a Brandis, "All That Counts", The Scent of Spruce (Windsor: The Netherlandic Press, 1984), p.31.

Immigration is a journey, a process. Like the war before it, immigration seems to erase all of that which has gone on before. Some of the images of the past remain with the traveller forever, but they become static, frozen recollections. The recent arrival traumatizes the immigrant because of the felt disorientation and lack of familiar frames of reference. Not until the expatriate recognizes *here* as opposed to *there* does he begin to make his presence felt. Only then can he discover new guideposts and begin to find his way through the labyrinth of the future. The next pattern or landscape may be totally different from that made before or it may incorporate the useful elements of the former.

Terpstra enables the reader to make the discovery about his own Canadianness. In a sense he shows the reader that which was there all along. The first generation of Dutch immigrants depicted in his poems have allowed a lifetime of traditions, beliefs and accoutrements to colour their perception. An initial response to expatriation is to force these old patterns onto the new landscape, concentrating more on the design than the substance. An equally inhibiting response is immediately to acquire the artifices of the new country, which, like the arranged photograph, gives one a false sense of identity.

The child, in his game, has made a discovery useful to everyone. His clear-eyed vision permits him to re-use what is good and lasting while relinquishing extraneous detail. He is simultaneously aware that there is nothing of permanent value in the particular man-made design. The ultimate truth is in the continuous universal pattern evidenced in all of nature. What the immigrant discovers is that one can be a steward of the earth anywhere. Though the natural landscape may change, one's ingenuity is intact and he can be used to respond to the environment accordingly.

Terpstra has found the spiritual voice of a people, and his craftsmanship in word-building offers an honest and clear-eyed view of the world. He envisions immigration as a journey of opportunity to get to know life afresh. It offers a chance to discard old ways of seeing, to wash away the old and useless, thus presenting a chance for renewal.

His poetry seeks to clarify the spiritual elements in all he sees so that others may incorporate them into their visions as well. Although Terpstra writes many "non-immigrant poems", these two poems permit us to understand the "reality" from which he begins his vision. Terpstra is at the stage of imaginative growth where he can begin to mythologize the stories and factual accounts of war and immigration told to him by

his family. Like Cook and van Herk he grew up in the transitional years. He has first hand knowledge of casting off the old and assimilating the new. It is the knowledge of the actual process of Canadianization that permits him to see its relevance to the ongoing process of becoming, which is of primary significance to all three writers studied here. Although Terpstra recognizes the pain and disorientation of leaving behind the old country, the old ways, he makes a useful discovery that his ingenuity and imagination are intact, thus enabling him to respond to the universal pattern in nature. For John Terpstra, the immigrant journey is definitively a spiritual one.

Chapter III
The Homecoming

There is a congruity between the visions and voices of John Terpstra, Hugh Cook and Aritha van Herk. Each begins with the feeling of immigrant-stranger and the sense of dislocation and explores the process towards completeness. The actual immigrant journey provides a good metaphor for the imaginative recreation of the world in which we want to live. Each writer has a keen sense that the transitory state of the first generation immigrant is similar to the dream of impossibility for which the artist and all mankind should strive. Cook, like Terpstra, begins with the recreated story of the physical journey and the resolve to transplant oneself firmly in a new homeland. He examines with compassion, insight and artistic honesty some of those "ineffable images" that pulled the Dutch immigrant towards a new home. He stands back from the

Dutch Canadian Calvinist community to discern both its positive and negative poles and to penetrate the imagination "that gives them faith and desire, the eyes to see beyond the future."¹ The visions he articulates are those of two generations in transition.

The author was born in The Hague in 1942 and immigrated to British Columbia with his family at the age of seven. He has written many essays and began writing fiction in the late seventies. His first collection of short stories, entitled Cracked Wheat and Other Stories, was published in 1984. In 1989, he published his first novel, The Homecoming Man. Many of his stories have been published in Canadian literary journals.

In both his collection of short stories, and his first novel, Cook is engaged in the attempt of Dutch immigrants to live out their faith in their daily life. He points out, however, that he does not set out to write "Christian fiction":

I believe strongly that fiction is fiction, and not propaganda. Whatever a story means must proceed organically out of the materials of that story, and cannot be added to the story. When I am writing a piece of fiction, what it may mean or whether or not it is Christian is the last thing on my mind. I'm preoccupied with the story If my

¹Aritha Van Herk, "Introduction", To All Our Children: The Story of the Post War Dutch Immigration to Canada, ed. A van der Mey (Jordan Station: Paideia Press, 1983), p.11.

vision of reality is whole or Christian at all, that vision will inevitably come to expression through the materials of the story.²

In an essay, "'To Find Just the Right Words': Faithful Fiction", Cook discusses his reasons for writing within the Calvinist tradition, a tradition which has often been accused of being incapable of producing great fiction, only great rebels. He points out that critics assume that Calvinism inevitably creates wooden fiction: "stick figures in a mechanistic universe". He postulates:

Interestingly enough, the things that prevent us from producing more writers and artists, I believe, are not things that are in principle opposed to our tradition, but have more to do with our failure to be consistent with our tradition. It is our failure to live a full-orbed Calvinism, in other words, that has prevented us from producing a Graham Greene or a Saul Bellow.³

Calvinists, he feels, often wrongly restrict themselves, for the Bible should free one to be creative and celebrate creativity. He would agree with Frye's assertion discussed in the introduction that when evangelicals choose a dogmatic interpretation of the Bible, they choose a literature of closure and cliché. To write a truly Christian literature is to be

²Cook, Personal Letter, April 24, 1990.

³Hugh Cook, "'To Find Just the Right Words': Faithful Fiction", Inaugural Lecture, April, 1990, p.8.

expansive and inclusive. He quotes Clyde Kilby to this effect:

There is a simplicity which diminishes and a simplicity which enlarges, and evangelicals have too often chosen the wrong one. The first is that of the cliché -- simplicity with mind and heart removed. The other is that of art. The first falsifies by its exclusions, the second encompasses. The first silently denies the multiplicity and grandeur of creation, salvation and indeed all things. The second symbolizes and celebrates them. The first tries to take the danger out of Christianity and with the danger often removes the actuality. The second suggests the creative and sovereign God of the universe with whom there are no impossibilities. The contrast suggests that not to imagine is what is sinful. The symbol, the figure, the image, the parable -- in short, the artistic method -- so pungent in the Lord's teaching and acting, are often noteworthy for their absence in ours.⁴

This fundamental tension permeates Cook's art. He constantly tries to solve the problems of the artistic tradition and this two-sided stance keeps him on edge. His resolve/resolution comes through his faith, in his expression of the larger mythology in which our small individual life toilings are mere threads.

Viewed together, the Cracked Wheat stories and The Homecoming Man grew out of an urge by Hugh Cook to come to grips with the immigrant experience and give voice to a community for whom the conflux of cultures is a process which is still immediate and to which they are

⁴Cook, "Inaugural Lecture", p.8. The reference is to Clyde S. Kilby, "Christian Imagination", in The Christian.

still adjusting. The themes of dislocation and self-identification point to a contrast between the desire to discover form, naming the space the individual inhabits at present and the longing for inherited form, for a connectedness with past experience. Cook takes a close and sensitive look at the intergenerational gulf which is sharply intensified because of immigration. The cultural and historical difference in experience heightens the sense of disjunction between generations but not the desire to comprehend their inheritance.

Cracked Wheat and Other Stories emphasizes a regional and individual perspective. Cook takes an interest in a perspective in transition by shifting the narrative point of view from first generation immigrant to the second from story to story. The shift implies a change in our view of what we know and how we know it.

The opening story, "Exodus", elaborates some of the perceptions initiated in Terpstra's work. The characters, Anton and Mieke, are a young immigrant couple fleeing the oppressive old world pattern, an image of a country and its people violated by war. The experience is related in terms of death and mourning, rebirth and metamorphosis. For the woman, immigration takes on a special significance. Cook associates women with home, sustenance, historical awareness, and continuity. Mieke's emotional involvement remains with

the extended family in Holland and is confined to her immediate family circle in the new country because extension into the new culture is more difficult and immigration heightens the sense of something torn off.

Mieke intuitively knows her decision to emigrate was the wise one, for she laments, "What kind of a world was it when you had to choose between people and food Was it a world to bring children into?"⁵ Though she desperately wishes to trample these old world surfaces and begin in a new green world, she is transfixed by the inherited images.

The biblical myth behind this story serves as a primary framing device while the secondary inclosure is that of World War II. Mieke's country and her entire past were surrounded by a black border like that around the handbill tacked to the trees listing the names of the deceased. Cook continues with the use of the border image, the form which holds the tension of the opposing forces. The energy within must resolve itself in some way. The conflict between inherited and new, familiar and strange is held in balance by this frame. The ark-ship door separates the familiar world on shore from the chaotic blankness of the ocean. The lintel of the bedroom where Mieke barricades herself among her mementoes of home separates her from the wilderness of

⁵Cook, "Exodus", Cracked Wheat, p.14.

her new surroundings. This image is repeated in the frame around the photograph of family and friends, the triptych on her hope chest, and most poignantly, the mental frame of memory that preserves its reflections of past miscarriages and war horrors symbolized by the trapdoor-coffin lid. Mieke must keep a small back window open to satisfy the need to drug the sense of reality. This view of "old pastures" is now merely a memory, a mental construct. And yet these backward looks are necessary to give a sense of where she has been and where she is going.

For Anton, the tension manifests itself in a different way. Man is associated with space, dynamism, outward movement and quest. Anton is determined to reach out and adjust to the new world through his job and new friendships. For him, however, the past horrors present themselves over and over in the immediate context through impressionistic symbols, such as the bloody carcasses, the whirling saw blades, and the German foreman in the meat plant where he works.

Cook's technique of juxtaposing Anton's present mental visions with Mieke's vivid flashbacks of war images creates an intense feeling of uneasiness. The whirl of blood images and allusions to death, miscarriage, and destruction are pervasive and the reader feels the urgency of the need to escape. Cook

draws the reader into the experience as Mieke recalls the spectacle of her husband hidden from the Nazis under the trap-door and recounts the extreme will it took for her to close the trap-door on her own husband "for it looked to her as if she was about to close the lid on his coffin. After that she was willing when he talked to her about emigrating."⁶ Now the shipping crate, a miniature ark, containing all the artefacts of her past life seems like her own coffin and "with the nailing shut of the last board it seemed her confinement was complete".⁷

The feeling of exile and the biblical allusion to escape from disaster in an ark is repeated as Mieke boards ship, "...and she felt she was walking into an ark and would soon see the disappearance of her familiar world".⁸ The emotions evoked by the blank horizon, devoid of any reference points, and the total annihilation of everything Mieke called home have left a permanent scar on her. It seemed then that God had surely forgotten his promise, "And there shall be no more sea".⁹

To Mieke the mesmeric experience of the journey is

⁶Ibid., p.17.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

encapsulated in the metaphor of the ship as a "mote" on endless water which merely continues on after arrival at Halifax into a sea of land: "prairies stretched endlessly." The repetition of the words like "stretched" and "blankness" for describing both land and sea gives a sense of the distorted vision. Through the use of adjectives such as "blank", "bleak", "barren", "dead cold", and "pale", the reader knows the dream has turned to nightmare. The unfamiliar landscape is as desolating and achromatic as the interminable seascape: "At night she saw nothing, the blankness broken only by the occasional yard light of a farm, increasing her sense of isolation. Then the mountains -- does anyone live in this country" ... God brought us here?"¹⁰ For Mieke, there is no one in this country; "Here" is nowhere. Time, place and life itself have been obliterated for her.

Everything was different from what she had known in Holland. Strange words ... strange music And strange buses Everything was strange, even the details: doorknobs, matches, diapers.¹¹

She must now begin the arduous process of familiarization in order to re-interpret the landscape, discern the patterns and re-construct the world. Language is the key to this re-articulation. "It's a

¹⁰Ibid., p.18.

¹¹Cook, "Exodus", Cracked Wheat, p.17.

new world, Mieke, he [Anton] had said, we will have to face." But she resists.¹²

The lid of the coffin-crate, which is nailed down on a past of old memories until "it seemed her own confinement was complete", resembles her bedroom door which she closes on herself.¹³ The lid signifies a death and an end to all hope for her. Cook permits the reader to be the first to perceive from his vantage point that the symbolic burial of the past is, in fact, Mieke and Anton's opportunity for freedom and rebirth from the pattern of blood, war and miscarriage. The reader understands before Mieke herself does that she will not be able to resolve the conflict between the new Canadian landscape and the abandoned homeland until she moves towards the perimeter she has defined for herself. She must move towards the green, unstructured future in order to create a balance with the photographic images of her retrospection. She cannot evolve until she perceives a basis for a new order.

Slowly her despair begins to transform into a design of hope, birth, quiet and green. She can no longer hold back her child rushing to meet the new world. His birth marks a surge of creative energy and immersion into the new world. Mieke searches for God's

¹²Ibid., p.12.

¹³Ibid., p.17.

covenant promise as she ponders the child's inopportune birth, just as her previous deliveries had been. This time, however, there is a distinct difference. Her first son's tearing birth coincided with her father's death from cancer. Her daughter was born one year into the war. Victor, her third son, was born as their Jewish neighbour leapt to his death pursued by the "polizei." Mieke remembers her sister haemorrhaging because of the bomb shrapnel in her womb. All her previous experiences of birth have been associated with death. Cook punctuates her memories with a steady barrage of background sensory images of Anton's job at the slaughter house with violent sounds of tearing flesh, screeching knives, shouts of men, and colours of blood, black and white. This backdrop frames the quiet of Mieke's reflection on her relationship with her husband and the birth of her son. She contemplates one further reflected image, the box (crate, coffin) containing a birthday gift for Anton, an analogy for their shy love: "Time to bring on the birthday, Anton, time to open the present. *Time to open the present!* But not before the past had been granted its due and was no more than the past."¹⁴ This image, coupled with that of her sister's miscarriage, suddenly clarifies her own resistance to crossing the threshold

¹⁴Ibid., p.20.

into this virgin landscape.

The son is to be named Anton, for "Everyone must have a son who is named after him, and it is right that it be the first one here, for he is a sign of what is to come."¹⁵ She now sees the sign of the covenant alive in her own son, Adam/Anton. The evidence of blood still on the stump of his umbilical cord and his recent circumcision are now signs of renewal, rather than death. Also, "the membrane of skin beneath the fleece of hair at the top of his head" pulsates in anticipation of the baptism, the New Testament sign of the covenant, "like a faithful promise."¹⁶ The water drops of baptism recall the flood waters and God's promise of rebirth by washing away all impurities and old restraints. She traverses the first threshold as she takes the baptismal gown from the closet: "Then she left the room."¹⁷ Cook intricately weaves the Old Testament covenant signs of blood, circumcision, and water into the image of border crossing towards the new world of ambition and danger. In *Exodus* 12: 22 - 18, liberation to the Promised Land is preceded by the symbolic painting of blood on the door frames of Egypt and the warning to the Israelites not to cross the

¹⁵Ibid., p.19.

¹⁶Ibid., p.21.

¹⁷Ibid., p.22.

threshold until the destroyer had passed over.

For Mieke, the baby's birth, his naming and his baptism become her first signposts in the new green world. They are now freed from the old world bondage and historical association. They are liberated into a new future in a wilderness and can now choose to create their own destiny. The baby becomes a point of orientation, the first new root to take hold. He is also a sign that metamorphosis must be organic and cannot be achieved through mere surface manipulation. Mieke could never have been free in the insular, Babel-type world she tried to maintain in her room, where she continued a mental segregation. Such attempts at control inhibit communication and narrow vision, thus further increasing isolation. Transformation cannot occur until she reconstructs her world, which begins by opening the door, crossing through the frame, and allowing spontaneous impulses to take form.

Cook implies in "Exodus" that the processes of birth and death are interactive and immigration to Canada brings to a head this interaction by exposing the dynamic centre thriving on these tensions. Through the birth of the child "stitched together as embroidery", his naming and his baptism, the immigrant family begins a celebration of the convergence of old and new, father and son, first Adam and second Adam-

Anton.¹⁸

Hugh Cook's recently published book, The Homecoming Man, brings together many of the themes explored in his short stories and permits the reader to discern the tensions inherent in the immigrant experience by providing multiple perspectives. In this novel he creates a tableau of the metaphoric journey and search for home experienced by the earlier and later generations within a Canadian context. He moves back and forth through time and space by his use of images, symbols, dreams, and monologues. Cook views the first generation immigrant experience from the perspective of the middle-aged academic son who, after the break up of his marriage, moves in with his aged father for the summer. Simultaneously, the reader witnesses the father's inner perspective through his interior monologue, which is imperceptible to the son. Shortly after his arrival, the son begins to notice that his father exhibits strange behaviour and a mysterious locked room in the basement piques his curiosity. Unbeknown to the son, the father is carrying the guilty burden of a moral failure that has its roots in the old man's experience in Nazi-occupied Holland.

¹⁸Ibid., p.15.

Among other themes, the book explores the difficulty of forgiveness, familial love, aging, and the love of land, space and freedom. Like the stories in Cracked Wheat, it is steeped with Cook's intimate knowledge of the Dutch-immigrant experience in Canada. He explores the sense of marginality and split-personality experienced by the immigrant-stranger, which is passed on from father to son. This ambivalence and a sense of crossing boundaries are a powerful presence in his art. The son rejects his father's point of view, yet echoes some of the same qualities.

The novel form provides Cook with a larger frame in which to examine the dynamics between generations, cultures, faiths, traditions, and literary forms. In this enclosure he studies the meaning of identity and survival. He plays out the confrontation of man with himself as he attempts to reroute himself and his family from a Dutch to a Canadian landscape. Rather than flourishing as expected, he finds himself entangled in a web of human existence with all its cultural and historical baggage. The war represents for the old man the negative legacy and symbol of his past. He had hoped to escape its encumbrances by immigrating to Canada but, instead, the nightmare images of war in The Homecoming Man, like those in the

short stories, "The White Rabbit" and "Exodus", erase a sense of freedom and innocence never to be regained in this world. Immigration becomes a journey to acquire a renewed sense of place, to build a home, and re-create a garden to be passed on to his sons.

Paul's father, Gerrit Bloem ("bloem" means flower), is a gardener, an Adam. He brings a sackful of chestnuts from the trees of his own father's garden in Holland and plants them in Canadian soil. At the time he wonders whether this is nostalgic foolishness "to start something he could never possibly enjoy the fruit of."¹⁹ Cook places this query against the biblical landscape of *Psalm 102*, where man himself is like the grass and flowers in the field: "the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more."²⁰ As he ages, Gerrit ponders more and more frequently the use of his "home-making": "Who is going to follow you, he thought, and who is this place for after you're dead?"²¹

The seemingly idyllic life the old man leads in his retirement is in reality riddled with vivid blood images of a long dead past. His lifelong obsession

¹⁹Hugh Cook, The Homecoming Man (Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1989), p.51.

²⁰Ibid., p.30.

²¹Ibid, p.51.

with planting trees, while on the surface representing his attempt at re-creating a garden, is also a direct response to the Nazi's rape of the landscape of his ancestral home:

... it was what the trees did for the house, leaf over stone, a sense of shelter. Until the war. During the winter of '44 the Germans had come to cut down the oak woods for lumber and he'd felt he could not let them and that is when the trouble began. When he'd come home from prison the trees had all been felled, every last one of them
²²

The trees had made this landscape and house a home, a place of belonging. With the violation of home, Gerrit spends the rest of his life seeking its restoration.

Like the wind, the war changed everything. War, like death, represents a chasm in the life of Cook's characters standing as an insurmountable obstacle in their path. Paul expresses this feeling upon his young son's death:

... he realized every time again the gap in his life, his son so suddenly gone he had not even had time to tell him, *I'm sorry*. Afterward he came to realize that with Quentin's death something in his life had ended, something was over -- what was it? Happiness? His idealism? Whatever, just as the life of Christ had separated time into BC and AD, from then on his life had been divided into a before and after; this was before Quentin died; that happened after Quentin's death.²³

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., p.46.

The chasm caused by both war and death is noted by changes in perception and meaning. After the war everyday objects and occurrences take on new meaning for the father and intensify as he ages. After extreme deprivation nothing is mundane or to be taken for granted ever again. Food takes on a whole new dimension and becomes the most powerful symbol of survival. Gerrit is constantly irritated by his son's waste of food. He embarks on secret shopping trips and hoards freezers full of food in his mysterious basement room. The sound of bulldozers and chainsaws used in excavating a new subdivision frightens Gerrit as it recalls the Nazi terrorism. The drawbridge on the old pastoral painting becomes for Gerrit a vivid symbol of the cause of his internment in the concentration camp and of the death of his brother and friends. The lack of understanding between Paul and his father increases as this trick of the father's vision splits reality for both of them.

War never allowed his father to go back to plain living even after a change in landscape. His imprisonment forced a change in perspective and he now carries his nightmare within him. Gerrit becomes aware of this discovery as he stumbles along the streets upon his release from the death camp. His body was still too racked with pain to notice the rejuvenation of

spring, though he feels

... unspeakable relief he had reached the end of his suffering and that he is a homecoming man with nothing he need fear anymore -- nothing except God. The memory of his suffering and betrayal he had managed to bury deep inside for almost forty-five years, and now the whole thing was being unearthed again. Never would he be able to roam freely anymore, forever all his paths would lead inevitably to the same place, forever he would have to make his way around this immovable stone in this path.²⁴

The stone, the symbol of guilt and unforgiveness, becomes imbedded in his mental landscape. War has broken him mentally and spiritually. His Canadian garden has the symbolic stone buried deep in the field and he is forced to go around it in his daily work. Cook uses the metaphoric stone to place Gerrit within the archetypal pattern where the stone becomes both the hill of Golgotha and the stone covering the grave of Christ, thus symbolizing the sin of all men.

The sin haunting Gerrit is the confession he was forced to make to the Nazis under their extreme torture. His statement became the death sentence for his own brother and his friends. He has carried this bitter memory since the war but has pushed it to the background. In his old age it becomes increasingly vivid and real -- so much so that he cannot share in the communion celebration in church, a sacrament which

²⁴Ibid., p.283.

always brought regeneration for him:

There was a stain in his life he had lived with for more than forty years that the blood of Christ had not washed away, and the sin had not been forgiven because he had never confessed his guilt, had never faced up to his betrayal but had tried to suppress it instead; for forty years he had managed to bury the memory of it but now his guilt lay at the surface of his conscience for him to see clearly.²⁵

Gerrit feels like a Judas, a man descending:

God seemed far away, beyond reach, and he at the bottom of the pit whose steep sides gave no footholds for him to climb out....²⁶

The stone of guilt blocks his path to access, communion and communication with his family, with God, and even with himself. It bars him from living his faith fully. He can barely face himself in the mirror. He always remains a stranger, an alien; he feels unacceptable even to himself.

Immigration doubles this sense of exile, even though he chose it to escape from the burden of the past. Immigration cheats him further because it robs him of communication with his family. He blames this inability to communicate on the need to work to rebuild a life and create a home, a place of freedom for them but it keeps him from communing fully with his family for forty years. That, he feels, was the price he had

²⁵Ibid., p.247.

²⁶Ibid., p.274.

to pay; war, immigration, and life exact a price.

In prison, Gerrit was forced to stare death in the face. Confinement intensified images of things he had formerly taken for granted, "... the smell of grass after the rain, the smell of cheese ... how unexpressibly rich his life was when he could work and move about freely."²⁷ Deprivation provides the opportunity of seeing the freedom the world offers and facilitates the celebration of life and the fullness of each day. Ironically, however, for Gerrit, freedom becomes even more confining than imprisonment because the bonds have turned in upon him to become mental chains. That is his continued suffering:

Never would he be able to roam about freely anymore, forever all paths would lead to the same place, forever he would have to make his way now around this immovable stone in his path.²⁸

For Gerrit all patterns and designs move towards that one focal point. Immigration cheated him even in this respect, he feels, for his self-imposed exile did not permit escape -- his nightmare comes with him.

When Gerrit experiences a flashback, his thoughts go into ever smaller squares until he is again imprisoned in his cold square cell. Like Mieke in "Exodus", his eyes are riveted at these times to a

²⁷Ibid., p.285.

²⁸Ibid.

world which can no longer be relevant and this all-consuming perspective leads to a sense of madness.

The tension which builds because of the presence of this paradox between the outer life lived and inner life experienced is a prominent element of Cook's work. The outer life resembles seeming freedom, an escape from the past to a new landscape, a life of vision, pattern, colour, and verdure, and a sense of uniformity and control. Yet life is not as it seems, because the interior life is one of secrecy, silence and imprisonment. The inner experience is one of memories closing into tightening concentric circles. In the process, orderlessness accelerates with centrifugal force into amorphism. As Gerrit gets older, his sense of place becomes increasingly confused as he experiences a mental de-migration towards his past and nearer the site of his anguish. His thoughts echo the pattern: "he felt the walls press in on him ever more closely, as if his bedroom were growing smaller and smaller until he felt confined to a space no larger than a"²⁹

Cook demonstrates this multifariousness throughout his novel and uses the mirror, the painting, and the room in the basement with its locked frame to symbolize the restrictiveness of the reflective life

²⁹Ibid., p.226.

which concentrates on tradition, legacy, and unforgiveness. Cook makes use of the technique of visual fallacy and hallucination as Gerrit's vision becomes obscured. At the vanishing point, imperceptibility is replaced by the view in the mirror and the past is relived. Life, with all its baggage, has a terrible grip on Gerrit. Cook's use of the house-home image and the metaphor of homecoming is significant throughout this novel both in terms of sense of place and continuity. House and home are symbols of warmth, peace, communion, and belonging. The image also recalls the final homecoming in this promise of Christ: "In my Father's house are many mansions." Ironically, within Gerrit's house, a silent battle rages between two worlds and two generations. Paul's father has converted the upstairs into an apartment for him. His rooms are in direct contrast with his father's dark bedroom and the even more mysterious basement vault, a realm of contained historical stasis. Paul and his father move about in stealth, spying on each other, prying into each other's rooms and worlds but never achieving a sense of understanding. Though they live in such proximity, they move on parallel paths, headed for the same focal point yet never meeting.

The antagonistic forces between an earlier

generation with its memories and tradition and a later generation with its own experience and innovation are pervasive. Rather than the return to the filial home Paul expected, home becomes an imprisonment. By coming into his father's home he is drawn into his father's world, which results in an inevitable clashing of ways but also a self-confrontation.

Paul believes himself to be a modern, enlightened man and pits his taste for more expressive art forms against his father's love for traditional, more "predictable" and often religious, music and poetry. He senses that he must escape the safety of old frames in order to define himself against tradition.

Cook conveys his own uneasiness with the mimetic notions of truth and closure, symbolized by motifs of geometric shape. His character rejects the father's traditional literary and aesthetic tastes and points out the rigidity of his father's Calvinistic beliefs. As Cook sees it, the father's Calvinism is but a part, the negative part, of the whole. It is essential to avoid the descent into the pain of a partial experience and to grow into a greater wholeness. His character, Paul, learns the values hidden among some of the man-made restrictions.

While consciously rejecting his father's vision, Paul subconsciously expresses an urge for the safety of

the frame. His return home signifies a desire to return to his familiar and framed childhood experiences. He and his brother, Max, relive old times and boyhood antics. He hangs up his father's old painting and gets pleasure from its symmetry. His father, however, rips it off the wall because for him, it holds a chaotic memory. Paul wants the view from his study window to resemble the

elevated God's eye point of view of a painting by Breughel or Grant Wood or William Kurelek ... he wanted it to have the clean up and down lines as if he were looking at a painting, he wanted reality to be as ordered, as patterned, as that.³⁰

Paul succumbs to an obsessive type of gardening similar to that of his father. He is, however, caught up short by reality's disorder while trying to cut the grass in concentric squares around the stone lying in the seemingly idyllic picture, and accidentally cuts the leg of a fawn with his cutting machine. He discovers that pushed to excessive extremes such patterning and order is savage, brutal and maiming. Paul's life is running in conformance with that of his father despite his verbal protestation.

Paul's father has creative energies, too, although Paul had never really considered them as such. He is surprised when a friend admires his father's gardening:

³⁰Ibid., p.174.

"'Look at all the flowers and shrubs everywhere, and how everything's planned. Your father's obviously a very creative person.' Paul had not really ever looked at his father that way."³¹ He now begins to try actively to understand his father's secrets, and searches beneath the appearance of his father's tranquillity for reasons for his outbursts and periods of unease. Paul tries to discover what is in the "vault" in the basement and to learn the reason for his father's constant expression of guilt. He tries to make a connection between his father's past and present.

Part of his comprehension comes through his job as translator of old Dutch poetry. Cook uses Paul's writing in a symbolic manner. Paul's inability to write "original" poetry is symptomatic of his failure to communicate. He calls himself a "failed poet."³² Translation is a mirror of someone else's art. His inability to communicate extends particularly to his father. Because he is unable to express himself freely, he ends up translating the traditional and historical. Ironically, Paul's father finds his translations horrific but only because the old truths bring to the surface the horror and chaos which are

³¹Ibid., p.256.

³²Ibid., p.156.

also intrinsic parts of his tradition.

The reader can see from his vantage point how much Paul is like his father. It becomes obvious to the reader that Paul will inherit his father's legacy. There are physical resemblances as well. Paul looks like his father and bears similar physical and emotional scars. His relationship with his own son, his own lack of self-forgiveness for his son's death, and his inability to communicate with his wife and children are part of the legacy of his father's silence: ... "and now the words *forgive me* were like a small stone clasped in the palm of his hand, his clenched fist unable to let the stone go."³³

Paul's translation of a work (entitled "De Trap Naar Hell", or "Stairway to Hell") by a Dutch-Jewish poet serves to communicate something essential that eventually enables him to understand his own father:

For as I made my way across Europe back to Amsterdam, I was a homecoming man tortured by guilt, equal to any physical suffering. Why had I survived when so many had died? In my heart I could not answer that question. Coming home I knew that after my suffering I had nothing to fear anymore -- except God.

... Silence seemed the only possible response to the horrors I had seen; thus for ten years I wrote nothing. After ten years, however, my sense of guilt and my resulting silence had become an impassable stone in the road, blocking not only my literary progress but, more importantly, my emotional health. I

³³Ibid., p.89.

would have to remove that stone by words.

... That guilt having haunted me for ten years, these poems are an exorcism. They are, finally, my true liberation.³⁴

His translation provides a key to his father's silence, which itself has become the stone in his path. His inability to unburden himself and ask for forgiveness from his family and God made the stone impassable.

Paul symbolizes man in the middle, bringing the mirror and lamp face to face. Through his translation he becomes an echoer and a mediator -- dividing and uniting. He leaps the gaps between old and new forms, clarifying the present reality.

Cook, too, is a translator of sorts. He creates within a tradition. He writes within biblical patterns, using their imagery, symbolism and motifs. "The Bible has given me a powerfully rich storehouse of literary material that pervades my own writing throughout".³⁵ Rather than silencing and restricting, he discovers that the archetypal patterns liberate him to be truly creative and communicative.

For Paul, the writing has become his exorcism as well as a form of expression for his father. Translating has become a key to understanding and

³⁴Ibid., p.92.

³⁵Cook, "'To Find Just the Right Words': Faithful Fiction", p.10.

compassion. When Paul learns the truth for himself, he helps his father break old frames and memories, releasing him from the hobbling stone. The act of communion takes place on the father's death bed with the son giving absolution: "then he felt a wave of forgiveness wash over him, of being forgiven and of forgiving in return, and he bent forward, embraced his father's thin frame, and wept"³⁶ With this signal his father is released from this shadow of reality into the light of the final homecoming, thus closing the lifelong gap. Cook allegorizes the son's removal of his father's stone with the biblical rolling away of the stone freeing all men from the bonds of death. The novel's epilogue repeats the symbol in the physical removal of the stone in the garden.

There is a distinct similarity between this scene and the death-bed scene in Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel. Hagar, like Gerrit, achieves just such a final opportunity to communicate with her son. The stubbornness of both mother and son has precluded this possibility until the end. Hagar recalls only two truly free acts in her ninety years. One was a joke and the other a lie -- "yet not a lie, for it was spoken at least and at last with what may have been a kind of love." Only by such an act can she release

³⁶Cook, The Homecoming Man, p.312.

both herself and her son from his Jacob's hold: "I will not let you go except thou bless me." By accepting the final drink from the communion cup, Hagar has the opportunity to set herself free.³⁷ While Laurence's novel ends on an ambiguous note, Cook's rendering provides the reader with a surety that Paul's embrace of his father releases him through the veil. This same act of communion also frees Paul to a future unencumbered by the past.

Cook begins the novel with Psalm 103: "As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more." Gerrit is a gardener who spends a lifetime planting such flowers. He has seen their passing through war, immigration, bulldozers, the death of his wife and grandson, and now, finally, he comes face to face with his own obliteration, "like tender grass man's days are but a shadow."³⁸ He had tried to take precaution against death by filling freezers and rooms but he missed out on the simplest passage to freedom, that of the word, the Word.

Homecoming is then a journey in itself, a journey

³⁷Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1964), pp.307-308.

³⁸Cook, The Homecoming Man, p.10.

in which self-discoveries are made. Seeing through the mirror, Paul recognizes that he is an image-bearer of God, an enlightenment permitting his new stance towards creativity. His words of true communication are the simplest words of forgiveness, "I love you."³⁹ This truth encompasses all others and opens the way to making choices. Homecoming is then not so much a search for ending as it is a new beginning.

Cook reaffirms the biblical cultural ideal in the transformation of his two main characters. Both father and son, both Adams in their own right, achieve a glimpse of the restoration of order. Both spend a lifetime trying to find the right words to communicate. Paul is a faithful translator and so is Cook in this respect, for he follows the maxim of *Ecclesiastes* 12:10: "The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true". Cook believes, "The writer does not create, *ex nihilo*, he finds words, just the right ones, words that speak wisdom and truth. What higher goal for a writer could there be?"⁴⁰ What greater contribution can a Dutch Canadian writer make to Canadian literature?

³⁹Ibid., p.312.

⁴⁰Ibid., p.16.

Chapter IV
A Furtive Becoming.

Aritha van Herk has a first-hand knowledge of the Dutch immigrant experience as a physical struggle of a stranger trying to achieve a sense of home in an alien environment. This understanding has given van Herk a unique vantage point from which to view the immigrant-stranger's journey in metaphoric terms of "becoming". In much of her work van Herk takes issue with the patriarchal point of view which would see the immigrant as a conqueror who achieves a sense of domination or control over the landscape. She maintains that such a narrow perception invokes an unacceptable male sense of "homecoming" or closure. van Herk would take issue with Terpstra's and Cook's attempts to impose pattern and symmetry on the landscape in the effort to make it conform to mental patterns.

In "Women Writers and the Prairie: Spies in an Indifferent Landscape" van Herk points out that the patriarchal view of the landscape holds it in bondage

to a finite image. She quotes Edward McCourt's description of men viewing the prairie as "'a clean naked land where man might make his own way, rear his family, worship his gods, cherish the customs of his fathers while evading their oppression, and live in peace with his fellow man.'" She continues, "Man, man, man. The land was blameless but man dragged his baggage with him."¹

Aritha van Herk was born in 1954 in central Alberta, the child of Dutch immigrant parents who arrived in Halifax on April 1, 1949. She has written numerous short stories and essays, co-edited two anthologies of fiction, More Stories from Western Canada and West of Fiction, and published three novels, Judith, 1978, The Tent Peg, 1981, and No Fixed Address, 1986.²

While asserting that she is a "complete Canadian", van Herk, the artist, often sees as a stranger or outsider.³ This perspective can be attributed in part to her knowledge of what it means to be a minority, both as a second generation Dutch immigrant raised in a

¹Aritha van Herk, "Women Writers, and the Prairie: Spies in an Indifferent Landscape", Kunapipi, vol.6, no.2 (1984), p.17.

²Aritha Van Herk, "Foreword", The Tent Peg (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987).

³Aritha van Herk, Personal letter, Aug. 7, 1988.

strict Calvinist home, and as a woman writer.⁴ The imaginative and the fantastic become for her as much the natural home for the outsider as the impetus behind her fiction. She comments on her fantasy world and her feeling of strangeness experienced by

growing up in the country, in a community that did not value books, with parents who did value books but who wanted you to become successful ..., parents who didn't speak English very well, who didn't have a television, who didn't have a telephone for a long time, and growing up to be a complete and bloody oddball. You take a little kid who already knows how to read, you send her to a school in the middle of a country community, with a different language, funny cloths [sic], different habits⁵ ... after a certain point I really retreated into fiction, into stories instead of real life. And real life to me was a big fiction and stories were real. So I reversed everything on its head. I didn't like my family, didn't like where I lived, I didn't like my life, but I could read about interesting lives in the books I read.⁶

A direct correlation can be seen between this view of the artist as outsider and her impression of immigrant-strangers who, she believes, also follow a dream that cannot be wholly validated in terms of straight

⁴I.S. MacLaren, "A Charting of the van Herk Papers", The Aritha van Herk Papers: First Accession comp. S. Mortensen (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1987), xl.

⁵Ibid. xviii.

⁶Aritha van Herk, interviewed by Ingwer Nommensen, "Das Thema der Verwandlung in dem Romanwerk Aritha van Herks," Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Kiel, 1984, p.75.

"realism."

In the introduction to To All Our Children, van Herk expresses her desire to explore the myth which led the Dutch immigrants to Canada, dissolving a world, a life, a culture to become strangers here. van Herk searches beyond the stated facts for that "image that lies quietly in the human imagination" that made them come.⁷

There is still a suspended silence between the oblique moment when people first think of the idea and the irrevocable moment when they decide to immigrate. Through all ages, the strongest and hardiest, the curious and far-seeing, have moved to push beyond their own civilization. They have often moved west, searching for the bright dream of impossibility. Against all odds, they made it possible, they took what meagre means they had and made a life, their own life. But we will never know what brilliant sift of wind, what far off glimmer prompted them. We only know they had imagination, that quality that makes human beings extraordinary, that gives them faith and desire, the eyes to see beyond the future.⁸

It is precisely this "suspended silence" and "bright dream of impossibility" that van Herk seeks to unearth in much of her writing, both fiction and essays. van Herk makes every effort to move beyond the known, conventional society to uncover those silent

⁷Aritha van Herk, "Introduction", To All Our Children: The Story of Postwar Dutch Immigration to Canada, ed. A. van der Mey (Jordan Station, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1987), p.11.

⁸Ibid.

realities that have not been seen or heard before. Her imaginative voice is essentially that of a stranger trying to infiltrate an alien geography and cultural landscape and locate herself on a Canadian literary map.

This paper defines a movement in perspective. A physical and psychological change in point of view takes place as the Dutch immigrant moves from his initial position in Europe, to his view from the deckrail and from the prairie train. As the stranger continues to move into the landscape and becomes acculturated a simultaneous change occurs on a psychological, metaphysical or spiritual level. van Herk firmly believes that the internal landscape we inhabit is affected by our history, culture, religion, and gender. Each person's unique vantage determines perspective:

The impact of landscape on the artist or artist on the landscape is unavoidable. The two are cellmates, as countless case histories have already established. In landscape, however, the crucial point is the vantage point from which the viewer sees the world. One must look at landscape from within landscape. What one sees is determined by position; the scene varies accordingly. There's a hell of a difference between the landscape a person sees standing on a hill and what the same person sees from the bottom of a coulee a few hundred feet away. Position dictates point of view and position's influence has been neglected.

The landscapes that we inhabit inevitably shape us, our vantage determined

by the hill on which we stand.⁹

van Herk goes on to describe the Alberta parkland on which she grew up as "a vantage both narrow and unlimited."¹⁰ She refers here to an upbringing which she felt was restrictive both in the religious sense and in that she and her family were immigrant-strangers and "oddballs." Yet this vantage was unlimited because it gave her access to the literary and imaginative world. This phrase also refers to the literary map of Canada already noted as being restrictive since it is male dominated, but yet is unlimited in that she intends to re-explore this landscape and re-route the map, naming places not seen before or re-naming those not clearly seen. van Herk points out that what becomes most important in a vast and undulating landscape is contrast and multiplicity of perspective. As a child she was enticed by the beauty of the blue water of Dried Meat Lake at the back of the field. Experience told her that in reality it was nothing but "a reedy, sucker-infested lake", but when viewed from a distant single point the "landscape beckons escape; escapade."¹¹ Because she feels the lack of a perspective such as hers, by providing it she makes the

⁹van Herk, "Women Writers and the Prairie", p.15.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., pp.15-16.

entire literary response more complete, more real.

van Herk's fiction can be seen as an assertion of a woman writer against the mainstream Canadian fiction of the time during which she writes, mainly the 1970's. "What I am critical of in the Canadian novel is the extreme and dedicated realism", says van Herk.¹² Her criticism refers directly to her fictional technique as much as it does to the literary, social and ideological perspectives. Hutcheon describes van Herk as a "postmodern", "ex-centric" writer and states,

The postmodern literary technique is in many ways, a critical response to that realist reaction. And many of its parodic, satiric, or just ironic impulses derive from this need to respond to what has come to be the dominant definition of the novel as literary form: realism.¹³

van Herk's fiction challenges realism and provides a different art form. Her choice of images and metaphors emphasizes this move to multiplicity of perspective. Her writing abounds in images of landscape, relief, earthquakes, spying, strangers, infiltration, disguise, survival, and mapping, with correlative denotations of tools, geometrical design and staking of claims.

¹²MacLaren, Biocritical Essay, xv.

¹³Linda Hutcheon, "'Shape Shifters': Canadian Women Writers and the Tradition", The Canadian Postmodern (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), p.129.

van Herk continually makes reference to a dialectic inherent in Canadian literature. She describes a point of view which "over-looks" the landscape, which she defines as a cerebral knowing and is mapped mainly from a male perspective, and a simultaneous "insight" or infiltration into the landscape, a more visceral type of knowledge. "The landscape and its rendering," believes van Herk, "shapes the eye of the viewer."¹⁴ The landscape is in essence indifferent; it does not escape the image that is imposed on it. "Art shapes place and place shapes art, but here [in the prairie], it is as though the signified is in bondage to the signifier."¹⁵ It is van Herk's opinion that the prairie landscape has been traditionally mapped from the male point of view, rearranged to suit the vantage of men. Mapping, like story-telling, is a subjective experience where the artist creates his or her vision of the landscape. First came the explorers and the missionaries, then the "whisky traders, mounties, the CPR, settlers, in that order. Writers. Inevitably writers."¹⁶ All have attempted to conquer, truss and bind the landscape. Writers such as Collins, Connor, Grove, Ross, Mitchell,

¹⁴van Herk, "Women Writers and the Prairie", p.16.

¹⁵Ibid, pp.16-17.

¹⁶Ibid.

Kroetsch, and Wiebe (and she could have mentioned Terpstra and Cook), have imposed image and pattern on the landscape through the use of metaphors of architecture which express domination and control of the landscape. "There is no entrance here, only imposition, the hammer blow of extrusive shape."¹⁷ The two representative images are Wiebe's "black steel lines of fiction" and Grove's plough man with his silhouette towering over the landscape, "he looked like a giant."¹⁸ Of Rudy Wiebe, she says,

He begins well, his idea initially right, but the metaphor is male, impossibly male, without entrance. This landscape has been garrisoned by the art that represents it. Man and his straight line -- steel, yet -- horizontal world cannot contain even predicate the female curve of prairie, let alone enter it.¹⁹

The landscape defined in such male terms excludes the female identity altogether. Women have been rearranged to become the centre of the men's extrusive structure. The women found here are static stick-figures "as mothers/saints/whores, muses all".²⁰ van Herk believes that men are afraid to enter the landscape because to do so requires giving up the

¹⁷Ibid., p.18.

¹⁸Ibid., p.17. Quoted from F.P. Grove, In Search of Myself, p.259.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., p.18.

"advantage" or "vantage." "To know prairie one has to stop looking at prairie and dive".²¹

And where does the woman writer of the prairie enter such a male-dominated fiction? .van Herk raises her voice in an attempt to be heard and to re-shape the eye of the viewer to provide the feminine rendering of the landscape. She challenges women writers to enter fiction through that same landscape for it will permit multiple points of view. "It is after all a curve; despite the steel lines, an undulation. We can enter this world because it belongs to us."²² Women must refuse the imposed silhouettes. They are the new immigrant-strangers, marginal, vague figures in this male landscape, and van Herk is committed to uncovering their peculiar vision of the Canadian landscape. Her aim is to infiltrate and re-route the old static borders of our literature, proving that women have never been an integral part of the map and have never had their own chosen fixed address, but rather are seen as fixtures. By shaking up accepted patterns she intends to prove that the male identity is not fixed either. By juxtaposing the "real" and the fantastic she embarks on a search for that which is more real.

The map or story of Canadian literature is flawed

²¹Ibid., pp.16,17.

²²Ibid., p.18.

by the verisimilitude of its representation. van Herk contests the signified and produces what her male critics may see as a countercultural account. She believes that women must re-draw the map, retell the story which by-passes the female identity.

Ostenso, McClung, Laurence, Pollock, Lambert, Alford, Atwood, Riis, and van Herk herself are cited among the growing rank of spies who are enabling this process, "the prairie as curve emerging through the eyes of the words of women."²³ The tactics she proposes for "our furtive becoming" are to turn every male imposition to our advantage and use it to gain access or entrance into the landscape.²⁴ One parodic technique of which van Herk takes advantage is that of trickster, one who would "mythologize" men who have muse-mythologized women, make a new mythology of them."²⁵ This kind of "reflexive subterfuge" will not be used to denigrate the Canadian landscape contextualized by the imagination of Kroetsch or Wiebe, or leave them behind. It will serve merely to tell stories that the men have not told, have not seen, or do not know. "The male west has to be earth-quaked a little, those black steel lines and looming giant

²³Ibid., p.20.

²⁴Ibid., p.23.

²⁵Ibid., p.22.

toppled. Not destroyed, oh no, but infiltrated."²⁶
 In The Tent Peg, the earthquake is used symbolically to shake up the men's version of realism. van Herk uses the same images for fiction, the same map, hammer, plough, and stake used in the male stories, but the sense of place communicated derives from a new perspective, one which comes from below, from pressing oneself into the earth. Her characters enter an underworld from below - a world which is part of all of us but always explored from the male standpoint. van Herk believes that the imaginative story is the moment of return, another chance to take a purified look at ourselves:

Every story has been told before because there are two subjects for stories, one of them is sex or love [...] depending on how cynical you are, you'll use one word or the other [...] and the other is death and life. Love and death. It just gets boiled down to that. Every story has been literally told before. And the only thing a storyteller is challenged by, is the infinite art of telling that story.²⁷

van Herk's stories develop a complex web of voices, visions, mythologies, archetypes, sexes, and cultures which together form a more complete vision of Canadians. She retraces the journeys of female figures who have been neglected, abandoned, or almost lost and

²⁶Ibid., p.24.

²⁷Nommensen, p.79.

retells their stories from a new perspective. "I'm sure", she says, "that most people who read my novel The Tent Peg have never heard about J.L. (Jael)." ²⁸

I. S. MacLaren writes:

Among other things, van Herk's rechartings entail the humanizing of the women of myth, interrogating them and the stories in which they survive, asking the hard questions, which make them stand to account, make their stories' readers look again at them as women, as female people. ²⁹

She reconstitutes the women of myth, sets them in a Canadian landscape where they can "cojointly transform one another", thus making the "real" and the mythic blur. ³⁰

The female characters van Herk creates initially correspond to the traditional role. Judith starts out as a secretary and mistress, J.L. as a graduate sociology student, and even Arachne has a semi-conventional job as a bus-driver. van Herk invests increasing power in each of them until they correspond to the giant male visions of Canadian literature. As a result, perspective is broadened to such a degree that the realistic transforms into the fantastic. At the same time, the comfortable, well-established male positions change as well. Her male characters become

²⁸Ibid., p.86.

²⁹MacLaren, Biocritical Essay, xvi.

³⁰Ibid.

strangers in a world they thought they knew and controlled (most of the explorers in The Tent Peg become unsettled), or the male figure becomes diminished to that of static muse, a reversal of the female role (Thomas in No Fixed Address becomes a Penelope figure).

van Herk refuses to accept the picture of the female immigrant as carved out by Margaret Atwood's characterization of women. She rejects the truth of Atwood's Susanna Moodie, who burrows underground only to be taken over and consumed by a male-dominated world. In Atwood's poems, Moodie's eyes become hollows through which society parades. van Herk objects to such passive acquiescence to the male structured/strictured world and joins Atwood's determined effort to affirm the female personhood. She comments on Atwood's characters in Life before Man:

There is something quite fatally hopeless about her characters, as good as they are. They are at the mercy of a larger society and system, it doesn't seem as though they have very much chance with.³¹

van Herk insists that "human beings are infinitely positive creatures and that they need only opportunity, something that will show them and then they are able to .." (assert themselves within their culture rather

³¹Ibid., xix.

than remain victims or aliens).³² The initiation of transformation is one's own small step -- the desire for change. The characters in her trilogy of novels, all of whom are outsiders, actively make efforts to change as they seek out their rightful place in the Canadian society. It is this transformation that van Herk believes is the essence and value of all story. Following one's desire to change necessitates sacrifice since it requires a re-definition of self and a renewal of relationship with a society who may not even recognize that alternative perspectives exist. Witness Gerrit Bloem in Cook's The Homecoming Man. The price he has to pay for immigration is one generation's lifetime in transition, within himself, within Canadian society, and between continents. It is this process of survival that fascinates van Herk:

Canadian heroines are surviving. What is interesting is not the fact that they survive, but how they do so, their journey to self-discovery, toward psychological freedom. That transformation moves us to understand that it is possible to transcend established reality by considering, not the obvious aspects of the world around us, but the unexplored, the unexplainable. Then the fiction becomes magical and transforms itself.³³

van Herk's energetic women, though fully aware of

³²Nommensen, p.84.

³³MacLaren, Biocritical Essay, quoting from van Herk's unpublished M.A. Thesis, "When Pigs Fly", xix.

the cost of change, never take a fatalistic view of transformation. They take not only great risks to change themselves, they also take the risk of motivating others to change.

Judith, The Tent Peg, and No Fixed Address are a movement away from the "man-made realism" of Canadian literature towards the "fantastic." These novels define a progressive move into the landscape and provide a new perspective on the struggle for survival. This study will focus primarily on The Tent Peg and briefly on No Fixed Address, as these later novels examine women who take even greater risks to initiate change than does Judith, van Herk's primary character in her first novel, Judith, and demonstrate more clearly the process from unnamed stranger towards homecoming. Each female character has been told where she should be located on the map, but life experience and female legacy have precluded her from the new mapping. Each is motivated by the desire to evoke a change through a journey towards self-discovery and psychological freedom. For Judith, survival means exploring a new identity and naming her spot on the landscape, "I'll get a box." For J.L., it means staking a share of the earth's resources, as well as inducing change in the lateral thinking of the men around her towards the achievement of real "insight."

For Arachne, the ultimate fantasy woman, survival means escape, free movement in a picaresque fashion with no restraints whatsoever.

"The notion of the novel as the record, the map of the imagination's transformative power", points out MacLaren, is van Herk's key premise in all her writing. Her novels assert a sense of taking back what was ours. Her records narrate fantastic tales. Each story begins with a realistic setting but quickly moves into the fantastic. MacLaren concludes, "But the fantastic quality emerges out of the juxtaposition that the novels provide with the "real" as we customarily see it. They continue intertextually to parley with the stories that they re-tell."³⁴ van Herk redraws the Canadian map to include and identify herself and her female compatriots, a map from which real females had formerly been excluded. As she proceeds to weave her "imaginings" between the existing "facts" of the "extreme and dedicated realism" of the existing Canadian novel, she adds a final warning for her readers: "Don't believe the facts -- they lie! What I tell you may be what I think is the truth".³⁵ The point she makes is that the accepted realism of previous (male) writers is in fact, unreal, a lie

³⁴Ibid., xiii.

³⁵Nommensen, p.86.

because of its exclusionary nature. van Herk will attempt to make the fiction more real by being inclusive.

Each of van Herk's novels is a retelling of an old story from either classical or biblical mythology and told formerly from the male perspective. van Herk cracks open these old "male" myths to expose the female side of the story. If one uses the imagination to "re-view" stories accepted as fact, if one opens up to new possibilities, new ways of understanding, one will find new treasures.

J. L. asks,

Where do you worship when your temples are stolen, when your images are broken and erased, when there is only a pressure at the back of your brain to remind you that we once had a place to worship?

Now lost and leaderless, no mothers, no sisters, we wander and search for something we have no memory of.

Dear Deborah, forget my carping. I know that in the end what matters most is how we survive. But I find myself raging, I find myself waiting angrily for that promised period of peace. I'm beginning to think that unless we take some action ourselves, it may never come. It's time we laid our hands on the workman's mallet and put tent pegs to the sleeping temples if we are going to get any rest.

I miss you and I hope your songs are going well.³⁶

³⁶van Herk, The Tent Peg, pp.172-3.

The theme of women as immigrant-strangers or exiles, seeking to gain recognition of personhood in the Canadian landscape, is consistent with the immigrant's search for a Canadian identity which does not exclude a dual cultural status. It is precisely in this way that van Herk sees the process of immigration as on-going in a metaphorical sense. The women she portrays have experienced a loss of home. They have to continue a process of self-identification to define themselves as separate and different. They are made to leave behind old "images" and "temples", a former, confirmed identity, to be absorbed in a male-defined historical, cultural and social landscape.³⁷ Her trilogy serves as a medium to enable women who are immigrant-strangers, exiles and aliens, marginalized in a patriarchal, pre-cast world, to re-establish a continuity with the silent women of the past. She wants to "re-root" women by re-weaving them into the fabric of human existence. She is determined to give voice to neglected, abandoned or almost lost stories, to rebuild the artefacts and, in so doing, open up the male "realism" to new vistas and perspectives. "We can

³⁷For van Herk, "temple" employs connotations of space, vantage, sanctuary, interior "mental" space and holy place. Here the temple and the body as a temple of the holy spirit are very closely connected. The reverberations for the mythological depth are many.

get into it, enter this world because it belongs to us," she says.³⁸

Through her use of an intertextual mode of writing, van Herk picks up the songs, stories and myths of female journeys initiated in past mythology, linking and re-routing them into the present Canadian literary landscape. Who you are depends on where you have been and, Hutcheon adds, "Like women writers in general, Canadian novelists must return to their history (as do Wiebe, Swan, Bowering, Kogawa, and so many others) in order to discover (before they can contest) their historical myths."³⁹ van Herk takes on the task ascribed to Deborah, the poet-songstress of The Tent Peg, a modern counterpart to the biblical prophetess of *Judges*, whose "voice could make shape out of chaos, give tongue to every unarticulated secret and intuition."⁴⁰

While van Herk comments ironically on the male world, she works simultaneously inside and outside the main discourse offering women insight into themselves and an opportunity to gain their bearings. What becomes apparent as her characters reappropriate the

³⁸van Herk, "Women Writers and the Prairies," p.18.

³⁹ Hutcheon, "Introduction", The Canadian Postmodern, p.6.

⁴⁰Ibid., p.111.

male territory, is the possibility of a landscape where men may become the immigrants or outsiders. van Herk, however, holds the door open. No one need be left out. Hutcheon calls van Herk a "shape-shifter"⁴¹ re-shaping, re-naming, re-figuring the Canadian mythology to curve and encompass all discourse.

Judith is a re-constitution of the myth of Circe and Odysseus, which has always been recounted from Odysseus' perspective. van Herk transfers the story to an Alberta pig farm. I.S. MacLaren asserts that Judith is the story of a woman "not known until mapped", for women like Judith have never been truly identified.⁴² In the male-told myth they have always been type-cast, "fixed as mothers/saints/whores, muses all".⁴³ The story begins with the character, Judith, in just such a prescribed role as a mistress, a secretary and a daughter. She makes every effort to change this designation, re-entering through the pig barn to explore a self that lies outside that defined by men. She follows her true desires and re-establishes herself on the map.

In The Tent Peg the transformation follows the

⁴¹Ibid., p.133.

⁴²MacLaren, Biocritical Essay, xv.

⁴³A. van Herk, "Women Writers and the Prairie", p.18.

insistence of the main character, J. L., to be recognized as a person in the community who happens to be female rather than someone's caricature female. The Tent Peg is, then, the story of a woman's imaginative "re-drawing" of the map of the North to communicate a different sense of place.⁴⁴

If van Herk's characters often seem two-dimensional, it is because she intentionally uses them as trickster or shaman to reverse or re-design the conventional male-envisioned story. She affirms, "I searched mythology for a long time before I found a character I could use as a model, and only stumbled on it by accident: Jael, the tent-dwelling nomadic woman."⁴⁵ van Herk uses this character actively to seek out, reshape and restore a lost identity. She admits that J.L's relation to the female landscape does not necessarily mean that all women understand nature better than men, "but she is more of a symbol for me than a real human being, and that is done deliberately as a symbolic kind of connection. A symbolic relationship."⁴⁶

The Jael of the Old Testament story of *Judges*,

⁴⁴MacLaren, *Biocritical Essay*, xxii.

⁴⁵van Herk, interviewed by Nommensen, p.98. See note 6.

⁴⁶Ibid.

Chapter 4, frees her people from oppression by driving a tent peg through the head of the Canaanite general, Sisera, who came to seek shelter in her tent. J. L. wants to free herself by fighting against the presumptuous attitudes of men in a patriarchal society. The tent peg becomes a symbol for her attempt to drive arrogance and presumption out of the men's heads. The act of staking is simultaneously an act of reference, a guidepost towards a new future on a map of male discourse.

The Tent Peg is a first person narration documenting the inner monologue of each of the thirteen characters in diary form. This form is consistent with the factual, record-keeping style of explorers and is aptly suited to van Herk's purpose because it permits the reflection of a multiplicity of perspectives. This structure permits a documentation, then, of both the exploration of the geographical and psychological landscape of the characters. J. L.'s voice and character serve as a pivot around which the visions and voices coalesce.

The male characters, many of whom have symbolic explorers' names such as Mackenzie, Thompson, Hearne, and Hudson, embark on a geological survey expedition in the Yukon tundra. The men feel confident since they are armed to conquer with maps, scintillometers and

spectrometers, stakes, grids, lab analyses, and other such tools with which to fix the nature of the landscape and impose order and control. The validity of the maps is questionable, as van Herk points out in "Mapping as Metaphor", for in maps "the conception, the point of view, even the blindnesses of the maker are always present." What is portrayed on these maps, then, is not only the world the cartographer saw, "but includes their own vision and interpretation of that world."⁴⁷

The Yukon symbolizes an unknown world, the white spaces beyond the known map. This "indifferent" landscape becomes a foil against which to examine alternative means of exploration. The Yukon also represents an interior world where former maps and guidelines have limited use. In such surroundings and with such a combination of characters, anything is possible. The "realism" of the steadfast, scientific techniques may not apply here. J. L. gives a sense of what is to come as she observes from the plane window:

beneath the plane the land wheels in an unending hesitation of sameness. And yet, it is ever-changing, white snow and black water a striated spectrum. I am mesmerized, frozen here looking down. Two hours we have flown transfixed by that fatal design. For it is dangerous. Skull teeth gleam through an

⁴⁷A. van Herk, "Mapping as Metaphor", in *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Kanada - Studien*, no. 2 Jahrgang (1982), pp.76-77.

invitation; the tundra can both restore and maim. No man lives to presume its power.⁴⁸

van Herk defines landscape as "a stretch of inland scenery as seen from a single point Landscape beckons escape; escapade."⁴⁹ The Yukon is defined from the male explorer's vantage; it is described and rearranged to suit his particular point of view. Mackenzie feels comfortable with the freedom of this landscape, as J.L. witnesses,

This is his world, he moves effortlessly, the moss under his feet natural and yielding ... Mackenzie is in control as surely as he seemed awkward and unassuming in town. His world it is, and I have to halt and catch myself at the strangeness of this place.⁵⁰

The Yukon symbolizes the wilderness: free, mostly unexplored and uncontrolled by rigid structure. "Up here", says J. L., "There are no rules, no set responses, everything is new and undefined, we are beyond, outside the rest of the world. There are no controls here."⁵¹

To this fresh landscape each person brings his own "bundle of faggots", or restrictive baggage, as he attempts to claim it as his own. J. L. denounces such imposition: "There is no entrance here, only

⁴⁸Ibid., p.7.

⁴⁹van Herk, "Women Writers and the Prairie", p.16.

⁵⁰van Herk, The Tent Peg, p.56.

⁵¹Ibid., p.86.

imposition, juxtaposition, the hammer blow of an extrusive shape."⁵²

Throughout the novel there is an ambiguity between what one believes one will find and what is actually there. The landscape remains indifferent, changeable and ever-changing. It allows equal access to all its treasures. The maps brought by the geologists prove to be uncertain guides here. Only first hand experience of the formation and contours will make discovery possible, and even such discovery depends on the character of the observer. The map must constantly be adapted to the fickleness of the landscape it charts, for if the landscape is merely overlooked, the treasures held within will be missed. Diving into the landscape, earth-quaking or penetrating it, may lead to unearthing the organic, natural harmony and treasures that have always been there but missed because former exploration was too narrow and finite. The geological team is sent to find uranium but Mackenzie alone keeps his imagination open to other metals -- copper, silver or gold; only Mackenzie, among the men, relies on touch to guide him.⁵³

For Jerome, the company's directive to find uranium means that this is fact. To him the map

⁵²Ibid., p.18.

⁵³Ibid., pp.62,87.

represents immutable truth, providing a set of rules and directives within which he can confine his activity. He consistently imposes this view on the rest of the team. For Jerome there is no hope for change: "If he can't shoot it or fuck it, he's not interested."⁵⁴ The others, too, project their notion of how the world should be onto the harsh Yukon landscape. Homesick Hudson cannot accept a world that is not like his England. Milton can understand life only as interpreted by his religion and, therefore, experiences severe culture shock. For Franklin, the analyzer, meditation and poetry are the directives, and Hearne relates only to a perfect surface composition fixed forever in a photograph. Cap is always trying to win all situations and Ivan ignores the landscape, paying attention only to his machine. Control is sought through a variety of superimposed structures: tradition, philosophy, history, religion, science, and art; all are man-made cerebral constructs which create a garrison effect on the landscape, imprisoning rather than freeing.

The men begin to see the Yukon either as repressive and antagonistic or as magical and strange, because it does not offer itself to be controlled. What they cannot understand is explained away as

⁵⁴Ibid., p.137.

fantastic. Thompson describes it in the following manner: "The Yukon is a magic place.. I know it. Mackenzie knows it. It's a place where reality is inverted, where you have to take strangeness for granted."⁵⁵ Each man limits his own potential for discovery by trying to claim the landscape from his particular vantage.

J.L., the only woman, infiltrates and gains access to this male bastion of occupation and space by disguising herself as a male and using the anonymity of initials to obscure her sex. She had hoped to escape the conventional world of a graduate student and free herself from the "bundle of faggots" females carry here, that of "old myths, old lovers, old duties, my mother's warning voice, my infallible conscience."⁵⁶ J.L. believes that men have developed their attitude of dominance in the course of history in considering their achieved rank to be natural and god-given. Milton's reference to the body as temple of the spirit is more precisely interpreted by J.L.:

And only a man would have the nerve to connect himself with God, to name a part of his very anatomy after a place of worship. The forehead of a man is the seat of wisdom, the place of being, the centre of thought. How many of them have we seen posed head ostentatiously propped on a fist. And temple

⁵⁵Ibid., p.126.

⁵⁶Ibid., p.37.

it is, they worship themselves as intently as we poor females have never dared. Worship their own intellectual capacity when it is (if they only stopped to consider the danger) no larger than ours.⁵⁷

In so doing men identify themselves not only with the gods but with the godhead.

van Herk's rejection of organized religion has much to do with this hubris. In this passage she shakes up that male-imposed and male-centred interpretation of the biblical truth of the creation of humans in God's image. She points out again and again that such supposition of knowledge is a distortion of vision, a case of complacency, blindness and assumption.

In outlining her complaints to Deborah, J.L. realizes that the burdens the men carry are probably heavier than those of females because men cannot admit that they are carrying any. They expect women to sort their faggots so that they can continue on with their predestined and pre-structured world. Such pride precludes submission, humility and sacrifice. J.L. comments on Milton's culture shock which stems from his patriarchal religious beliefs, "The ambiguity of religion: giving you something to believe in but making you use that belief to contend with the

⁵⁷Ibid., p.172.

world."⁵⁸ Rather than freeing one to envision and experience one's true potential identity, such superimposed beliefs are limiting and repressive. These bundles of faggots need to be laid down and dispersed but J.L. does not want this role. She resents what she perceives as a "woman's eternal lot", a role confined by emotionalism, one of love, faithfulness and chastity.⁵⁹ She feels trapped in the traditional female lot of physical and emotional nourisher.

The nature of this small community set up in the Yukon mountains is such that change is imminent. Each member feels the tension, strangeness, even magic. All, except Jerome, recognize the potential for transformation and reconstitution in the camp. Some of the tension issues out of the sexual expectation, echoed in the mythical stories of Zeus and Io, Artemis and Ursa Major retold by J.L. Once J.L.'s attempt to mask her gender has been discovered, each man wants to use her according to his version of the story in which a woman is property to be conquered. Throughout the summer the men have identified J.L. in a pageant of roles from the de-humanizing to the super-humanizing. She is described as "siren", "nourisher", "mystery",

⁵⁸Ibid., p.138.

⁵⁹Ibid., p.58.

"crackshot", "dancer", "bitch", "virgin", "tease", "listener", "goddess", "cock-tease", "redeemer", "judge", "trickster", "useless cunt", "devil", "cook", "prophet", "executioner", "shaman", "witch", "magician", "jinx", and "good-luck charm". Instead of escaping convention, she finds herself in a more concentrated community than if she had stayed in a relatively safe and abstract civilization. Each man here tries to map her in his own way just as he maps the land he is prospecting. J.L. cries out to Deborah, "I'm tired of being weighed and watched and judged and found wanting every minute of the day. I thought I could be alone here -- I'm less alone here. Here I'm everyone's property, I belong to everyone of these men."⁶⁰ Her dilemma becomes that of maintaining and enhancing her own strong self-image. She does so by refusing to conform to the silhouette imposed on her.

Deborah, J.L.'s friend, is her constant source of strength and wisdom. She connects J.L. with all women throughout history and mythology. She appears to J.L. in the Yukon landscape in the guise of a she-bear and enables her to choose from a range of alternatives, converting, reverting and inverting old roles and techniques, in order to gain entrance to this unclaimed land. She points out to J.L. that there is no escape

⁶⁰Ibid., p.106.

from either community or the role of womanhood. In order to survive it is essential actively to map out a new route within society that leads to self-discovery and freedom. Deborah tries to give voice to the female "tradition and history and structure", which is as cerebral as the male version, "But singing is visceral."⁶¹ The transformation in the novel comes about when the emphasis is changed from the focus on a male cerebral centre to a female visceral centre, from a focus on earthly knowledge, structure and realism to actual communication and communion.

J.L. becomes the focus of the men's interests and gains a profound influence on their behaviour. All the men, except Jerome, become "transformed, transfixed by her sphere of knowledge".⁶² Such a loss of control can be explained only as mystical or magical. As the novel develops, J.L. is increasingly associated with the force and energy of the earth. She "earth-quakes" the male perception of the landscape. When one night the camp is struck by a rockslide, only J.L. sees and hears it. Since the men sleep through this event, J.L. concludes that they are the ones disconnected from reality, "... they're still dreaming. Men with no

⁶¹Ibid., pp.112-113.

⁶²Ibid., p.146.

ears, men with no connection to the earth."⁶³ J.L. responds in a sensual manner: "I kneel then, press myself down and whisper, rock myself and whisper softly until the earth and I grow still, calm ourselves."⁶⁴ The rockslide represents the changeability of the landscape but also a shift in security of personal relationships. Mackenzie and Thompson are most open to experience and for them the rockslide signifies a break-through, a moment when each begins to see that he can never expect to possess or claim the women in his life.⁶⁵

Fire and water are a strong images of elemental energy in the novel. Fire has a centering and redeeming function. Each evening the men are drawn to J.L. around the fire. Mackenzie describes J.L. as having "the fluidity, the deep swirling motion of water", referring to her cleansing, rejuvenating qualities and her continuous circular movement.⁶⁶

J.L.'s means of communication with the earth and people are chiefly irrational, sensual and emotional. She converses through singing, dancing, touching, listening, feeding, and story-telling. The circle

⁶³Ibid., p.121.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Ibid., pp.151,203.

⁶⁶Ibid., p.145.

motif identifies her female life, "always with an edge, always circular, ever-turning."⁶⁷ J.L. gives new shape to things, revealing the landscape's fluidity, swirling and curving nature as opposed to the precast, horizontal, grid-like shape seen from the male point of view.

The men regard such intuition as "unearthly knowledge."⁶⁸ Like a sorceress, J.L. "seduces" them into her force-field. Deborah lauds J.L.'s chameleon-like wiles and tricks as legitimate roles if they lead to the nurturing, purging and redeeming of her fellow human beings. In van Herk's version of the human myth, this small girl grows in stature and power until she takes on the eternal female role in all its humanness. J.L.'s relationship with the grizzly is a total reversal of the Zeus and Io mythology, a parable of how men frequently perceive women merely as animals with which to mate. The she-bear represents a furious and demonic female power arising from the ground itself. Its huge, ragged silhouette serves as a comparison/contrast to Grove's gigantic ploughman conquering the prairie.⁶⁹ Ironically, however, the

⁶⁷Ibid., p.59.

⁶⁸Ibid., p.146.

⁶⁹van Herk, "Women Writers on the Prairie", pp.17, 18.

bear is a vision of the gentle, but powerful, Deborah.

The songstress, Deborah, re-translates the biblical truth explicated by Paul in *Ephesians* 5:21 - 25, 28, a truth which is consistently misinterpreted by the patriarchal point of view as a license for male dominance. When J.L. complains to Deborah that she does not want the men's pestilence poured into her ear, Deborah reminds her, through the she-bear, that to listen, absolve and redeem, thus re-routing each life towards "becoming", is a noble act of womanhood. True Christ-like submission to one another includes both men and women. van Herk's repetition of the she-bear's exhortation, that "we all", "all of us" in Christ and like Christ must sacrifice to one another, is an enlightened statement of the truth of mutual sacrifice obscured by male presumption.⁷⁰ Love and the willingness to sacrifice are boundless and liberating, encompassed only by divinity.

J.L. now wields the mallet to drive the stakes. She uses these male tools of conquest to her advantage for her own "furtive becoming", not in an abusive manner to achieve dominance, but in a restorative sense and as a means of "opening" to yield inner treasures. By the symbolic act of hammering the tent peg into each sleeping man's temple, she penetrates the complacency

⁷⁰MacLaren, *Biocritical Essay*, xxv.

of her companions and creates a new awareness and self-knowledge. The stake or tent peg absorbs a multiplicity of meaning: psychological, spiritual, sexual, and geographical. Interpreted as a redemptive act, the staking echoes the nailing of Christ to the cross and J.L. does assume some Christ-like attributes. The men grant her the position of priestess in their imaginations, viewing her healing touch as blessing. Cap responds in this manner: "She just rests her hand on my head and says nothing, looks at me so warm and gently I'm suddenly calm, washed clean, complete."⁷¹

van Herk believes that one of the primary subjects for stories is "sex or love."⁷² The relationship between sexual intercourse, which is inner directed, and charity, which is outer directed, can be symbolized by the act of staking. Phallic expropriation is a selfish sexual act. At one point J.L. reverses Jerome's attempt at rape by using his gun, another male phallic symbol, to force him into submission. Jerome's initial gesture echoes that of Jael driving the tent peg into Sisera's temple.

Finally, staking signifies a discovery of mineral wealth and parallels the personal discovery made by the men as J.L. touches each of their lives. The scene of

⁷¹van Herk, The Tent Peg, p.193.'

⁷²Nommensen, Thesis, p.86.

J.L. driving the stake into the temple of the earth, which Hearne captures as the perfect picture, denotes her rightful claim on the Canadian landscape. Here the act of staking is an act of naming, of putting one's personal mark on what is achieved and discovered.

J.L.'s claim is an act of reference from which other female characters and writers can "figure" their bearings and "plot" their imagination.⁷³ J.L.'s act is not one denoting conquest; rather she becomes one with the act, "leaning herself and the hammer into the ground until she becomes a movement of striking."⁷⁴ The staking becomes a process of "rooting" into the earth as J.L. claims it as home.

In the course of the summer all the men, except the unregenerate Jerome, who is hopelessly trapped in his narrow vantage, change their attitudes towards J.L. from suspicious to admiring. J.L.'s presence enables the men to explore new dimensions of themselves, giving them the ability to trust themselves and use their self-knowledge. Some of the men accept these new perceptions of themselves, but others are unable to change their point of view. She offers all of them the opportunity to broaden their view of themselves and affirms the validity of femaleness, making the men

⁷³MacLaren, *Biocritical Essay*, xii.

⁷⁴van Herk, *The Tent Peg*, p.210.

accept it into their visions. She tells them new versions of old stories that they have never heard before, thus opening their ears and eyes to existing truths. As she talks "The men lean forward, pulled into a motionless circle they have never imagined."⁷⁵

The final triumph is a personal one for J.L., however, and is evidenced by her final dance over the fire. She has managed to balance the turmoil of the summer, emerging intact and in harmony with other women. She, too, has awakened from a sleep and is reinstated into the continuity of story. Mackenzie's gentle touch is such "as to awaken from the longest sleep, a song of praise unlike any other, a promise of hope, an invitation to the perfect of years of peace".⁷⁶ She recalls the men who respected her as a true woman, "who saw me, J.L., the person inside my body; it's them I try to remember, the ones that held me between the light and the shadow, suspended me in that terrific hiatus between one movement and the next".⁷⁷ Her final silhouette as dancer re-emphasizes the larger than life quality, as for one moment she hangs above the fire drawing all the men into her circle: " ... I am held for an instant in a

⁷⁵Ibid., p.154.

⁷⁶Ibid., p.214.

⁷⁷Ibid., p.160.

frozen hiatus and then I leap to the cool dark edge of the circle."⁷⁸ The image of balance between the real and fantastic role of womanhood is a recurring one and throughout the story J.L. is tempted by this image of deification, presumption she rejects in the men. Mackenzie's touch reminds her that the cost of belonging to a true community is the acceptance of worldly personhood. From this unencumbered vantage she sees both her own and the men's transformations and transfigurations reflected in their faces. Each has the tent peg through his temple. Each has gained his fullest possible identity for one moment of time. True discovery of knowledge is not precast or mapped out but comes in instantaneous moments of time only to those who actively seek it. J.L. explains to Thompson:

Knowing won't make any difference at all, because you can only know something the first second you realize you know it, and after that the knowing is only a memory of knowing. Things change.⁷⁹

The only thing that counts is the "furtive becoming." Both women and men must be in constant exhaustive search to get in touch with their temples, to achieve that transfiguration when for one moment we glimpse our fulfilment, the reflection of the I in the thou.

Women must persevere to make whole a broken image

⁷⁸Ibid., p.226.

⁷⁹Ibid., p.158.

of themselves. In order to do so each woman, like J.L., must "vanish into a world of her own making."⁸⁰ In this imagined world, this unmapped hiatus between one movement and the next, she can for a moment celebrate herself and her wholeness, and her continuity with Deborah and other women. There are no guarantees of stability, however; only continued communication ensures that some reference points are marked along the way.

The Tent Peg is a novel of exposition and explosion. van Herk opens up the male design and disperses the multiple truths and visions found within the Canadian landscape. By focusing on a female centre, each character's self-identity and perception of others become more encompassing. The process of penetrating and exploding old male and female myths to fill in the silent gaps has a centrifugal force with unlimited potential for revealing and exploring new possibilities.

*

When we stand in a new place never before seen by eyes we have a tremendous urge to name it, and map it, to make it real in some representative way. Much of our naming, which van Herk sees as a form of mapping, is a human imposition on the landscape, not necessarily

⁸⁰Ibid., p.203.

representative of the shape of the land, but rather of how we view it.⁸¹ Arachne Manteia, van Herk's main character of No Fixed Address, reflects on the names of places through which she travels:

Rumsey, Rowley, Craigmyle, Celia, Michichi, Munson, Morrin Bridge, Ghost Pine Creek, towns like their names isolated, hopeful, doomed. Each trip they are eroded, less proud, the settings, for impossible regional fictions, their realities doubtful and confined It is an illusion that she shoves away; these places are her livelihood, they gave her a reason to travel, a story to inhabit.⁸²

These are the reference signs put up to acknowledge that we have been here. "Human beings make maps of the external world to serve as mediators of reality; as such, the map is a symbol, a metaphor," van Herk points out.⁸³ As long as people have tried to plot the landscape, the result has been a diagram of their own vision. Each person passing through plots differently. To view all the diagrams, maps or experiences at once gives one the opportunity "to understand the possibilities of juxtaposition and the proximity of the

⁸¹van Herk, "Mapping as Metaphor", p.75.

⁸²Aritha van Herk, No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), p.112.

⁸³van Herk, "Mapping as Metaphor", p.76. The reference is to Arthur H. Robinson and Barbara Bartz Petchenik, The Nature of Maps (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p.5.

fantastic to the real."⁸⁴ All these accounts act as a way of mapping the past and as a means of orientation in the labyrinth of the future. van Herk views the records of our own charting, our stories, as the action taken in response to our confrontation with the landscape.

In No Fixed Address, van Herk refuses or transcends all possible boundaries. If Judith and The Tent Peg mapped out new routes within society, leaving new guides, this allegorical story of the immigrant-stranger as vagabond is located outside of society as we know it. While it is woven against conventional backdrops, Arachne Manteia inhabits a territory in the neutral margin outside of the diagrammed social context. This novel is, in many ways, a story that takes place between women in a context generated by women tellers and spinners. van Herk infuses and insinuates new meaning into the empty spaces not accurately represented in previous versions of this tale. In the re-telling of the journeys undertaken here, the reader, as well as most of the other characters, becomes a stranger, trapped within old conventional maps of stories. Our preshaped world and old maps will not accommodate Arachne's discoveries.

van Herk's transformation of the Arachne/Athena

⁸⁴van Herk, "Mapping as Metaphor", p.77.

myth delineates the process of making oneself from nothing, generating idea and meaning, creating and naming the text, the story, and thus oneself. "Like a spider dissolving in the constructive secretions of [her] web", Arachne, the chief character, works out her own definition in the perpetual interweaving and unmaking of herself.⁸⁵ She is continually described in active process as, for example, "driving into her own escaped history", and, she "eats slowly, circling the web inward to the body of the spider at the centre of the plate."⁸⁶

In Miller's discussion of the theory of text as arachnology (a fable of metamorphosis), she states, "The subject in this model is not fixed in time or space, but suspended in a continual movement of fabrication."⁸⁷ This type of literature MacLaren defines as "a kind of marginal, peripheral, outsider discourse in writing by women."⁸⁸ Weaving, like cooking in The Tent Peg, is traditionally viewed as a safe, feminine and domestic craft. The weaving of

⁸⁵Nancy K. Miller, "Arachnologies: The Women, The Text, and the Critic", The Poetics of Gender, ed. Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p.270.

⁸⁶van Herk, No Fixed Address, pp.278, 283.

⁸⁷Miller, p.270.

⁸⁸MacLaren, Biocritical Essay, xxxv.

language becomes an emergence from silence and changes the craft into a new means of resistance. van Herk's craft is a process of becoming, unwinding a previously unseen portrait of women. Her choice of arachnology is another rejoinder against the controlled, finite design produced by Canadian male realism.

No Fixed Address is van Herk's strongest statement on the immigrant experience, a story which is diametrically opposed to tradition, a story of rebellion, innovation, isolation, freedom and spinning out of control. It attempts to portray the journey as wholly determined by her character's desire and ignores the demand for verisimilitude. The narrative structure defies the conventional form of realistic literature which van Herk represents by Thomas' admirably designed maps. Thomas, Arachne's conventional lover, draws exquisite maps of obvious places, history, and events, but he constrains the landscape to conform to his perception. Arachne is enticed by his maps:

They could lead you into the past so easily,
lead you through history and another frame of
time. With these maps around, she would be
able to transcend her own past, its rude,
uneven measure, its gaps and horrors.

...She covets them the way he does, images
that trace out hope, mapping an act of faith,
a way of saying, I have been here, someone
will follow, so I must leave a guide.⁸⁹

⁸⁹Ibid. pp.117, 118.

This "on the road" novel germinated in van Herk's appreciation of Kroetsch's The Studhorse Man:

I felt that a loose-lived itinerant was a better reflection of the world I had come from and still inhabited than a young boy moving up on the prairie. I am, of course, referring to Who Has Seen The Wind?, the Canadian classic that has helped bully our literature in a romantic direction. ... But for me, these two examples came to represent the polarities of Canadian literature.⁹⁰

In her presentation, "Picaros and Priestesses: Repentant Rogues", van Herk outlines her travels throughout the West: "As I travelled, I began to wonder if I was part of a tradition, a continuum of women travellers. Later, I hunted for a female picaro, a picara."⁹¹ She is intrigued by the travelling trickster, shaman, witch, or rogue image, believing that women have to play a double agent role in order to enter fiction.

Arachne, the spider, is a character led on by her unpredictability. She plays the role of trickster well and uses her own resources to travel where she will. At one point, she permits Thomas to disguise her as a conventional woman:

She is not so much an actress as a double agent, an escaped criminal who has survived by relying on what slender veneers are

⁹⁰van Herk "Picaros and Priestesses: Repentant Rogues", Association of Canada Newsletter, Humanities, Vol.13, No.1 (Fall, 1984), p.14.

⁹¹Ibid. p.16.

available. She wonders, though, if she should have let Thomas manage her, even by God, dress her up and fix her manners. She is disgusted by women who need men to rescue them.⁹²

At other times, she masks herself as an underwear saleswoman, a bus driver, a child's aunt, or whatever persona suits her purpose. She resents this loss of old self:

She's relegated the leader of the Black Widows to a broom closet.... She is not Raki at all but a tied and tagged creature of a world she doesn't belong to.⁹³

Arachne is determined to free herself from the predictable world to a fantasy world. As she spins her web, she juxtaposes the two and her audiences are shocked, amused, disgusted, and intrigued by her disclosure and "unclothing."

Arachne spins a random text with an indefinite beginning and end. van Herk, the text maker, creates a representation of undoing: "... the picaresque pretends to be nothing but a literary phenomenon; it denies contact with real life altogether." She defines picaresque fiction as "a work of fiction concerned with the habits and lives of rogues."⁹⁴ This form breaks down boundaries between inside and outside, past,

⁹²Ibid., p.141.

⁹³Ibid., p.214.

⁹⁴van Herk, "Picaros and Priestesses", p.15.

present and future, reality and fantasy. van Herk creates narrative which reads against the weave and refuses to cohere. Her arachnology involves a re-telling of a story that "deploys the inherent production of power, gender, and identity inherent in the production of mimetic art."⁹⁵

van Herk transcribes the myth of Arachne and Athena into the Canadian landscape. This "Notebook on a Missing Person" is an attempt to recover within representation the silent and erased female identity, while obliterating conventional roles into meaninglessness. van Herk subscribes to Nancy Miller's interpretation of Ovid's story as an arachnology. In Miller's reading of the myth, Arachne challenges the goddess Athena to a contest of weaving. Each weaves her own representation of life. Arachne outweaves Athena by documenting a protest against the crimes of divine desire committed by the gods against women. Athena, who identifies with the phallic identification of the Olympian gods and with godhead, "the cerebral male identity that bypasses the female", punishes her opponent for her feminocentric point of view.⁹⁶ She destroys Arachne by battering her into silence with the phallic shuttle and tearing up her tapestry. Arachne's

⁹⁵Miller, "Arachnologies", p.272.

⁹⁶Ibid., p.274.

transformation into a spider, the very antithesis of goddess, further decenters and decapitates her. She is restricted "to spinning forever outside representation, to a reproduction that turns back on itself."⁹⁷ All she is left with is the language of the body. van Herk takes up Arachne's point of view of protest and completes her figuration, re-inscribing her identity viscerally rather than cerebrally. She characterizes Arachne Manteia as a misfit and stranger located beyond society. Arachne is an underwear saleswoman working for Ladies Comfort. Ironically she despises underwear and all things that confine and define women. While freeing herself she helps to impose restriction and convention on other women. She refuses to be shaped by others and lives to move viscerally and freely through life, travelling, changing, and driving her vintage Mercedes.

It is Thena, the reconstituted goddess, who is trapped in the confines of the social context and infuriated by Arachne's freedom and refusal to conform. She, paradoxically, becomes a foil for Arachne's movement and becoming. Arachne gives a tongue-in-cheek description of her friend:

Only Thena gets the whole truth.' For what is a traveller without a confidante? It is impossible to fictionalize a life without

⁹⁷Ibid.

someone to oversee the journey. And Thena is the perfect confidante, discreet if opinionated. She is trustworthy, reliable. She has always watched with a clear eye and a bitter disregard for tender feelings, even her own.⁹⁸

Thena, somewhat like Deborah, is stalked by males and trapped by their sexual impositions. Thena, Thomas, her mother, Lanie, and her stepfather, Toto, anchor Arachne's fantasy web to the conventional world, lending authenticity to her fabrication. The following narration describes this relationship of necessity:

Arachne returns from the road with a store of chronicles for Thena: tales, descriptions, narrating expositions. She is an explorer for Thena's enclosetment, a messenger from the world. And needs her too. For what is a traveller without a confidante. Every adventuress requires a teller of her tale, an armchair companion to complete the eventuality.⁹⁹

Thomas, too, she considers "her one solid connection with what she calls the real world, certainly the respectable world, in which she is an imposter."¹⁰⁰ The reader for realism, who is continually fooled by illusions of shape, is much more comfortable when Arachne tries to fit into society's masquerade. Thomas, the arm-chair discoverer, who is "drawn by his maps" rather than learning from

⁹⁸van Herk, No Fixed Address, p.154.

⁹⁹Ibid., p.146.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p.103.

experience and self-discovery, also "draws" her into a respectable woman.¹⁰¹ Arachne rejects such cerebral dominance and proceeds viscerally like her mythical counterpart. She identifies by touch and feel like a spider moving across the landscape on her web of roads: "Like any picara, she thrives on her own, travelling/spinning outside representation stories for herself that are as illegal as both the deeds of the gods that the mythic Arachne depicts and her depiction of them."¹⁰²

Arachne Manteia has never had the luxury or status of conventional roles, such as secretary or graduate student. She is an unfixed and "missing" person. She knows that she is an outsider,

... that she was not the same, would never be the same. There was nothing she could do about her difference, nothing to do but exploit it, call attention to the fact that she was crossing every boundary. It was a way of declaring herself, of drawing a line. She knew where she stood. Outside.¹⁰³

Judith and J.L. make their presence felt in society, claiming a place for themselves on the existing social map, but Arachne remains the travelling immigrant-stranger with no intention or desire to root herself or leave a map of her travels.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p.260.

¹⁰²MacLaren, Biocritical Essay, xxxvii.

¹⁰³van Herk, No Fixed Address, p.143.

No Fixed Address is not a story about establishing continuity. Arachne has no intent of tracing where she has been or where she is going. She rejects all family ties and will not allow herself to be defined nor does she wish to define others:

She is socially unrecognizable, unmapped, unacknowledged.... The web she weaves has no centre, none either that one can readily identify or that in terms of one can orient one's reading of character or text.¹⁰⁴

Survival for her means to remain unattached to the "real" world; such detachment is her form of self-preservation. Life in margins has more validity than at the "convention centre." She is the ultimate "ex-centric."

The reader's first impulse is to deny the anarchy of this chaotic novel. The reader looking for conventional realism is disquieted by the strangeness of the scenes at Crawford's grave, Arachne's sexual relationship with the old man, Josef, the women's convention of conventional roles, and other fantastic incidents occurring along her travels. Arachne totally refuses to relate to regular society as "she spins out of control, beyond the forces of control (police), beyond logic (knifing the ferry passenger), beyond realism (screwing a dead sailor), beyond plot,

¹⁰⁴MacLaren, Biocritical Essay, xxxiii.

"belonging and desire."¹⁰⁵

The title, No Fixed Address, verifies that the journey taken does not follow a route, but is rather an ongoing, unending trajectory which will never arrive at an identifiable termination. The sole purpose of Arachne's journey is to create events, not to link them. Life is a process of "becoming"; there is no arrival, no homecoming. The conventional narrator, who searches for a realistic cover story and rational characterization of Arachne, reaches the end of his or her quest when the last known male frontier is reached:

This is the ultimate frontier, a place where the civilized melt away and the meaning of mutiny is unknown, where manners never existed and family backgrounds are erased. It is exactly the kind of place for Arachne...

... but she is not here.¹⁰⁶

The narrator, whose displaced voice is located outside the narrative, is unable to track this character who seeks disorder and unwholesomeness and moves wherever her desires lead her. She ventures into total freedom beyond the known boundaries of the map: "This entrance into alien territory is not momentous, only a movement from one place for another: a leaving, an arriving. Arachne cannot remember leaving. Her life has become

¹⁰⁵Ibid., xxxviii.

¹⁰⁶van Herk, No Fixed Address, p.316.

movement without end"¹⁰⁷ Arrival for Arachne is merely the assurance that she has successfully escaped all defined forms and hurled herself over the edge, into the hiatus outside the constructs of this postmodern novel.

As in Judith and The Tent Peg, van Herk uses her witty subterfuge and inversion. It has already been noted that Thena, the representative of the power-hungry Athena, resembles an insect trapped in a web (of her own making), noisily spinning its legs. van Herk creates ambiguous reversals of the male and female precast figures. For her, parody, satire and irony are a means of critiquing Canadian fiction. The use of verbal irony and the obvious fun she has with the reversal of names, roles, jokes, mythologies and forms of literature permit van Herk, an "ex-centric" female writer of the Dutch ethnic minority, to both assert and undercut the undeniable cultural authority of the male-dominated structures in Canadian literature. Rather than silent rejection, van Herk's responses vary from the mocking to the playful. As antidote to marginalization van Herk uses parody to define a female position in a male world.

The picaresque form of literature permits her female adventurer to invert a range of male

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p.304.

conventions. Arachne Manteia becomes an anti-type female, whose first name represents spider and surname denotes predator as well as prophet or soothsayer from its principal element "mantis". She is a woman who refuses all conformity, signified by her refusal to wear underwear. Her renegade, roguish character defies all female stereotype as she becomes a reversal of the male road jockey, cowboy and pimp extraordinaire. She inverts the jokes and sexual cliches associated with the stereotype of male erotic exploits. The black Mercedes becomes both horse and home for Arachne, releasing her from all conventions of women travel and home-centredness. van Herk also mocks both male and female acquiescence to conventions, literally and figuratively, particularly the "Women First Convention" and the "Ladies' Comfort Conference."¹⁰⁸

Arachne's love, Thomas, the opposite of the biblical doubting Thomas, is a static muse figure, a male version of Penelope, who remains forever faithful to Odysseus. Thomas, whose name is generic for footman or waiter, is a home-maker and a one-dimensional character of cerebral knowledge only. As in her previous stories, van Herk's ironic choice of names is intentional. Naming something does not necessarily define, fix or resolve it; the name merely makes it

¹⁰⁸Ibid., pp.243,217.

recognizable. While van Herk plays off the conventional expectations and names, the shape and appearance of her novel are controlled by the use of familiar (or similar) names and interlink with well-known allegories. The name, Thomas Telfer, recalls the Scottish engineer and road builder Thomas Telford. This namesake lends Thomas more credibility as a cartographer whose product authenticates Arachne's process.¹⁰⁹

Arachne breaks all the social rules. Her relationships with her ninety year old friend move the reader from humour to empathy. Only Josef, an artist and fellow outcast of society, has a sense of true communion with Arachne that goes beyond their physical intercourse. Josef is an escaped war refugee who develops a kinship with Arachne because both are displaced persons. The image of the dance depicted on Josef's gift of a copper disc is in this story representative of the circular pattern of love and desire, life and death. Josef's story is a map of another time and place. Unless he tells his story, it, too, will be lost forever. Like the news bearers in the biblical story of *Job*, he says, "Only I am left to

¹⁰⁹Hutcheon. "ShapeShifters", The Canadian Postmodern, pp.123,130.

tell ... I alone escaped."¹¹⁰

No Fixed Address is a reappropriation of the mythical Arachne's tapestry which van Herk reinterprets into a post-modern amorous journey. The mythical Arachne had left no definition, no signature, remaining unfixed, unrecognizable. van Herk recognizes the signature of her female predecessors, reads and translates the rendering of Arachne's ambiguous feminist signature in the frame around the finished product: "The edge of the web with its narrow border is filled with flowers and clinging ivy intertwined".¹¹¹

Miller warns, "To remember Arachne as a spider or through the dangers of her web alone, is to retain the archetype and dismember, once again, with Athena, the subject of its history: that is to underread."¹¹² Such a misinterpreted story leaves out the silent truth. van Herk provides an "overreading" to fill in the gaps of the existing story. Such a "review" allows the reader to recover the figurations of Arachne's tapestry and determine the spinner's attachment to the web. van Herk's search for continuity is meant not only "to retrieve texts from the aesthetic universe but

¹¹⁰van Herk, No Fixed Address, p.228.

¹¹¹Miller, p.273.

¹¹²Ibid., p.288.

to identify the act of this reading as the enabling subjectivity of another poetics, a poetics attached to gendered bodies that may have lived in history."¹¹³

Miller would support van Herk's attempt to identify

the female signature, the internal delineation of a writer's territory. For the "female landscape" is not only a scene within which to read metaphors of sexuality, it is also an iconography of a desire for a revision of story, and in particular a revision of closure. This desire for another logic of plot which by definition cannot be narrated, looks elsewhere for expression: in the authorization provided by discourse and in descriptive emblems tied to representation of writing itself. A practice of overreading self-consciously responds to the appeal of the abyss.¹¹⁴

van Herk is a weaver, an explorer, a cartographer, a soothsayer, and a mythmaker. She retells, reshapes and transforms the stories of the journey towards discovery to fit as many perspectives, visions, and voices as possible, revealing the "imagined between existing facts of the extreme and dedicated realism" of the existing Canadian novel. van Herk goes beyond the aesthetic and literary facts, re-inventing philosophy and making up her own history as she moves along. She uses this new mythology to make a statement about women's fiction which may appear fantastic but is the work of real human beings who are anchored to facts of

¹¹³Ibid.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p.278.

cultural, political, and religious attitudes and structures that have silenced the inscriptions of women. van Herk maps the journey of the female immigrant-stranger to the farthest frontier possible. She asserts that identity is based on what one imagines or feels rather than on what one knows or does. True discovery is that active journey inward to penetrate and release the mysteries within each human being, male and female alike. The ultimate dream, that "bright dream of impossibility", is the process of fiction making itself. van Herk, traveller and storyteller, becomes the dreamed being of her own story. For a moment creator and created are one.

Conclusion

Returning to the Path

Stories by Dutch Canadian immigrants are stories of movement and perspective. At each point in the process the traveller must refocus, readjust his vision to see where he has been and where he is going. The facts tell how it was; the stories and poems tell others how it is going. The facts are frozen memories, broken, "fuzzy" images, static artefacts of life lived. The stories we tell about ourselves, then, become the fabric of meaning, the embroidering. Barbara Myerhoff states it thus: "the tale certifies the fact of being and gives sense at the same time".¹ It takes courage to tell our immigrant stories for to map means to leave an identifying mark and communicate a sense of place.

The backward glances are necessary for reorientation. If one maintains the focus on the Old Country, he remains a foreigner and suffers from

¹Barbara Myerhoff, Foreword, Number Our Days (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1979), xi.

homesickness. But occasional backward glances are necessary to reaffirm our position so that we can continue this process of becoming. These new Canadian writers insist on reminding us of the past because they know "that a people without a past, without memories, are locked in a vicious circle"²

The process of Canadianization by Dutch immigrants is an ambiguous one, like a spiral turning into itself and immediately outward, held by the tensions of moving away and going home. The telling of the story depends on the writer's position and perspective within this transformation. The tension is evident in the first stage of writing which describes the physical, factual process of immigration, is maintained through the transitional stage, and is still a powerful force in the imaginative stage. The male artists tend to see the immigration experience as a linear progression from removal to transformation to 'arrival' at a centre, while female artists view the entire process of immigration as on-going -- at least metaphorically -- even after arrival. At least this is true for women who have to continue the process of self-identification. The terms used to describe the energy shift as the art develops. The polarities inherent in

²Henry Beissel, "Introduction", W. Bauer, A Different Sun (Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1976), iii.

the expression include many of the associations evoked in Kroetsch's art:

On one side, there is Tradition, the model, inherited form, the father, history, geneology, convention, archetype, myth, mimesis, stability, east, endings, closure, death. On the other side there is Innovation, anarchy, invention, sonship, presence, isolation, experimentation, fragmentation, tall tales, instability, west, beginnings, openings, birth.³

John Terpstra's vantage point is his all-encompassing Christian life view. For him the self-identification process begins with the physical journey of immigration. It is a journey filled with ambiguity and paradox. The immigrant thought he was going to fulfil a dream, one that is both imagined and spiritual. What he discovers, however, is that the trauma of dislocation disrupts vision, derails and subsumes one. The immigrant acts in desperation, clinging to old frames of how life was in the past or hastily manipulates new configurations on which to ground his vision. Such forced adjustment gives merely a momentary and illusory sense of security. Old frames are useless here -- old dreams, old dogmas, old vanities, old ways of seeing. The resultant emotional estrangement results in an intense feeling of exile and alienation. Some aspects of the immigrant's Dutchness can not be disposed of and must be maintained. His war

³Lecker, Robert Kroetsch, p.148.

experience, his familial ties, his Calvinism are part of his heritage which come along. His Dutch ingenuity and imagination can be put to good use in Canada.

"Forty Days and Forty Nights" and "Pedlars of the Practical" are poems of double exposure, presenting the constant scission in the Dutch immigrant's perception. Terpstra transposes the biblical archetypes of the flood, exile into the wilderness and gardening over the Dutch immigrant experience in the Canadian landscape. Though the new immigrants in the poems aim directly for the core of the dominant culture, the acclimatization, Canadianization and process of self-identification require a long, anguishing journey. The physical arrival proves disillusioning and is not an end in itself. Arrival results in an emotional and mental entrapment. To renew the sense of identity and wholeness requires that the immigrant re-embark on a new journey of spiritual and psychological dimension.

Terpstra presents the immigrant's role as a "second Adam naming" as a truly humbling experience. The Dutch Calvinist came in all his hubris to re-settle and re-name the 'promised land,' but in reality the process was like going through the eye of a needle -- through the focal point from the human vision to a glimpse of the godly vision. As the immigrant begins to see from within the culture he finds he can be more

creative here than in the Old Country. Total involvement frees him up to move across borders into familiar space with new possibilities. Once he relinquishes man-made designs, which have no intrinsic permanence, and gains a clear perspective, the Dutch immigrant discovers he can be a steward of nature anywhere.

Terpstra views immigration as a journey of opportunity, of fresh visions of life. Once we wash away the old and useless, though this experience is painful, we are presented with a chance for renewal. Terpstra sees the relevance between the physical process of Canadianization and the on-going process of 'becoming'. The pain and alienation can be overcome if one's ingenuity and imagination remain intact and push one on to discover ever-widening spheres of possibility.

Terpstra's poems act as word-bridges. The physical bridges built by these immigrants for survival and the language-link formed by the children between tradition and innovation have been internalized in Terpstra's verbal constructs and continue to form the lines of communication for which they were intended.

Hugh Cook's fiction grew out of his resolve to come to grips with the immigrant experience and to give voice to a community in transition, one which is still

dealing with a convergence of cultures and values. He, like Terpstra, explores the marginality, split-personality and bifurcated vision of the immigrant-stranger's re-routing. Themes of dislocation, alienation, confusion of identity and a search to legitimize a connection between there and here, past and present, first and second generation are central to his fiction. The immigrant experience exposes the dynamic centre which thrives on the tensions between old/new, death/birth, instinct/reason, time/space and Dutch tradition/'Canadian' modernism. The characters of his fiction become enmeshed in a tangle of human existence with all of its cultural and historical baggage. Imagery of frames, boundaries, parallelism and doubling permeate his stories holding the tensions of opposing forces.

Cook is very aware of a need to return to a personal experience of the Dutch community's history to discover what is there. Some of what may seem to be unbridgeable chasms of history, such as the nightmare legacies of war, literary traditions and religion are ingrained in the heritage and must be questioned and understood before we can proceed. Cook's work reveals a search for a new order in the face of moral, social and cultural chaos of the Dutch immigrant's world, an order that can accommodate two traditions. In his

wrestling he finds he cannot accept all of either but only the essential truth of each. He also discovers that his community must challenge the centralizing notion of ideological conformity which would exclude Calvinism as a legitimate response. Any metamorphosis or renewal of his community must be organic and cannot be achieved through surface manipulation. Asserting a new selfhood means coming to terms with an undeniable past. Resolution depends further on a movement towards an unstructured future to balance the uniformity of the photographs of retrospect. Border-crossing widens perspective but should not occur without first looking within and behind. Release from constrictive, excessive conventions and patterns of history, literature and religion leads to a liberating and encompassing multiplicity.

Cook's final resolve/resolution comes from a re-affirmation of a text that was there all along: the larger biblical cultural ideal, a mythology which is both expansive and inclusive. The father's spiritual homecoming in The Homecoming Man echoes his son's and Cook's own momentary sense of arrival in the knowledge that communication itself is the key to transformation. Inscribing his community into fiction, making the story known, is the only way to express their subjectivity.

Aritha van Herk is an "eye-witness" and "I-

witness" within the Canadian culture who uses her inherited female and ethnic, and artist's perspective as immigrant-stranger to re-embark on a metaphoric immigration. Her purpose is to examine the effect of vantage on the charting of the landscape in Canadian prairie writers. Her process is to link the word and the land. In order to achieve an increasingly widened perspective, van Herk dives back into the static centre of Canadian writing, shaking up conventional ways of seeing and writing. Her technique and characterization become more and more unconventional in her trilogy of novels in her determination to break open an "exclusive" male realism in which women are static caricatures.

van Herk's three novels map progressively risky feminist journeys while simultaneously retracing old journeys of female figures of mythology. The result is a rejoining of a disrupted female story and a reintegration of "ex-centric" female voices into the whole pattern of literature documenting a move from unnamed stranger towards identity. Each evokes a personal change through a process of self-discovery and psychological freedom while influencing both men and women around her.

J.L., the heroine of The Tent Peg, stakes a claim in the unknown Yukon territory within a male community

of geological explorers. She infiltrates this male space through the use of feminine visceral attributes of process and intuition rather than the male cerebral characteristics of product and structure. She is able to adapt imaginatively to and penetrate forcefully the changeable landscape in order to gain access rather than to control or to conquer by imposing structure. J.L. maintains her female self-hood and transforms the men at the same time. All are freed to enlarge their view of themselves and others, both male and female, opening themselves up to new possibilities.

While Judith explores a woman's desire for a definitive place on the landscape, No Fixed Address moves outward into the white spaces of "no places." Arachne refuses all possible definition, remains in constant motion, changing directions and continuously making and unmaking. This novel affirms the immigrant experience as a necessary metaphorical experience for all women, all humankind, in order to avoid entrapment into a static centre of homogeneity.

van Herk tries to escape tradition while using traditional archetypes. No Fixed Address, for example, rejects shape and convention, yet its shape is dictated by its relationship to myths and literary forms. While Arachne may spin out of control, the narrator and reader remain within myth and story. van Herk's female

journeys exert centripetal and centrifugal forces in order to define themselves within the Canadian mythology. The marginalized "immigrant" woman moves towards a centre, myth, home, stability, wholeness and identity, and then immediately sets off in an outward direction, spinning towards freedom, silence, no-place and non-being.

Her attempt to inscribe the space outside the borders of realism, to map the dream of impossibility, is a paradoxical process which is never "fixed, closed, eternal or universal," but makes room for a model based on "contingency, multiplicity, fragmentation and discontinuity."⁴ van Herk does not reject the old faith, culture and values; rather she challenges the conclusive frames of convention of literature, religion, history and sociology.

An increasing number of voices and visions of Canadian artists of Dutch Canadian heritage are being revealed on this moving circular model. Maria Jacobs is a first generation, modern Canadian poet, a weaver: weaving, webbing, and embroidering the words in order to pass on meaning. The pain and trauma of the disruption of the blood circle of children, family, and past that she describes in her poetry are part of the

⁴Linda Hutcheon, "Introduction", The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary-Canadian Fiction (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), p.19.

identity of Dutch Canadians. The web created joins the old images and the new, and sets them into an interlocking symmetry. Telling the stories is like a third birth, a regaining of a sense of wholeness. We can now see the old and familiar with new eyes and take a purified look at ourselves. The reader of Hugh Cook's stories, for instance, can look back and find the links; one can look at the images of parents and grandparents and find "what's me in them."

In the first years after immigration the new Canadians were a people in transition, divided between two lives, two cultures:

With one foot firmly
in the romantic tradition
the other in quicksand
we are not well equipped
to take charge of our lives.⁵

We learn through experience that we cannot build our life on that of someone else. We have to find our own way in growing up, both in immigration and in life generally. The letting go of the Old World is for our own benefit. Like the explorers in The Tent Peg, the old baggage clouds our vision to new possibilities. It must be dealt with for the tangible evidence of our past, those facts of being are knit into our present life to create a new identity. Prairie writer, Guy

⁵Maria Jacobs, "Straddling", What Feathers Are For (Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1986), p.30.

Vanderhaeghe, begins the short story, "What I Learned from Caesar," with "The oldest story is the story of flight, the search for greener pastures. But the pastures we flee, no matter how brown and blighted -- these travel with us, they can't be escaped."⁶ Life is a series of separations from birth to 'arrival,' a series of junctures, images and signposts. The stories and poems, paintings, novels, and movies fill in gaps and knit together the disparate elements. They are the communication pattern which tells what we have seen along the way.

The reality is never quite like the image. Even the old photo, which is proof of being, is unreliable because the composition is manufactured. As soon as we turn our back on what we thought we were or cross the ocean to a new country, the polishing, cutting and splicing takes place until everything seems homogenized and harmonious. Reality recedes and is replaced by imagined reality, broken images, impressions, composed pictures.

Besides the letting go of the old, there is a simultaneous fear of what is to be. Risk-taking and following one's desires do not come without sacrifice. van Herk's work, to a great degree, explores that

⁶Guy Vanderhaeghe, "What I Learned from Caesar", Man Descending (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982), p.69.

change noted by Jacobs: the difference between what one thinks is the physical reality and what one imagines can be. She recognizes the uncertainty of truth "in the wide, undefinable circle around the facts."⁷

Much of the literature produced by those first Dutch immigrants revolved around those facts. Yet it becomes evident very quickly that even the bare facts are changeable depending from which angle and through whose eyes they are viewed. Added to these variables are the dreams, aspirations, and visions of the viewer, and the story changes yet further. Present day writers of Dutch descent such as John Terpstra, Hugh Cook, Maria Jacobs, Patricia Rozema, Guy Vanderhaeghe, Aritha van Herk, Rudy Wiebe, and many more, probe and sift through the threads, memories and mementoes, fabricating truths and meaning through an imaginative recreation of what they themselves have heard, seen or experienced.

The immigrant stories are often told through a child narrator, partly because the writers were often children when they immigrated and partly because the child sees in an impressionistic manner; thus the stories told are elaborated impressions or poetic

⁷Aritha van Herk, "Introduction", To All Our Children, ed. A. van der Mey (Jordan Station, Ontario: Paideria Press, 1983), p.11.

visions. The child stores up all he has seen in his mind to be re-investigated from various perspectives at a later time.

The children may reject the values and visions of the parents, their attitudes, habits and customs, and this conflict between point of view of original immigrant and his descendants forms the basis of many of these works of fiction. Yet the children maintain a plural identity in that they inherit the 'change' of their parents. The gap between these two generations in conflict closes as the children communicate with and speak for the previous generation. Their stories recreate the process of change, the journey of the first immigrants, and in so doing they link themselves and other Canadians to a part of their inheritance. The spirit is still intact, the warmth and solidarity not destroyed by the change. This generation is putting new words to the silent language of the first immigrants and interpreting the memory of song. Subsequent generations will never quite understand the Dutch immigrant's strengths, his sacrifices, his obedience, his gratitude, and his appreciation of the tenuousness of life which are made clear in his accounts and stories, and in his religious praise. All we have left are the disjointed images they have passed on and it is up to the artist to recreate and transform

the experience for all of us to comprehend and be deserving of our legacy.

Immigration and the retelling of the process involve movement in depth as well as in distance. Constant self-examination is required in order to make the common marvellous again. The pattern and order we create must remain open-ended to adjust to the natural harmony and the all-encompassing "kingdom" order. In this way we all must anticipate our inheritance of "change" and take our own precautions against stagnation.

Rudy Wiebe's short story, "Sailing to Danzig", encapsulates the process of mythmaking, that final stage of cultural development where practical skill and consciousness coincide. Wiebe identifies the essential human truth, which is the focus of the three writers examined in depth in this paper, when he opens his story with "the first Adam Wiebe was Dutch."⁸

His ancestor, Adam Wiebe, was reclaiming land and recreating the earth in that peculiar Dutch feat of engineering, stringing cables and moving earth over water from hill to bastion centuries ago. Yet he remained a "stateless refugee", forever exiled and forced to migrate continually. He finally immigrated

⁸Rudy Wiebe, "Sailing to Danzig", Dutch Quintet, p.11.

to Canada to escape Old World, constricting, man-made structures. The essential pattern that remained is that of ancestry and the tie to the first Adam ("I am the vine, you are the branches").⁹ The narrator recognizes his own Canadian, (Adam Wiebe's) reflection in the first Dutch Adam Wiebe, who also resembles the original Adam. This is the last and only permanent bastion. The narrator has sailed throughout the world, suspended and sustained by these cables strung by his ancestors.

The younger Wiebe has only a few small facts left about his heritage and these conveyed little or nothing about his identity. The teenager discovers that

my mother and father could tell me so little about the names I had, could tell me only small facts that explained nothing; facts like intermittent poles sticking up out of sinking ground, holding up cables no one could explain what genius, what vision had once made them possible so that all that solid earth could be moved so beautifully over swamp from the Bischoffs Berg to build the Wieben Bastion.

Wybe Adam von Harlingen, where are you now? Your cables are gone. Only the memories of songs remain.¹⁰

But Rudy Wiebe, here in Alberta, Canada, child of a distant Frisian Adam, is knitting and weaving words, memories and songs of his own to continue these cables

⁹Ibid., p.7.

¹⁰Ibid., p.21.

strung by ancestors, which will ultimately lead him back to Danzig, Byzantium or Eden. And ultimately the intermittent facts and their particular visions are not as essential as the recreated stories, the "human truths", that is, our individual accounts of sailing to our own bastions, our final homecoming.

Just because we are ignorant of our ancestral sailing, immigrations, migrations and journeys does not "make any of those cables less real, any sailing less beautiful. Or potentially dangerous."¹¹ Their presence is real and if we listen carefully and look behind and ahead, we will see our part in the pattern and the broken pieces will fit into a wholeness of sorts.

Canadians, too, are a nation of stateless refugees or universal migrants. The contemporary writer, Bharati Mukherjee, has strong words for Canadians on the subject of change. To her the quest of national identity is echoed in the personal one. "Canada is changing too now", she said in a recent interview, "and we must go with the changes. What will make or break Canada now is our personal and national response to the threat and reality of de-Europeanization."¹² We who

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Bharati Mukherjee, "Midday" Interview, CBC, October 19, 1989.

are not native Canadians cannot become complacent, immersed in our own nostalgia. The way we look at ourselves now as Canadians, what we remember of the process of Canadianization, as well as our compassion to other travellers, will affect our response to change.

Initially, the fresh, "young" writers of Dutch heritage produce a literature which works centripetally to cohere and affirm themselves and their physical place on the map of Canada: "I am here as opposed to there." As they mature that map loses its significance and must be redrawn to accommodate a wider vision. The fiction now creates a centrifugal force dispersing in multiple perspectives. The writer moves from a marginal position where perception is splintered and incomplete, towards a greater completeness as he participates more fully in experience -- past, present and future. Now "there" becomes "here" as well. Home is no longer a physical place but a much more encompassing metaphor where we experience a universally shared sense of identity. Once the immigrant artist is familiar with the particular, he begins to move outward towards the larger mythic context of literature. The greatest potential his art can reach is that of implicit metaphorical identity where the divine is within the person rather than out there somewhere. In

the work of Terpstra, Cook, van Herk, and other artists of Dutch heritage, we see that interest in the unexplored landscape of Canada growing into a fascination with unexplored areas of human myth. The stories they tell and the maps they draw are a tracing of their own Dutch Canadian lives, of the lives of those gone before them and an attempt to imagine the future.

Hutcheon writes, "The textuality of history matches that of literature: that is, the only way we know our past is through its traces, its texts."¹³ Canadian writers of Dutch heritage must return to their history in order to discover and subsequently contest their historical myths. First the old myths must be "deconstructed" in order for redefinition to take place. Terpstra, Cook, Jacobs, Wiebe do re-define themselves by reviewing their history and traditions. van Herk has moved yet further into adjacent spheres, challenging those borders of old European myth, Canadian literature, and female subjectivity, offering new perspectives on old interpretations.

For Patricia Rozema, another artist of Dutch Canadian Calvinist heritage, the world of art is far more than just pictures and words: it has the power of religion. Her film, "I've Heard the Mermaids Singing",

¹³Hutcheon, p.14.

reveals an integrity, honesty and religious depth. It shows a search for signposts beyond the physical arrival at a comfortable world of art. Her attempt to capture and recreate according to the larger pattern is an indication of the heights to which her imagination, as well as that of her Canadian counterparts of Dutch heritage, has risen.

This second generation of Dutch Canadians is steadily developing new modes of expression, creating new patterns and moving from poetry and short stories, through novels, films, photography, painting, and music. The work demonstrates the growth from two-dimensional, incomplete images of life as an immigrant Canadian to the recreated, imaginative process of a truly Canadian, truly human vision in which they themselves are part of the creation.

Upon close examination, we can distinguish the varying casts of the same image. Suddenly, we realize that though our individual perspectives may vary according to where we stand or whence we came, we are looking at ourselves travelling on our own Canadian journey. When we see from without and within at the same time, we have realized an "over-looking", encompassing vision which comprises time, space, gender, ethnicity, and culture. A feeling of belonging goes with this "wholeness" of vision when we see

ourselves as part of what we see and know, when we see the centre and margin of the circle at the same time. By recognizing the shades of colour and multiple interpretations of stories contributed by Canadians of Dutch descent, we now know that without these voices and visions the perceived whole is incomplete.

It is the on-going transformation, not the first physical arrival, that is important to the reader. To avoid conclusiveness is to keep telling the story, constantly inventing, re-inventing and un-inventing ourselves and our world. By doing so we uncover a multiplicity of meaning until we are all included. "Hearing the voice that is theirs" is essential to ensure continuity and to enable others to discover a more complete mosaic because of the inscription of the Dutch Canadian voice into Canadian fiction.

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