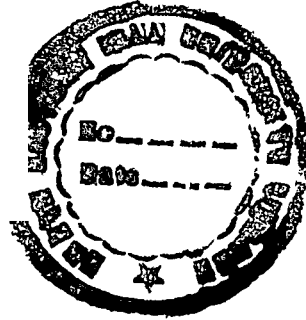


**WOMAN AS ISLAND, GEOGRAPHY AND  
GENDER: INTERTEXTUAL NEGOTIATIONS IN  
ARITHA VAN HERK'S *PLACES FAR FROM  
ELLESMERE***



By

*Swapnalee Devee*

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirement of the degree of *Master of Philosophy in  
English*

Of

**North-Eastern Hill University  
Shillong 793 014**

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This is being submitted to the North-Eastern Hill University for the degree of Master of Philosophy in English.



Head  
Department of English



Supervisor



Candidate

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*Swapnalee Devec*  
(Swapnalee Devec)

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## **INTRODUCTION**

|| A genre is less like a game than like a code of social  
behaviour.

*Validity in Interpretation* E.D. Hirsch.

## INTRODUCTION

“Almost everything,” says Helen Cixous, “is yet to be written by women about femininity”(1981:256). While moving towards writing completeness, feminism has to keep on writing itself. In underlining difference and (re) writing itself feminism has to mediate between/among issues, ideas and re-contextualise priorities. At the heart of rewriting gender, sex, and identity is to create and occupy a space that can be called “women’s own”. The vision of that space is anchored on an articulation of the ‘female desire’. The awareness of that ‘desire’ is, primarily, connected to the understanding of the structures of female ‘self’. Patriarchal marginalization of women no more holds in today’s context, however, it is impossible to think of women’s autonomy without challenging and contesting axiomatic and universal patriarchal discourse. It is for this reason that patriarchy becomes central in many respects to feminism. As patriarchy cannot disappear over night, women’s struggle should continue. In saying that “everything is yet to be written by women about femininity”, Cixous has certainly warned the feminists that the challenges before them are far from over and it goes beyond biological determinism of sex and cultural construction of gender, and there is a need to open up perspectives for self-actualization. For such a proposition to materialise, the challenges before the women creative writers are enormous. The feminist literary critics also have to share the responsibility in developing a self-reflexive feminist discourse, while dismantling patriarchy’s mechanisms of domination and control.

For a typical feminist, the subject is women. Her body, language, identity, autonomy of selfhood are vectors in the process of reformulation and redefinition of our hitherto notions of gender, society and culture. Methods of reasoning in this discourse is ~~deconstruction of the patriarchal myth and canon~~ that moves feminist articulations in words, creating a vision and a tradition; and an epistemology that is based on female experiences. Feminist thinker and writer, Mary Daly and Adrienne Rich most vividly argue that women are completely different from men, in the formation of knowledge. A new binary opposition emerges between “tongue” (female tongue) and “muscle” (male muscle) in the trajectory of the so-called femininity and masculinity. The ‘lack’ in women considered as the debilitating factor is transformed into strength in women’s writing.

The centrality of man in controlling the discourse is reconstructed in replacing exclusion with inclusion, absence as presence, docility with activity. In the process, the woman is attributed with subjectivity and autonomy. The objective is to create ‘feminist thought’ replacing ‘male centered thought’ and perception. It is not that patriarchy does not recognize the potential power of women (the womb itself symbolically represents the creative power), but fears to confirm it.

Creative writing provides the essential scope to female writers to articulate themselves in order to break the silences, tell female tales in a language invented by them for their purpose. The women novelists prefer the fragmented parodic

form to deal with the issues. However, the novels written by women vary in form and representation. Canadian female writers excel in expressing themselves taking up issues close to their hearts in recognising the agony of the female voice and relocating the women in culture with honour.

Aritha Van Herk is a sensitive and alert woman writer, who occupies a recognizable place in Canadian literary scene. She ceaselessly experiments in writing fictions, opening a new way of articulating feminine concerns. In her writing she attempts to bring fiction closer to critical theory in the form of 'fictocriticism' combining facts and fiction and erasing the dividing line between fiction and theory. Aritha Van Herk was born in Wetaskiwin, Alberta in 1954 to Dutch immigrant parents Meretje (Van Dam) and William Herk. Educated at the University of Alberta, Van Herk teaches Canadian Literature and Creative writing at the University of Calgary. She first rose to prominence with the publication of her first novel, *Judith* (1978) that won the Seal Canadian First Novel Award. She was selected as one of Canada's most promising young writers in the 45 Below Competition for her second novel *The Tent Peg* (1981). This work is one of the few fictional works about the Canadian north, written from women's perspective, exploring women's psychological domain. Her first two novels *Judith* and *The Tent Peg* are considered as *anti-male* novels by many as the female protagonists in these two novels escape into a world of their choice to enjoy freedom. Her female protagonists are always in search of freedom and space. In these novels, autonomy of selfhood and feminine identity underline the development of the protagonists.

Her third publication, *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey* (1986) is a parody of the picaresque novel of Arachne Manteia, an underwear sales-woman. It was short listed for the Governor General's Award for fiction. In this work, she depicts the interaction between the author and the reader, while attempting to establish a relationship with the fictional characters of the text. Similar strategy is employed in her fourth work *Places Far From Ellesmere* (1990), a *geografictione* that goes beyond genre classification where fiction, autobiography, literary criticism merge. This text is selected for the present study. She depicts places through geographical mapping to show that even literature creates maps of places and people in its own way.

Aritha Van Herk's *In Visible Ink: Crypto-frictions* (1991) tries to assert that no form of writing can exclusively stay apart from each other. Writings become journeys through places created in language. This book reveals the author's continued interest in ficto-criticism. In creating a style of her own, Van Herk delights in the art of linguistic play, while reconstructing or revising classical, Biblical and Canadian figures and landscapes. *A Frozen Tongue* (1992) is a collection of Van Herk's essays and ficto-criticism.

As a fictional work, *Places Far From Ellesmere* maps human territory, in that it transcends its limits and redefines feminine bonding. *Places Far From Ellesmere* is subtitled as a *geografictione* a new label that is anchored on asking a female question. This is indeed an invented genre, an invented space. This genre conjoins multiple genres as Leona Gom identifies; "In some places it is a memoir, in others history and often it is all of these together" (1991:125). It

depicts an island Ellesmere, which symbolically stands for an imaginary territory exclusively meant for women. Geography has always been a male domain and women are traditionally excluded from it. Van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere* admits women to Arctic space and aims to rewrite about the north from a feminist perspective. Aritha Van Herk is the narrator/protagonist and participant in the novel. She travels to the Arctic Canada in order to occupy the space, while claiming it exclusively for women. North seems to be a more seminal space that does not permit itself to be colonized by the masculine propaganda. North is a kind of open space without any discourse attributed to it, therefore it offers an opportunity to enter into a new enigmatic discourse. To be a Northerner is a state of mind, so is Ellesmere - it is an enigmatic creation of the female imagination. Van Herk starts her self-actualizing journey through Edberg, Edmonton, Calgary and Ellesmere along with Anna Karenina, Tolstoy's infamous character, whose presence in the novel is exciting/ enthralling. Van Herk designs a challenge here to transcend the barriers of time and space in rescuing Anna from Nineteenth century Russia, and locating her in Twentieth century Ellesmere. In the process, she critiques Tolstoy's authorial intention in *Anna Karenina*. She tries to become her own authority in the process de-authorizes the male notions/ assumptions. Tolstoy is accused of authorial arrogance despite the "critic's inviolability" attached to him. Van Herk accuses him of not being fair to Anna almost making her suffocate in the stifling patriarchal atmosphere of the nineteenth century Russian social milieu.

A woman embarking on a literary venture has to overcome a lot of pre-ordained norms, formulated and maintained by men. To conform is to make way for social acceptance as a virtuous “good woman” and step outside the norms is to lose approval. Morality as a norm is meant only for women not for men. Women were subjugated and condemned without even their voices being heard. This kind of domination calls for protest and creating the ‘space’ for women’s freedom. Van Herk wants the space in her writing for Anna to undertake a self-actualizing journey to fulfill her unfulfilled desires.

The purpose of this study is to analyse contemporary feminist thoughts based on separatism, utopianism and cultural feminism in the light of literary theories underlining geographical inputs in the process of “writing as exploration”. This work explores the limits of fiction writing and goes beyond, where geography shapes up the entire course of the book attributing human characteristics or traits to the geographical locales. In fact, geography builds up the personality in such a manner that it becomes an inseparable part of human life not only in fiction but also in real life. While personal geography is important, so also one’s identity, self-possession and history. The fascinating fact in Van Herk’s work is that geography provides the scope to re/read gender. The work allows escape from bondage and initiates bonding. The geographical locale becomes the physical space that makes the invisible visible thereby admitting freedom of choice and action, where there is no intervention of any kind.

*Places Far From Ellesmere*, assumes “hypertextuality” and negotiates intertextuality , while transforming and deconstructing versions of a male text.

*Anna Karenina*, the much acclaimed, perhaps widely read (in translation) text by Leo Tolstoy is recreated in an intertextual manner to register female resistance, as a mode of protest. The intertextual negotiation in the text creates the possibility of criticism and recreation in the probable utterances of all those innumerable other texts on similar issues yet to be scrutinized. This text becomes a sort of its own kind to analyse problematic issues like sex, gender, desire etc., while opening up new ways of creating female space.

Finally, Ellesmere as an imaginative construct gives way to the emerging idea of “woman as island”. Ellesmere promises self-fulfillment and self-expression in its unreachability and cartographic representation. “Women as island” is a fictive construct that articulates the probable alternative for women in constructing female identity based on shared experiences and bonding through mental mapping and dream geography that lead to creation of feminine “utopia”.

For exploring the notion of “woman as island”, the present study is divided into the following chapters:

1. Introduction.
2. Geography and Fiction: Writing as Exploration.
3. Writing as Site: Negotiating Intertextuality.
4. Woman as Island: Geography and Rereading Gender.
5. Conclusion.

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# **CHAPTER - ONE**

The transition to a new age in turn necessitates a new perception and a new conception of *space-time*, the inhabiting of places, and of *containers* or envelops of identity.

*An Ethics of Sexual Difference: Irigaray, Luce.*

## GEOGRAPHY AND FICTION: WRITING AS EXPLORATION

As narratives both fictional and geographical writings are discourses that mediate people and places. Texts produce meanings according to the conditions and contexts in which they are read or re-read. The relationship between the discourses of fiction and geography is not only affiliative, but also intertextual. This unique relationship transcends the boundaries of “metaphorical” and “material” space, while blending intellectual and “imaginative” objectives. These discourses are constructions of spaces in which human action literally takes place (Gregory, 1994:5). As James Clifford maintains:

We now have to make sense of a world without stable vantage points; a world in which the observers and the observed are in ceaseless fluid, and interactive motion, a world where human ways of life increasingly influence, dominate, parody, translate and subvert one another.

(James Clifford 1986: 1-26, quoted in Gregory, Derek 1994:9)

Clifford's view underlines the necessary conditions under which geographical and fictional writings are produced. The textuality of both fiction and geography variously deals with people and places mapping territories and imaginations. They also reflect upon life, upon its trials, tribulations, failures and triumphs, while holding them together in rhetorical representations. Aritha Van

Herk, a Canadian feminist writer, for the first time used the expression *geografictione* and has attempted to fictionalise geography. The process and practice of this new *genre* has been successfully accomplished by her in her work *Places Far From Ellesmere*.

Geography and fiction are about space and territories. Fiction as a narrative creates its own geography as it creates its own space. Geography defines itself as the study of the earth's surface, the space within which the human population lives. It seeks to understand a person's life in relation to places, habitations and environmental conditions that comprise his or her geographical world. As Richard Hartshorne, an American Geographer maintains in his work *Perspective on the Nature of Geography* that

Geography is concerned to provide accurate, orderly and rational description and interpretation of the variable characters of Earth's surface. (Hartshorne 1959: 12)

Geography tries to locate a place accurately with certain inherent attributes and tries to represent its location effectively through maps. The study of Geography disentangles the factors that lead to particular spatial patterns. However, geography primarily is associated with writing -- writing about the earth. It constructs the physical existence of landscapes, territories, and boundaries in words.

Fiction defines itself as a product of human imagination, thought and action and it refers primarily to "mental structures". All mental activities are supposed to be fictional, because they shape materials, which are inherently shapeless. As mental

structures, fictional representations, though often considered false, are accepted as true for their psychic coherence. We must go on relying partly on these fictions, since there is no other way of making sense of things. Fiction seems to be relativist, because it sensitizes us to the limitations of our own and other people's outlook.

As a literary genre, fiction is inherently geographical. The world of fiction is made up of locations, settings, landscapes, perspectives and horizons. Various places and spaces are occupied by the fictional characters in the fictive world, which the narrator explores along with the reader. Fiction represents a field of varied, sometimes competing forms of geographical knowledge and experience, from a sensuous awareness of places to enlightened idea of a region and nation. As an impure art, the form of fiction has been speculative for it explores and articulates social milieu and mental conditions of its characters. In this sense, the novelist becomes an explorer like a geographer. The refinement of the fictional genre was appropriated with the refinement of a number of geographical discourses, such as town planning, estate improvement, cartography and topographical painting, which survey and record the spaces of the modern world.

Geography and literature may not be considered as the combination of two essentially different disciplines, objective and subjective, real and imaginary, but are overlapping and interconnected discourses that intersect each other at different levels. Following this, it may be asserted that the worldliness of literary texts and the imaginativeness of geographical texts conjoin to create the wonderful world of fictional writing. The imaginativeness of texts, fictional as well as geographical

reflects the images they express and the way they construct them, through modes of writing and compositions. The worldliness of a text consists of various contexts such as biographical, economic, institutional, geographical that are integrated by writing to make them intelligible. Geography in its extended sense is not confined to any one discipline or even to the specialized vocabularies of the academy. Instead it travels through social practices to a large extent and is implicated in myriad topographies of power and knowledge. People instinctively make sense of places, locations, territories and landscapes in everyday lives in a number of ways for a number of purposes. Geographers have used literature as resource, as evidences of past landscapes and benefited the creative writers by enhancing their capability to capture the subjective qualities of places, locales and people.

The institutionalization of geography during the late nineteenth century has made geography entrapped in a world of contracting spaces and expanding aspirations. On the other hand, academic institutionalization of fiction has made fiction experimental in nature. Fiction has become far more adventurous in scope and writers have taken excess liberty with fictional genre, adapting to its deviant form and content in order to create a fictional territory for the reader as well as for the writer himself/herself.

This so-called experimental fiction allows a reader to explore the fictional territories by involving himself/herself in the narrative. A reader explores these territories according to his/her subjective responses to life's experience both at the levels of reality and illusion. Aritha Van Herk came up with the idea of

*geografictione*, a hybrid Canadian Italian word – combining geography with fiction in order to fictionalize geography through her lived experiences and thus to humanize geography attributing human traits.

The process of exploration is not only an activity to overcome distances, but also to create “imaginative geographies”. The explorers have experienced different realities and hidden secrets of different regions as they travelled. More than that they have constructed particular ways of reading the explored territories, places and people. John Berger Cosgrove showed how the concept of landscape formed a bourgeois “way of seeing” during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This concept was very much rooted in the spirit of Renaissance humanism and in the exercise of power. If the argument is that a landscape is “a way of seeing”, then, there will be a number of ways of seeing it. One may deduce from this that there apparently will be a male and a female perspective of seeing, experiencing and writing about places and people.

Recent studies on imaginative geographies have examined the processes in which images and fantasies about the colonial worlds were articulated within the texts of geographers, soldiers, missionaries, anthropologists, novelists and administrators. Explorers’ tales were lavishly illustrated with images of fabulous creatures, awe-inspiring landscapes and daring deeds. The story of exploration has frequently been interpreted as the gradual triumph of modern geographical science over the mysteries of the earth. Geographical knowledge was represented as a tool of

empire building enabling both the acquisition of territory and the exploitation of resources.

V.S. Naipaul in his novel *A Way In The World* (1994) has explored his geographical knowledge, by portraying Trinidad in depth along with Venezuela. He speaks about *small island geography* and *colonial geography*. Even Hardy, Faulkner, Lawrence and many others have created “partly real, partly imaginative” worlds to give regional uniqueness to their fictions. William Faulkner is most deeply *Southern of Southern* writers -- the setting and scene of most of his novels, is his legendary *Yoknapatawpha* County. It is supposed to be in north-western Mississippi, with its county seat, called Jefferson. Yoknapatawpha County of Faulkner’s legend is based closely upon the Oxford and Lafayette County of geographical fact South,(its people with racial identity) forms the subject of his fiction -- an inescapably inevitable subject. Hardy and Faulkner particularly mythicised landscapes of “Wessex” and “Yoknapatawhna” in their respective fictions and Lawrence could never forget “Eastwood” and “Haggs Farm” which, according to him, made up “the country of my hear”. Haggs Farm was an inseparable landscape of his memory mapping Nottinghamshire with its mining environment turned everything to vile and ugliness became a part of London life. The very landscape of Nottinghamshire spoke about mining community and their lives with acquired attributes. Hardy and Faulkner mostly portrayed social misfits as protagonists who occupy the fringes of conventional rural society. This imaginative stance leads to the exploration of that society in fiction. Hardy was the great model of provincial writer of genius who

forced the literary world to listen to him and he caught the vivid imagination of Geographers.

Even for the twentieth century authors like Norman Mailer, America is still portrayed as ‘ a beauty of magnificence unparalleled’, ‘a beauty with a leprous skin ... heavy with child’ and a ‘ tormented lovely girl’ in *Armies of the Night* (1968). In this work a series of images reflect the range of conflicting feelings that Americans currently project on to the landscape. Annette Kolodny traces the web of images that focus the metaphor of *land as woman*. A series of oppositions in the nineteenth century thought between passive foliation and active impregnation are associated with American landscape. Frontier imagery in American imagination was “shaped by personal psychology, social context, milieu and changing geography”, while masculine image stresses the existence of a virgin land, a veritable garden of Eden with immense possibilities to be “taken” and “possessed” and exploited. The feminine images, by contrasts, view American landscape as a garden to be cultivated, nurtured and cared for considering a natural role for human being in the scheme of things.

During the time of Imperialism and Empire Building not only fictional heroes of the exploration and exploitation like Mr. Kurtz (*The Heart of Darkness* 1899), but explorers, the hunters, soldiers, the missionaries, the administrators, all in particular ways have provided moral models for a generation of empire builders. There was hardly any space and scope for women explorers in the colonial discourse. Of course, during the Victorian period, a lady like Isabela Bird went on travelling of her own



and in the process exploring not only new lands and people but herself. Her travelogue is unique for she has articulated her own identity and experience. However, male Geographers never bothered to include the experience of female explorers in the geographical discourse.

The female responses to sights and scenes or to landscapes are wonderfully unique to geographical imaginations. The quest for truth, discovery, self-realization and self-actualization is as much a male as female desire. Annette Kolodny in her book *The Lady of the Land* (1975) tries to trace the metaphorical representation of the land as a feminine entity throughout American history. She incorporates the innumerable but contradictory ways in which men articulate the land with the attributes of *Virgin Mother* and *Mistress*. Land as a fundamental attribute of geography is inseparably related to a place. A place has a character and a personae of its own and it comes alive in the works of creative writers where geographical territories although real become fictional. Annette Kolodny further surveyed the American literary history and showed how the New World was constantly fancied as a means of male gratification, for a virgin land to be conquered and tamed by the forces of male aggression.

Contemporary writings on "geography" are filled with assumptions about gender, as well as empire. It is not that geography serves only one sole purpose of empire building by extending and occupying territories, but geography is instrumental in other aspects too. Fiction, today has encroached into geography in a big way demolishing the boundary demarcated between fiction and non-fiction.

Fiction has fictionalised geography by reinterpreting the landscape and rediscovering the place in a new form that is through personification. The disappointing part is that it has taken a male form in male writings. Alan Sillitoe's "Nottingham novels" are comprehensively masculine, structured almost entirely on the expression or repression of male desire, whether in its more visceral or more enlightened modes. The very conventions of mapping, which help to fix Nottingham's geography, also release the author and his subject from purely local, vernacular associations, co-ordinating Nottingham to other cities and their cultural traditions. Sillitoe's Nottingham stands as a sexual battleground in which women are considered as sexual objects to be possessed or owned without identity and individuality.

"Women's way of knowing" could immensely contribute to the rewriting of histories of geography and geography of histories. The stories of women travelers are incredibly varied yet they share some common trends. One is their quite explicit recognition of the personal goals of their travels. The so-called objective discoveries of new places were not separated from the discovery of themselves. Their understanding emanent from internal sources for most of them seek places where they could live a desired life denied at home. For the women explorers of Victorian age, growing up in worlds circumscribed by Victorian standards and expectations, freedom could only be assured living in places away from that set up. Women travelled, then, for quite specific reasons. But actually they were seeking as much empowerment and self-knowledge as "objective knowledge". Their satisfaction was derived not in the external discovery of "new geographies", but in the process of

exploring, in experiencing a world in which they could participate in their own terms.

To explore a world both figuratively and literally involves an active participation of the subject as observer. Although male explorers were also interested in self-exploration however for them external discovery of places was the top most priority to quench the male thirst of adventure. Women were in fact more free in their travels as there was no such institutional context. So they were more often aware only of their subjective goals.

Explorations involve discovering and separating of unknown lands and people. In this sense writing is exploration for it opens up new avenues Explorers are both outsiders and insiders-- they observe and yet become participants in the lives and lands that they travel through. To “conquer” and to “penetrate” unexplored lands or places were considered a purely male activity--“suppressing foreign lands as they had suppressed women” (Said.1978).

People create structures in the context of places, those structures then condition the making of people. The places can change in terms of both their context and extent. The people-place-interaction incorporates a place-place or people in place interaction while establishing external as well as internal linkages A powerful sense of interplay is seen between a specific character’s sensibility and a specific sense of place and time. In *Places Far From Ellesmere*, Aritha Van Herk herself becomes the protagonist and a participant in the text. She relives through her experiences at three different places-- Edberg, Edmonton and Calgary while creating

an utopia for women in the desert island, Ellesmere. She wants to be in Ellesmere with Anna Karenina to breathe freely without patriarchal bondage. Here writing becomes a real exciting experience and self-assuring exploration for the writer exhorts the readers to question while interrogating herself and a particular text like Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. Van Herk here explored the multiple possibilities that are available to a writer to create works of fiction through auto-representation and self-reflexivity.

Geography builds up the psychology in a sense that a place determines the temperament and outlook of a person as she/he is inseparable to its surroundings. To put in other words, no one can be "outside geography" and its influence. Thomas Hardy's and William Faulkner's usual obsession with a place, in an intimate sense, indicates a desire to *forget the words* to engage with more fundamental, palpable realities of life, that is the land, the reasons, physical labour and instincts, traditional agrarian mores, folk-culture. Their fictional worlds define man's identity largely through his relationship with his environment. So a place, a location or simply the geography can be powerful once articulated in language for it transforms the inanimate to living beings, and humanises a place. However, Van Herk makes a difference in using a different language in attributing material context for creating gendered spaces.

The theme of post-modern fiction itself is the composition of fiction at the level of enunciation and the enounced. At the level of enunciation there is an obvious concern with the role of the narrator and the narratee. Plurality of narrative voices are introduced and in most cases the narrators are writers. This is an exploration too

for  
perhaps

Post modern writing gives way to aleatory writing, parody and pastiche that questions the story, forms a tissue of intertextuality. Moreover the representation of the author in the work leads to self-parody. The conventional demarcations between fact and fiction, present and past, reality and artifice have collapsed and it is manifested in texts.

In *Places Far From Ellesmere*, the author is simply not the narrator but a reader, a participant and a character too. In her creative endeavour, she changes the role of the reader by provoking, accusing, questioning them and thus forcing the reader to get involved in the narrative. Even she revolutionized the role of the narrator in the text, employing the narrator as both character and reader. She initiates the readers into the act of re-reading/un-reading different places in the novel and Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*.

Geography which was once ascribed as "mother of all sciences" considered to be a "robust manly science", due to the chauvinistic attitude of the male geographers. They thought it was male prerogative to explore territories and conquer the entire horizon. The Western Canadian writers believed and behaved in a manner that exploring North in writing is only man's business and privilege. The Northern territory, still unexplored at large is full of adventure because it is associated with mystery and romance that imbued the geographical imagination. Van Herk in *Places Far From Ellesmere*, demolishes the patriarchal myth by contextualizing the remote island in her work. The post-modern female writers have been trying to deconstruct

the old patriarchal myths and attitude to reconstruct everything in their own way self reflexively articulating female identity and experience. Van Herk maintains:

“Writing place: hiding place”(p.21).

A writer with a mask/without a mask explores many hidden truths to justify certain issues. For writers a writing place is a hiding place, for it provides them a location and in a sense writing provides solace to the bruised female hearts/egos Writing works as a therapy for women to vent out the rage and fury. The suppressed feeling of an oppressed community (woman as a community) is expressed in an overt form The gradual erasure of “I” in women’s writing reflects the significant blending of personal reminiscence and factual observation.

Van Herk divides the novel into four distinguished sections, named after four different geographical locales in Canada -- Edberg, Edmonton, Calgary and Ellesmere, These places again represent certain attributes to relate them to certain significant themes. There are the places where Van Herk lived and experienced its surroundings. She relives her experience through the fractionalized narrative of these places through memory mapping and dream geography. The author explores her formative years -- childhood, youth and adulthood with the help of rememory, placing herself again in each of these places while creating an utopia for women in the remote iceclad islands of Ellesmere.

Van Herk opens her novel *Places Far From Ellesmere* with the portrayal of Edberg: “ Edberg, Coppice of desire and return” The journey through re-living, re-experiencing and re-discovering the self begins at Edberg, a small, semi urban town

Edberg is a schedule, a reminder of the outside world -- North/South. Modern day movement is a part of geography and the movement of "self" symbolically commences with the moving train that allows entry and exit. The train journey to specific destination can be identified with the journey of the self aiming at the goal of attaining self-hood and autonomy that has to originate somewhere and Edberg indicates that beginning. The railway platform at Edberg is transformed to a person that acts in a human way. A railway platform witnessing so many incidents both fulfilling and disappointing, (including Anna's tragic death) acts as a human agent;

How many farewells/ deaths/ welcomes/ shopping trips  
did that train's platform launch; or abortions/  
abandonment's/ divorces?

[p.18]

Edberg is considered to be a lifeless person -- full of gloom -- whose soul cannot be elevated:

"Dust over all. A dead town: Edberg" [p.20]

) Edberg: Deadberg. [P.22]

Despite all untoward happenings/mishappenings and heartbreaks a town exists. So does a person:

Dream yourself a place: Edberg [p.20]

A place is justified with certain territorial attributes just as a person becomes a person with certain human attributes. Edberg is a place far from Ellesmere, which is mere, insignificant and hardly acknowledged. So Edberg takes the form of a "woman" whose entity is almost a non-entity except as an alluring object of sex and

passion. The different places of Edberg -- the bus garage, the hardware store, Erickson's Locker plant, co-op store, the hotel, the post office are renewed as sites with inherent traits for,

... the site persists, re/news its presence. (P.32)

Even writing as a site of exploration renews the previously told/heard/read stories in a new dimension. That is a kind of intertextuality and transtextuality, which is apparently dominant in *Places Far From Ellesmere*. Moreover geography and fiction intermingle with each other :

... trying to find Russia, and where will it all end?  
With murder? With a woman in a novel getting off a  
train in Edberg, her red beg in her train in Edberg, her  
red beg in her hand, seeking to fulfil a fiction?

[PP.33-34]

Edberg is fictionalized in the first section of the book. Anna gets down from a train in Edberg, a semi-urban town to fulfill previously unfulfilled desires. Anna suffered in the hands of a Russian male author that also reflects the gender bias in nineteenth century Russian context. That is why the 'feminist writer' (as she insists on that), Van Herk locates Anna in Canadian context and in twentieth century context she tries to transform Anna into a modern woman, aware of identity and selfhood who is empowered to read her own story from a female point of view:

... she has only to read the story differently, her  
own story waiting to be un/read by the light of  
these places. [P.36]

Edberg as geographical location has created its own fiction and a reader has to identify his/her own personal geography in reading of Van Herk's *Geografictione-Places Far from Ellemere*. Territorial divisions or geographical boundary of Edmonton is developed as narrative exploration. Even the text itself is extended to a city or place waiting to be explored just as Anna is waiting to be re/read. In this section, "Edmonton, long division", Van Herk maintains a sense of historicity to deal with the geographical location of Edmonton. History relates to the sense of time and place, thus enchains geography in it. Van Herk depicts herself in this section openly, and she becomes a part of the text and geography too, as nothing is "outside geography". The desire to create an island to be inhabited by only women germinates in this section, it gets momentum in the third section and finally is articulated as a probable locale for women's world, a space to be occupied. The geographical division is transformed to a division of the "self". Edmonton pretends to be another place--which is indeed a human act, a human being indulges in dream geography to be anywhere he longs to be in. As a matter of fact one is strongly rooted in one place which gives a sense of belonging. Man develops an emotional attachment to a place as he satisfies his biological as well as esthetical need from it as "man cannot live by bread alone". The human attitude and attachment to territory compel them to defend their living space and this space plays a significant role in the fictional narrative.

The third section, "Calgary: this growing graveyard" presents Calgary in its material/social aspects. The place has its own inertia that propels the author to be

constantly on the move-- physical as well as imaginary to fictionalize/humanise her experiences of different places in underlining belongingness;

To dare to say here to die, to dare to stay after death, to implant yourself firmly and say, ' Here I stay', let those who would look for a record come here [P.61].

Calgary, famous for endless and potent light is counted for graveyards, "counted for the people buried there--because death makes a place its own". Van Herk's strange fixation on death comes to the forefront here to suggest that death is a real act of freedom Calgary is full of charm and is also charmless at the same time. This duality reflects the modern day dilemma.

The final section of the novel, " Ellesmere, woman as island" is both integrative and disruptive for Ellesmere constructs and represents the idea of "woman as island". This arctic island despite its physical/natural harshness is chosen to be an ideal place for women to escape patriarchal domination. An island is not a dependant territory--it's representation underlines difference that is self-reflexive to women's identity. The idea is both symbolic and transgressive.

The regions, places, locales matter a lot as they are the prevailing conditions under which people live. Under these contingent circumstances people act as agents within the structures or constructs These structures are nothing but means of organizing of human lives in relation to the place and environment. As V.S Naipaul puts it in *A Way In the World*:

We all inhabit a 'construct' of a world. Ancient peoples had their own. Our grandparents had their own; we cannot absolutely enter into their construct.

[PP 154-155]

The human ways of life influence and subvert one another and in that process new cultures evolve. Everything is apparently fixed on a moving earth but the truth is everything is on motion. Even mountains and islands. No one can occupy a bounded or enclosed cultural space. Fiction or for that matter literature itself becomes a source of evidence for the changing concept of landscapes, cities and mountains or geographical masks. In this sense geography influences the writing of fiction, its formation, construction and design. The concept of intellectual landscapes works effectively to make fiction an exciting territory to escape to fulfill the desire of the heart. It's again a part of mental mapping that constantly goes on creating dream geography or geography of mind. Van Herk maintains:

One can indulge in dream geography. A place is made up with the various contributions of the people of different regions. [P.20]

The Canadian writers both male and female frequently indulge in creating unique geographies for their fictions. Cartographer's anxiety and desire bears upon imaginative mapping and fictionalization of territories. Some of the Canadian writers have been successful in employing metaphors of mapping in their works. These imaginary mappings often emerge as real territories. Margaret Lawrence's *Manawaka*, Alice Munro's *Jubilee*, Margaret Atwood's, *Grisweld*, Robertson Davies' *Deptford* Matt Cohen's *Salem*, Janic Brown's *Shrewsbury* are remarkable

examples of fictional geography just like much acclaimed Hardy's *Wessex*, Faulkner's *Yoknapatawpha* and Lawrence's *Nottingham*. Iconography as the images of these fictionalized territories is impregnated with symbolic meanings. Thus the desert island Ellesmere, the snowclad white mountain symbolically stands for an utopia for the author, Anna and for other women including all those stranded fictional female characters.

Geographical exploration is associated with truth that stands witness to the harsh reality of the land and nature. Similarly writing confronts the ever-expanding sites of life. Writing is not always euphoric in nature, but an exciting experience that deals with places and people. It is sometimes an escape from the mundane reality of existence. Especially for female writers, it provides the required space for self-articulation and expression in a self-reflexivity that bears upon female identity and selfhood.

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## CHAPTER- TWO

For the real miracle is language, that we humans want not only to touch each other but that we want to exchange words, like marbles from a fist, that we want to hear discernible sounds from each other's mouths, that we want to decipher them, that we utter our own sounds and others understand them. Even more miraculous, that we put these various marks on paper, written or printed or typed, and others understand the message, make some connection with these peculiar runes. This is a sweet and terrifying exchange, this intricate and shared knowledge of what is certainly a secret code.

*In Visible Ink: Crypto-frictions:* Aritha Van Herk.

## **Writing As Site: Negotiating Intertextuality**

Literature is a paradoxical institution that functions by exposing and criticising its own limits. As writing it is primarily, a linguistic event. The writing that designates itself as literature draws its material from different sources and foregrounds them in language through imaginative activity. As an activity, writing presupposes a need that is self-reflexive to the author who says, "I was here". The self-presence of the writer may or may not be visible in the textual space, but his/her presence could be traced through articulation. This does not mean to say that the authorial presence is important or crucial to the life of a text, but the position that the author takes in an intertextual negotiation is significant

Literature is also an activity of mediation. It mediates between/among events, characters, places and weaves them together with an objective of integrated representation. The author becomes a host, and invites the readers to invade/explore the writing "site". Writing is primarily an activity, which expresses feelings, emotions, imaginations, notions and above all the materiality of the words. Writing is a sophisticated weapon that employs "imaginative strategies" to do "make things happen" through words. Then "writing is an act of need: to make a mark, to say 'I was here'"(Van Herk.1991: 192). Writing needs to have a formal appearance and that comes in the form of text, according to the mode of genre. All writing is inspired by passion, a passion for words, and a passion for playing with the language. Writing, a linguistic "site" full of linguistic events is constructed with the words, the powerful words -- lively and alluring that attract the reader to invade the "site". It

makes way for the people and place to live within socio-cultural context in words that even brings along lot of other things. This site in writing becomes a replica. It comprises the mass of text with all its formal literary technicalities. A reader enters this site to co-create the text.

Thoughts germinate in writing and it registers the boundless context in a relatively fixed text. Text, as a term has been used prior to the advent of literary theory to connote literary genres for the consideration of the linguistic aspect of literature. In fact, text is one species of the social institution called *écriture* and it cannot exist in vacuum but in language, in the world. Bakhtin maintains:

We may call this world the world that creates the text, for all its aspects ... participates equally in the creation of the represented world in the text.

[1981:253-254]

Text is not merely a self-contained and self-confirmatory structure but a differential and historical structure. Said insists that texts cannot be isolated from the circumstances which made them possible and which render them intelligible. It is formed by the process of recurrence and transmutation of other textual structures though it cannot be held in place and in a fixed system of knowledge. Barthes in his essay *From Work to Text* writes:

Text is that special space that leaves no language safe or untouched, that allows no enunciative subject to hold the position of judge, teacher, analyst, confessor, or decoder. The theory of the Text can coincide only with the activity of writing

[*In Literary Criticism: A Reading*. Das and Mohanty  
1985:420]

A text is therefore an open site and it invites readers with different assumptions, ideologies and social background to negotiate with it in their search for meaning.

In linguistics, a text is defined as a body of signs or the system of signs constituting message that has an “existence”, independent from its author or sender and its reader or receiver. Here the “existence” signifies the physical aspect of the text. A text never gives rise to independent and universal meaning without its reading possibilities. Literary texts are networks of meaning and multilayered in their compositions. This implied multiplicity couldn't be reduced into a single, stable, established meaning. A particular reading of a text may seize on one aspect and privilege it as a central meaning. But for Barthes, if there is anything essential about the idea of a text, it is its plural nature and it is irreducible and open to a number of readings and reinterpretation. Barthes in *The Death of the Author* maintains.

... a text is made up of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation.

[*In Modern Literary Theory, A Reader*. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (eds.). 1992:118]

As such it has no one fixed or established meaning and there is no accepted, normative way of reading. It will create different meanings according to the conditions or contexts in which it is read processed or consumed. Although a text

creates its own contexts, contexts themselves are unending and multiple. That gives a way to constant ongoing process of reinterpretation of a text, as meanings cannot be confined to a determined context since contexts in which it is read or written are very much subject to change. It is very much a product of the world as well as of the language. There lies the essence of textuality. The experience of the world is constructed via language and reflection. A text cannot do without references to different discourses. The objects, nature and the world are nothing but linguistic texts for the simple reason that we become conscious about them by means of language articulated through representations. A text thus situates itself in the world through discursive practices involving the author and the reader in interplay of speech and reception and verblity and textuality. Edward said maintains:

A text in its actually being a text is a being in the world, it therefore addresses anyone who reads  
[Said. 1971: 225]

Texts are produced and developed out of cultural and ideological practices, conventions of genre, styles and idioms embedded in the language, connotations and collocative sets, cliches, formulae, proverbs and above all out of other texts. It demands attention of the reader and provokes him/her to consider literature in terms of a set of changing relationships that are never firm but provisionally loose, although embodied in a relatively stable written text. In a sense it involves the whole of a particular reality--all of an existing society, existing pattern of life On the principle of shared habits and associations, a text becomes easily accessible and is subject to the aptitude of an individual reader.

The theoretical discussions of the present century often lead to the debatable notion of text as free-floating, untouched by purposive human activity and expression or by the interpretative conventions of groups or reading communities. "Author-centered" criticism dominated the critical scene till 1950s that focussed much attention to the author, almost making him/her a sort of a model and medium of controlling and directing the text without even admitting the text's independent identity. To Michel Foucault authors are commonly represented as being the source of creative talent, genius and imagination. But branding the works according to authors is an impediment to the free circulation of knowledge in a particular system where works are already placed. Besides Foucault a number of critics started questioning this "author-centered" notion in putting forward the view that attention should be centralized chiefly on the text or literary work and not on the author. D H Lawrence maintained that

"Never trust the artist, Trust the tale". ✓

(1964:297)

During 1950s, literary critics mainly considered language and the form of the text while discussing the privilege earlier granted to the author as a producer or creator of the text. For them, author no longer exists once the text is in circulation and he possesses no right to claim and interfere. Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter deliberately refrained from making any statement or comment on their works even in the given interviews as if they had no right to comment. A text becomes a public property despite the copyright. It becomes a public affair and it remains open for the

readers to read/re-read/interpret or misinterpret a text in their own way depending on their relevant experiences and knowledge. Moreover meaning is produced not by the author but through the language of the text. Roland Barthes' essay *The Death of The Author* (1968) is the befitting example where the conventional role of an author as an "originator" of literary work has been challenged. Not only that, the essay also interrogates author's authority over the text. Barthes says, "it is language, which speaks not the author".

This position discusses the "author-centered" approach for understanding the full range of meanings embedded in a literary text, to realise that a text leads an independent existence. Readers seem to replace the author in exploring meanings in a text. The Reader-response theory of late concentrated neither on the author nor on the text but only on the reader as the central figure in the reading process to decode the plural meaning of a text.

Deconstruction as a method of reading attempts to subvert the implicit claims of a text to possess adequate grounds, in the system of language that it deploys to establish its own structure, unity and determinate meaning. Following Derrida, his followers believe that there exists "nothing except the text" or "nothing outside the text". According to the Deconstructionists, a text may betray itself as it insists on exposing the conflicting forces within the text itself to show the apparent definiteness of its structure and meaning into indefinite, undecidable possibilities of multiple structures and meanings. Deconstructionists say that the inherent, subversive, self-contradictory and self-betraying elements in a text include what is

not in the text, what is outside the text and what is not said. Such an approach opens up avenues for assumptions and possibilities by defamiliarising meaning. So Barthes maintains:

...there is one place where this multiplicity is focussed and that place is the reader, not as was hitherto said, the author ... the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.

[*The Death of the Author*; 1968]

Barthes “Readerly” and “Writerly” texts come closer to Umberto Eco’s “close” and “open” texts. “Writerly” text activates the reader to co-create the text just as “open” text offers a range of possibility for interpretation whereas “readerly” text makes readers passive and offers restrictive scope for the reader. The process of liberating the text and granting it a theorized status leads to the phenomenon known as *intertextuality* that denotes the dependence of a text on the other texts. Tonny Bennett maintains:

A text is constantly rewritten into a variety of different material, social, institutional and ideological contexts.

[Bennett, 1983:216]

The idea of a text that is being constantly written/rewritten through reading/re-reading and process of interpretation and re-interpretation generate the idea of intertextuality with great force that has been always existing in some form or the other. Texts produced and created are part of the intertextual possibility.

The phenomenon of intertextuality came into existence in 1960s in France. Julia Kristeva popularised the term though it is quite old. Great philosophers had talked about intertextuality in different forms. Plato's "theory of imitation" has much in common with the modern theories of intertextuality because of his insights into the way texts act. Plato believed that a work of art is not autonomous but intertwined by diverse references to social knowledge. In fact Plato's dialogues contained the element of intertextuality. Even Socratic dialogue was transformed by Bakhtin into *heteroglossia* that is what Kristeva named as intertextuality. Both Bakhtin and Kristeva were of the opinion that all discourses are essentially dialogical or intertextual. Whereas Aristotle's "theory of imitation" rests on the assumptions that dramatic creation is an intensification of a whole lot of texts known to the poet as well as to the audience. Cicero and Quintilian emphasised that imitation is not only a means of forging one's own discourse, but is a conscious intertextual practice.

The concept of intertextuality challenges our notions of originality and authenticity of a text and the view that author is the sole originator of a text. Intertextuality signifies the various ways in which a literary text is "inseparably inter-involved with other texts". That is through assimilation of structural or conventional features of an earlier text or texts and sometimes by the participation in the common linguistic conventions of the discourses. Text is a site or an intersection of countless other texts, as Kristeva maintains, of such texts which are not yet written or will be written in the future. Kristeva writes :

... every text takes shape as a mosaic of citations, every text is the absorption and transformation of other texts.

[Kristeva quoted in Fowler. 1977: 64]

She argues that every text is under the jurisdiction of other discourses. While reading fiction, we no longer can avoid intertextuality just as we cannot avoid the assumptions of critical theories. Because a text begins with an author who is first a reader and then an author and ends with a reader who is a co-producer or co-creator of the text.

The theory of intertextuality maintains that a text can never exist as a self-sufficient whole. "A work exists", Culler maintains, "between and among other texts". Hence it cannot function as a closed system. An author before producing his/her text is a reader of the prior texts. His/her work is essentially exposed to every possible kind of influence. Apart from that, reading as a process helps to obtain the meanings of a text due to the cross-pollination of varied textual material that a reader incorporates while reading. Intertextuality can either be very specific or it can involve, diffuse highly mediated patterns of influence and references. T.S. Eliot maintains:

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone, you must set him contrast and comparison, among the dead.

["Tradition and the Individual Talent" in *Selected Prose*: 1953: 23]

Intertextuality in this sense becomes a frail form that chiefly depends on the action of the reader as well as critic to determine the intertextual links. American critic Harold Bloom sees the attempt of writers, who suffer from the "anxiety of influence" to evade the all pervading gaze of their predecessors.

For Bloom no poem stands on its own, but always stands in relation to another. If analyzed closely Bloom's idea of "anxiety of influence" from the author's point of view, it implies a kind of intertextual imagination. Bloom maintains.

We never read a poet as poet, but only read one poet in another poet, or even into another poet ... the meaning of a poem can only be another poem ... poetry is the anxiety of influence. [Bloom, 1973.94-95]

To Bloom intertextuality is a vigorous development of an "ego" trying to get back to primary narcissism from which it is withheld by its forerunners. Bloom's agonistic text shows a relationship with other texts that is located in a trajectory of competition and rivalry. He developed a complex theory of revisionism by which a text wrestles with its "anxiety of influence" from previous texts. With the presence or absence of "anxiety of influence" elements of other texts in its multiple implied forms are there in a new text. Sometimes it demands even references from the other texts to perceive the meaning of the particular text. A reader has to take a position in the text. Hence Umberto Eco develops the concept of a "model reader" to explore the reader's position to create or co-create a text out of the authored text. In his novel, *The Name of the Rose* (1980, trans. 1983) the narrator asks William:

‘To know what one book says you must read others’?  
William replies, ‘At times this can be so. Often books  
speak of other books’.

(Eco quoted in Webster.1990: 29)

Similarly, Aritha Van Herk’s *Places Far From Ellesmere* articulates a sense of a model reader, who can recognize the full range and play of references, allusions, parodies. The ideal or model reader reaches that reading position that the text promotes for its understanding and interpretation. One who fails to observe all these will definitely fail to recognize the text and the discourse within the text. As Riffaterre understands intertextuality is nothing other than creating multiple possibilities of reading. In his words:

Intertextuality is not a felicitous surplus, the privilege of a good memory or a classical education (but is) the perception that our reading of the text cannot be complete or satisfactory without going through intertext. [Riffaterre.1984: 143]

“Transtextuality” becomes an apt term to denote an apparently direct and specific interconnection that exists between two texts. This turns to be useful to distinguish more complex cases where influences and references are extensive from mere relatively simple examples of references and quotations. At times, difficult situations arise when a writer picks up a character(s) from another writer’s work and recreates in a new work in a different context. Because most of the time the recreated version challenges and compliments the portrayal of the character in the prior text.

Intertextuality has much in common with “fictional reference”, another literary technique that exposes the grounds on which literary allusions rest. That is quite similar to Russian Formalists’ concept of foregrounding and Brecht’s alienation. Roland Barthes in his essay “Theory of the Text” writes:

Any text is a new issue of past citations. Bits of codes, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social language etc. pass into the text and are redistributed within it, for there is always language before and around the text

[Barthes.1981: 39]

In fact Barthes suggests something similar to intertextuality under the name *cryptographie* which is translated as *cryptogram*. He used the term in “Writing Degree Zero”. He writes:

Any written trace precipitates, as inside a chemical at first transparent, innocent and neutral, mere duration gradually reveals in suspension a whole part of increasing density like a cryptogram. [P.23]

Following Barthes one may say that a writer at best acts as a synthesizer to blend the multiple writings of a text, which are drawn from different discourses. Literary textuality is perceived as a sort of discursive practice, though the incorporated discourses in the text ensure that literary writing is never entirely repeated or similar. Daphne Du Maurier’s *Rebecca* (1936) is a rewritten version of Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* like Jean Rhys’s *Wide Saragasso Sea* (1966). Authors take enough liberty to modify the original version to give a twist to newly written

work in keeping with the mental make up, memory mapping and personal geography. The discourses are turned and twisted even after centuries for the sake of a new text to be written with new dimensions out of previous texts. The all time favorite *Hamlet* is taken up as a source material by Tom Stoppard's *Rosencratz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1967). On the other hand, John Fowles', *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) is not worked on one single source, but it draws on many quotations from historical, sociological, biological, geographical and literary texts. *Thru* (1975), a novel by Christine Brooke Rose frequently quotes the pieces of pre-existing language and imitates the established style of writing. It shows that a text can never stand on its own ground but it stands on the diverse discourses or interdisciplinary subjects to represent itself. It's like palimpsest, "a re-used parchment" with the half-effaced residues of the earlier text, displaying through the new text. For reading James Joyce, one has to frequently negotiate with intertextual design. The set of cross-references and allusions demand familiarity of all his texts. In approaching *Ulysses* (1922) one has to move through *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and even the earlier version of *Stephen Hero* (1944). Apparently *Ulysses* has an intertextual link with the *Odyssey*. Pierre Menard's *Don Quixote* is another such text, which is again reworked by Jorge Louis Borges.

Jean Rhys in her work *Wide Sargasso Sea* recreates Charlotte Bronte's characters from *Jane Eyre*. This is just not a matter of two sets of characters sharing similar fictional space, but there are revisionist and oppositional positions as well. Joseph Conrad's Marlow negotiates transtextuality of a sort that differs from Jean

Rhys. Van Herk, in fact articulates a negative but challenging interconnection in an extended form to build up the text, *Places Far From Ellesemere*. She not only directly refers to Tolstoy but also to other male authors full of patriarchal ego, who think, they are there to create something magnanimous avoiding female perspectives.

Jerome J. McGann says that many literary works cannot be said to exist in one text, which unambiguously represents its author's final intentions. He is very doubtful about the autonomy of the creative writers:

An author's work possesses autonomy only when it remains an unheard melody. As soon as it begins its passage to publication it undergoes a series of interventions some textual critics see as a process of contamination.

[McGann 1983: 100]

As Gerard Genette understands one type of intertextuality that can be termed as "hypertextuality" that implies some active transformation or rewriting of one text by another. To Genette hypertextuality is:

... any relation that links a text B (the hypertext) to a prior text A (the hypotext) to which it is connected in a manner that is not that of commentary.

[Palimpsests. 1982]

Joyce's *Ulysses* is hypertextually grafted onto *Odyssey* and provides the best suitable example of it. Another term related to intertextuality is *sister text*, a form that describes the connection between "novel and novel" and "novel and autobiography". *Metatextuality* is another mode of intertextuality that implies the relation of commentary to a text. In Genette's words:

... the relation which links a text to another text which it discusses.

[Palimpsests. 1982]

This type of analysis is often based on a critical relation. This metatextual element is obvious in *Places Far From Ellesmere*, since Van Herk is being hypercritical towards Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and provides commentary on/critique of Tolstoy's work that becomes a part of her own work. With the reader's active participation that possibility in a text comes to surface. Readers identify the allusions or parody in a text. The knowledge of theory equips a reader to explore different aspects in a text, may be such aspects of which the author perhaps may not be aware of. Intertextuality may function as trace or representation, it is the web of functions that regulate the relationship between text and intertext.

Intertextuality cannot avoid being hermeneutic in nature since hermeneutics is associated with the interpretation of human action that includes creative writing. This act has sociological implications, because it is linked to the institutions such as political, cultural, economic and kinship. In this sense, Van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere* is drawn upon the nineteenth century's Russian socio-cultural context, in contextualizing Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. Nineteenth century Russia was socially and culturally patriarchal in its own way and did not allow any freedom to women to experience desire. Vronsky and Stiva were allowed to be casanovas without a pinch of conscience or self-reflection as they represent the patriarchy since the "order and the rules are male". For such men women are not individual human beings but commodities. The prevailing moral code is only binding on women but not men.

Anna was discussed in almost every household for her extra-marital affair, for being a deviant to bear a child outside wedlock. Such stereotyped attitude towards women was not only popularized but also idealized. Such idealization negates choice and suppresses any expression of desire because they are only men's prerogative. To deconstruct this ideological position Van Herk takes up the issue from a female point of view taking a woman's position in *Places Far From Ellesmere*, attempting to liberate Anna from the patriarchal shackle. The intertextuality in *Places Far From Ellesmere* is not only between a man's text and a woman's text, but between territories-- male territory and female territory. The territory or domain of fiction writing so long occupied by male is retrieved by women writers transferring it into an equally exciting and virtuous female territory. Intertextuality thus becomes a means of interrogating male authority and self-reflexively representing a feminist position.

A sort of intertextual negotiation constantly goes on with a literal playfulness in Van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere*. Postmodern writing has changed to a great extent, which is reflected in V.S. Naipaul's writing. He writes in *A Way In The World*:

Writing has changed and then finding exactly where. But those are precisely the places you have to identify. Because those are the places where the writer decides to add things or hide things (P 166).

As Van Herk maintains in this context:

Writing place: hiding place.

[*Places Far From Ellesmere*, 1990.21]

That is enough to indicate that writing germinates a lot of provocative ideas, thoughts. Specially a woman may delve deep into the writing site and explore it to her advantage. Naipaul further writes:

Perhaps Phyllis with her initial French speaking limitations (Guadeloupe, Paris, West Africa) had established her own further construct of the world. Perhaps in that fluidity, in that shiftingness, she had found freedom (P.155).

Van Herk writes about this “freedom” in *In Visible Ink*:

That freedom to question encouraged me to write novels about Judith, Ja-el and Archne, mythic women whose powerful and active stories have been dismissed or obscured, and worse, misread and demeaned.

[P.132]

While male writers inherit a “construct”, women writers have to construct that to celebrate autonomy of selfhood and identity. That’s why “escape” is found to be an alternative mode to be free from patriarchal gaze and bondage. In *Places Far From Ellesmere*, Van Herk exhorts all stranded fictional female characters along with Anna to run away to Northern Arctic, Ellesmere to breathe freely:

You are at Ellesmere. You have escaped to Ellesmere. Her island, tabula rasa, a wayness so thoroughly truant you have cut all connexion to all places far from

Ellesmere. This is what you long for. Anna must have too (P.77).

Even Van Herk speaks about the desire of women including the fictional Anna, to exist, without any limitation. She feels all women suffer like Anna, they are caught in their orbits, “between children and husbands and lovers, their needs and desires”. At times women feel suffocated, rather they are trapped in the patriarchal system. “Feminism” thus becomes a discourse of desire that creates possibilities for women to articulate themselves.

In *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy portrays Anna in a way where she is humiliated for daring to be different, to make a choice for herself, which society does not approve of a married woman. He writes:

... but the rôle of a man pursuing a married woman and staking his life on drawing her into adultery – such a rôle was too great, too magnificent ever to be considered ridiculous.

[*Anna Karenina* (Vol.1) trans.1978: 166]

Lambasting Tolstoy, Van Herk writes in *Places Far From Ellesmere*:

In order to contain Anna’s sexuality, Tolstoy must make her unhappy; she cannot enjoy her appetites as simply as enthusiastically as Stiva does. Anna’s eroticism, the power she exerts, is culturally mis/timed, and she is damned. She has not appropriate colouration to suit the trappings of bourgeois respectability that first Karenin, then Vronsky, and above all Tolstoy, wish to impose on her. Her real sin is that she will not

serve, and so old Tolstoy, he who claimed that she should be pitied rather than despised, is merciless and pitiless. He shadows her unto her death. [P.107]

The mental make up of patriarchy is same everywhere. Perhaps that authenticated Tolstoy to malign Anna in Russian society, where she acquires a “new position” by deviating from patriarchal norms and she is not accepted. He writes:

This is what Vronsky experienced in respect to society ... very soon he discovered that it would receive him but not her (Anna).

[*Anna Karenina* Vol.II.1978 (trans.) 113]

Van Herk questions the authority that created Anna as a “fallen woman”, a guilty woman:“ but whose invention is she? Tolstoy’s? The nineteenth century’s? Russia’s? The novel’s? Your’s? She is the north’s invention [P.113].”

It is in bonding that Aritha discovers closeness for women as class. While interrogating Tolstoy’s representation of Anna she is indirectly suggesting what possibly could have been the situation. She also creates such condition for Anna in her own text. No one except princess Myakaya has sympathy for Anna -- no one understands her. Princess putting on Anna’s shoes curtly says:

Is it her fault that everyone falls in love with her and follows her about like her shadow?

[*Anna Karenina*: Vol. I 1978 (Trans.) 175]

Van Herk writes:

I am merely pointing out that she was a shadowed woman, and if we are so lucky as not to be pursued, then we have no right to condemn her [P 109]

Tolstoy made Anna suffer in the hands of her lover for who she endangered her position, her life. She suffered alone No one dared to sympathize with Anna except princess Myakaya, not to speak of to counter her since patriarchy tied their tongue. Anna was deeply hurt and humiliated :

Anna's grief was the greater because she endured it alone. She could not and did not want to share it with Vronsky. She knew that, even though he was the main cause of her unhappiness . he would never be able to understand the depth of her suffering.

[ *Anna Karenina*, Vol. II. 1978 (trans.)116]

Van Herk adopts a challenging tone in her writing to deconstruct a man's judgement, man's outlook. She tries to rescue Anna, for that matter, all women from such dehumanized attitude. She writes.

Why Anna, a self indulgent character created by a man who couldn't imagine women enacting anything more interesting than adultery or motherhood. Prescribed choices; mothers, saints or whores. [p 81]

Anna is not spared of criticism even after her death/murder. Death is considered to be an escape, but it's no more an escape for Anna. In fact it is a total freedom under such circumstances to articulate protest. Thomas Hood was humane enough to exhort the readers to forgive the sin of the "fallen woman" after her death, as death washed away her sin and what remained was the purity, the trace of a woman, though lifeless. But Tolstoy seems to be devoid of that humanitarian feeling

and consideration. He let the venomous tongue lash on Anna after her death. He treated her like dirt. The countess speaks:

... yes, she ended her days as a woman of her sort could have been expected to do. Even the death she chose was low, despicable ... she was a bad woman ... All just to show she was someone out of the ordinary. Well, she has shown it. Ruined herself and two fine people----- her husband and my unfortunate son ... her very death was the death of a wicked woman without religion.

[*Anna Karenina* Vol.II.1978: 395-396]

So Van Herk writes to efface this trace of accumulated hatred of society (Russian):

... Anna Karenina should have gone to Ellesmere. ... where you must read her over, through the transparency of Tolstoy's blame, his punitory withholding of erotic and emotional case. Anna, poor Anna, dead before she begins the end already read. You know where she is going, have pre/read that destination. But re/reading her, in Ellesmere a/new, reading her whole, you can re/write her too (P.83).

*Places Far From Ellesmere* becomes an intertext in more than one way. This feminist text is negotiating with a male text to deconstruct it, to overcome the "male historiographic gaze". It is an attempt to assert feminist point of view by analyzing the misrepresented male authoritative voice and by subverting male echo. Intertextuality is apparent as Van Herk quotes from Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* to

show misrepresentations and wrong utterances in the original work and erasing this text with a new evolving text in a new dimension. She quotes, “ a peasant carrying a sack over his shoulder” and she interprets – “In the sack over his shoulder is the novel, a huge muddle of words into which he stuffs the cut-off hands of beautiful expressive woman who refuse to be domesticated”(P.114).

Again she quotes:

To avoid seeing people she got up quickly and seated herself at the opposite window of the empty compartment. A grimy, deformed-looking peasant in a cap from beneath which tufts of his matted hair stuck out, passed by this window, stopping down to the carriage wheels. ‘There’s something familiar about that deformed peasant’, thought Anna. And remembering her dream, she walked over to the opposite door, trembling with fright.

As Van Herk interprets: “ Anna is right to be afraid: Tolstoy is about to beat her into a railway tie, rape her with her own reading. His forced and enforced writing of Anna will crush her beneath the cars of the text she has travelled for so many pages”(P.92).

Intertextual representation becomes a powerful mode here. While Van Herk is analyzing Tolstoy’s Anna she is dissecting all other Annas, “women” in their sufferings and oppressed conditions. This fictional Anna represents the entire woman community seeking freedom, a space of their own. She is successful in representing as she shows her linguistic ability to build up the text with the help of powerful

rhetoric. She does not follow any normative, standardized punctuation in her text, because it's not what is needed, but a "punctuation of desire" is required and wanted. It is a conscious effort to disinherit the patriarchal language and pattern, which exclude women, rather inflict pain. The novels are at some level about novels (sister texts) about the problems and possibilities of representing and giving shape or meaning to experience. Aritha Van Herk does that giving an outlet to her female experience by challenging the male text and breaking the fixed barrier of novel. She thinks every human being behaves as a character in a larger novel to articulate self. She writes in *Places Far From Ellesmere* :

You know you are a character in a larger novel, a novel of geography and passion, reading yourself as you are being read by a comprehensive reader. (P.118)

She intertextually carries on this concept in *In Visible Ink* :

. . . we are all characters in some huge novel that someone, somewhere is reading. (P.154)

So intertextuality will just carry on both in reading and writing process in the form of multiple process of encoding and decoding

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## CHAPTER – THREE

When you are powerless, you don't just speak differently. A lot, you don't speak. Your speech is not just differently articulated, it is silenced. Eliminated, gone. You aren't just deprived of a language... you are deprived of a life out of which articulation might come.

“Difference and Dominance” in *Feminist Legal Theory*: Catherine Mackinnon.

## WOMAN AS ISLAND: GEOGRAPHY AND REREADING GENDER

Criticism in Edward Said's words, "is always situated, it is skeptical, secular, reflectively open to its own failings"(1983; P.26). If one were to write about a work that claims to fictionalise geography and gender, while interfacing creative writing with critical theory, it is imperative to focus on the theoretical possibilities of the work. The idea of utopia and isolation from the feminist perspective constitute the very foundation of Aritha Van Herk's work *Places Far From Ellesmere*. Isolation as a critical signpost becomes significant. Said, in a way, has appreciated Auerback's splendid isolation in Turkey, which he turned to his advantage in producing the famous work *Mimesis*. It bears upon the fact that physical isolation is almost parallel to fictionalise an island as a site that symbolically implies a world of one's own. Women writers self-consciously construct worlds of isolation as an escape from patriarchal domination. Aritha Van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere* is such a construct that self-reflexively projects an island as woman's own world. In this, both inter and intra differences of women's identity are interlinked. Ellesmere as an island signifies "woman as island". The geographical concept of an island qualifies women's escape, seclusion, and self-possession of one's own world without any bondage or affiliative relationship. If the isolation of the island is celebrated it is not because of the presence of a man, but of another female companion retrieved from a nineteenth century text. The bonding takes place through intertextual negotiations

Van Herk creates an idealised world in which the fictional characters, creation of a male author and a female writer share filiative bonding across time and space. This bonding signifies the idea “woman as island” attributing a new meaning to the idea, and a critical vantagepoint.

The idea of an island may be an idealised position. The self-actualising journey for a woman begins with the idea of rereading gender. As Aritha Van Herk maintains:

...you have begun to read this discontented text, this corpulent Russian novel that pretended for so long to read the essential psyche of the passionate woman succumbing to extreme and impossible passions, infecting all around her. Anna tried, convicted, condemned, you are on Ellesmere Island ...you are free to un/read yourself, home, Anna.... (P.91).

A fresh beginning evolves with self-reflexive mood, trying to locate where one is with people or places. Requirements for this are “introduction, mapping initiatives”. Van Herk initiates the process of occupying a territory - an island in order to create an “utopia” for women. This whimsical idea germinates in the second section, and finally, it is articulated as a probable locale for women’s world in the third section. She is particularly obsessed with the idea of granting Anna absolute freedom to encourage her to reread her own story and to create a positive space for women.

Feminism envisages an equitable world order - a world free of male hierarchy, women’s subjugation or subordination. It purports a world devoid of

masculinist projections. Although it sounds utopian, it has its own justification.

Northrop Frye maintains that:

... utopian thought is imaginative, with its roots in literature, and the literary imagination is less concerned with achieving ends than with visualising possibilities.

[1973: P.32]

The inherent utopian elements intensify the creation of a picture of an alternative society, in that, it visualises possibilities. The idea of the utopia is also articulated by Mary Wollstonecraft and she anticipated the rational woman of the future long back emphasising the evils of the dominant bourgeois gender definition of the female as the subordinate helpmate of the male. Patriarchy as a political structure seeks to control and subjugate women so that their possibilities for making choices are curtailed. The priorities for patriarchy are to keep the choices very limited for women, thereby limiting the operative space. As Mary Daly maintains:

... patriarchy appears to be 'everywhere'. Even outer space and the future have been colonised.

[1978:1]

This all-pervading presence of patriarchy determines what part woman "shall or shall not play" and it is the same everywhere, across the world irrespective of geographical and political boundaries. Zillah R Eisenstein feels that patriarchy is patriarchy, whether in Nazi Germany or in tribal rites in Africa or in capitalist America. Questions of identity have become the focal point within feminism. Feminism is essentially a gender-based identity. Gender refers to the socially

constructed roles and functions allotted to an individual on the basis of perceived sexual difference. However, it has been crucial to the feminist discourse. Anatomy determines sex, hence a biological category, whereas the prevailing concepts of gender that constitute what is masculine and what is feminine are largely cultural constructs emerged out of the biases of an universal and axiomatic male discourse. Post-Freudians define gender simply as the consciousness of being male or female that is to say that masculine or feminine identity is acquired through the processes of socialisation or internalization. For Simone de Beauvoir, "One is not born, but rather become a woman". Socially constructed gendered identity and reproductive roles restrict women's anatomy and behaviour. Woman becomes a sexual stereotype to which she is subjected since time immemorial. The so-called stereotyped woman image even is shockingly revealed in the liberal philosopher like Rousseau In *Emile*, he maintains:

... what is most wanted in a woman is gentleness; formed to obey a creature often vicious and always faulty. She should early learn to submit to injustice and to suffer the wrongs inflicted on her by her husband without complaint.

(Rousseau 1911 333)

A strategy for resisting patriarchy is to redefine gender relations by creating women centred world-view that emphasises the positive capacities of women highlighting creative dimensions of their experiences. Such a situation will ensure a tradition that may be called woman's own and redefine among other things the nature and character of feminine bonding. Moreover, it underlines the desire for

individual freedom that could be achieved by recreating the existing world order. Changing the actuality by means of creating a model remains a goal. Separation fancied by women calls for isolation from men and from institutions, relationships, roles and activities that are male-defined, male-operated, male - controlled.

It is in this sense that woman emerges as an island in Aritha Van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere*. Because "no amount of hammering could shape a floating island into a metal bar". It will retain its own individuality in its "strange remoteness, its inaccessibility". So does a woman, if she could emerge as an island she empowers herself in transgressing and transcending, while retaining her "essence" as a woman. The emerging idea of "woman as island" may imply escapism, however, it is not so because the idealised notion is a construct of autonomy and self-actualization. Although it is a fictional possibility, it does not undercut its realistic implication. It is a woman's way to show to the world that there lies an alternative possibility that will ensure total freedom even from one's biological needs.

Geographically an island is not a dependent territory, it marks the difference in its autonomous and self-sufficient representation. Ellesmere is a fat island, the tenth largest in the world, "fat with distance, with unreachability with mystery" (p.90). Ellesmere is a "happy island", perhaps its happiness lies in its remoteness, being white, being snowclad, being different. It is an island with all inevitabilities - mountains, rivers and the brief exquisite summer lasting for only three weeks. But "no train" -- so cut off from the rest of the world. It has been waiting so long like a

“languid body” to float into a *geografictone* to assert its identical existence in a specific location or longing for a fictional voice. Ellesmere’s waiting is identical to Anna’s century long waiting to be rediscovered in a different fictional space to experience desire, to disappear from the world to attain a different kind of visibility. For “moments of erasure is only available in fiction and on desert islands” (p.87), where one can achieve *geografictone* of soul. Van Herk says that:

From here it is impossible to read the world, the world exists only in some enigmatic novel far beyond this sky, this dome of green, this stony ground, the glaciers you are trekking toward. In a never/read text, you lose the text of your usual fiction (P. 121)

Ellesmere is a symbol for the new text to be written by/about women to cultivate a new way of looking at things, while reading one’s own text “cautiously”

The issue of women’s autonomy is related to the question of choice, freedom to choose, and prioritize needs. Considering identity as the corner stone of women’s struggle, a new woman emerges being conscious of her “choices/preferences” and responsibilities. Men are apprehensive about this woman. In Van Herk’s *The Tent Peg*, Milton reveals this apprehension, dilemma.

She thinks she’s as good as any man. When girls get like that, they’re no good to marry. (1981 178)

Milton’s dilemma reflects not only male mind set that is to subjugate women, but their fears and sense of insecurity that women can take over if they are allowed to lead a bondage-free life enjoying total freedom. Freedom, autonomy, authority,

possession and power enjoyed by men are at stake. That is why men are always happy with “Kitty’s, sweet thoughtless girls, who preoccupy themselves with cooking jam and household inventories”. Women, who can absorb so much to retain the “sponge like” characteristic, yet remain voiceless. Women must have to cultivate toughness and resilience to speak about their priorities/preferences and it is in this sense that calling a woman an island is to create a separate space, which women can call their own. Conrad writes in *The Heart of Darkness* (1899) that “ The mind of man is capable of anything -- because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future” (p.52) Conrad’s observation is applicable to women as well – that they are capable of anything. Any woman who aspires to dominate and control space and time should not be considered deviant because man is the norm. Acceptance of her ability is what needs to be underlined. Time has come to recapture and reconstruct the true picture of a woman.

Major feminist theoretical concern has been to “denaturalize” gender, to free woman from biological bondage. Women’s identity should create its own discourse that should dismiss dependency. However, for constructing such a self-sufficient discourse, the subject positions of both male and female writers need to be clearly defined. It is in this context that Van Herk interrogates Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* and its author’s masculinist prejudices and projections. She writes:

So you take Tolstoy’s eight hundred and fifty pages as a lesson, to solve a problem in how to think about love, to solve a problem in the (grave) differences between

men's writing and women's writing ... the order and the rules are male (P. 82).

In fact, not only representation but writing itself has become a marker of difference. When one talks of women's writing, the focal point is not writing per se, but writing women. This is a challenge as well as a responsibility. Various critics/theorists have articulated on the theme and language of women's writing. Such a situation has generated debates around different theoretical approaches -- psychoanalytic, economic, political and sociological in order to drive home the argument that in all these approaches the real perspectives are sometimes lost. This has led to feminist readings of texts (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, 1988), readings that emphasize the role of gender in the process of creation and in the finished text. While the Franco-American approach is more abstract, where the Anglo -Americans address real readers and real situations, the French polarize feminist questions into body and language. Some conclusions came from "biological essentializing", while others focus on the general idea of language and writing. In this context, Helene Cixous writes.

... a feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive. It is volcanic; as it is written it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments; ... its' an order to smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions ..

(Cixous; 1980:258)

Luce Irigaray along with Cixous wanted to invent the sublime as a feminine mode-- to invent a vocabulary of ecstasy and empowerment, a new way of reading

feminine experience dismantling all its previous readings as well as writing. Both Cixous and Irigaray claim that women writers should focus on the female body, feeling and desire. Cixous maintains.

... woman must write herself: must write about women  
and bring women to writing ... woman must put  
herself into the text – as into the world and into history  
– by her own movement. [1981:245]

The dominant theme of contemporary women's fiction in Canada is to write a history that is gender conscious and map out feminine *space* as a means of resisting patriarchal domination. Within the fragmented national reality, the female reality is pushed to the margins in Canada. The female literary discourse addresses itself to the need for fencing in the marginal space of female identity into arbitrarily chosen private worlds. The female imagination constantly works to restructure and demythify in articulating private fictional world that could be called a woman's own. Hence feminist writing is characterised by the singular objective of articulating resistance. Their writing has become a self-conscious, self-propelled and motivated activity for a female writer. Self-referentiality and self-reflexivity become the defining metaphors for women's writing. A deliberate displacement occurs in constructing a fantasy world as a probable alternative and opposition to reality. Canadian feminist writers counter patriarchal assertiveness with inconclusiveness and multiplicity of positions.

Aritha Van Herk realises that words seem to be problematic and don't serve her purpose as a feminist writer. She writes in *In Visible Ink*:

... and I am up to my neck in it, this shitty, sexy language, shaped and developed by a patriarchal frame of reference, excluding me and all women, an male m(y)ne field of difficulties, words capable of inflicting, so much pain, and also so much pleasure (P 129)

The moment a woman starts thinking differently she becomes a feminist and does not feel comfortable in the “other tongue ”she grew up with. The linguistic exploitation becomes too apparent that propels her to explore a new vocabulary, develop a linguistic register that is intimate to affirm feminist points of view. She goes on deconstructing the male-myths in order to reconstruct the truth about women, encroaching into the domain so long occupied by men. The challenge is to inhabit the same place and to create a space at the same time, to imbibe a fresh spirit to read gender and gender relations. Women are not simply “bodies”, “passionate objects”, but potential individuals. Beyond body, something important exists that is *identity*.

Van Herk as a writer and a feminist, articulates herself in her “writing” inviting readers to participate in the narrative. To her, “writing becomes a participation, a code for the proper behaviour of good little girls”. She exhorts women to articulate themselves without letting them to be shrinking violets, confined to the patriarchal cocoon. Women have to question everything -- meaning, history, even one’s desires and duties, representations and also each other. The urge is to unread/reread and rewrite previous texts and to create new texts with new projections. In deconstructing stereotype female characters in order to create male counterparts, she writes in *In Visible Ink* :

.. the enormous weight of male story, male measurement, male domination. It’s our turn to create some male Madame Bovarys and Anna Kareninas and Molly Blooms (P 134).

Admitting role reversals she underlines a paradigm shift. In a shifting situation, it has become imperative to portray, as Van Herk implies the so-called infamous female characters in masculine form for making them deviant and free

The dialectics that divides woman is man made. Tolstoy categorises woman as “fallen and unfallen”. He further states that all “fallen women are the same”. That propels Van Herk to ask, “Are all the islands same”? The probability is that islands must be the same if they are happy places. For *all happy families are alike but an unhappy family is unhappy after its own fashion*. A “fallen woman” lacks the so-called virtues of the angels of the house, who is thoroughly domesticated. The author is careful in selecting an island that is beyond the conception of fallen/unfallen, beyond dialectics, beyond value judgement and determination. Provoked by the enormous weight of a male story that becomes unbearable, Van Herk says

I believe we are free to create as many bastards and sweet hearts and saints and gentlemen and deluded idiots as there are such configurations among men. To revise the overall story from our point of view;

The visceral story

Wanting to be told

Wanting to be heard/read.

Open to criticism

[*In Visible Ink*. 1991:134]

Anathematizing Tolstoy for Anna’s suffering -- textual rape and ultimate murder, Van Herk writes:

If Tolstoy had suffered her, if she hadn’t been a woman created and governed by a blind and obstinate

man. This is a remedy you want to propose to her, as if it were a nectar she could swallow or inhale". (P.77).

She designs a possibility to transport Anna from one "fictional space" to another "fictional space" - Ellesmere, a "fecund island" remote from other places and offers an opportunity to relive in a different context. Van Herk wants Ellesmere to cast a magic spell on Anna in the form of nectar to forget the past humiliation inflicted upon her by Tolstoy. The publication of *Anna Karenina* seems to be a sort of punishment -- every woman feels the lashing of patriarchal tongue and muscle. It is not Anna alone, but all Annas (women) are whipped --so that no one dares to talk about choices of her own like Anna, no one talks about other priorities apart from her husband/children/hearth. The feminist project is to end male domination in all spheres creating feminine bonding that is articulated here with the emerging bonding between the author and Anna. Ellesmere becomes the centre of the world for the author, Anna and all those "stranded female characters of fictions" those who severed all connections with rest of the world.

To call an island as woman is not simply to transcend the idea of physicality, but to humanise that physical representation in the form of autonomy, selfhood and power. Further "islands neither preach nor convert", in that, the idea of "woman as island" is nuanced to retrieve her powerlessness in an exercise of naming since the power of naming provides authority to possess, own and control or regulate the named object. Naming has been men's prerogative over centuries. In identifying woman as island, Van Herk intends to subvert the "order of naming". As Mary Daly writes, "to exist humanly, is to name the self, the world and God". Women writers

feel the need to indulge in the process of “naming”. As a matter of fact, Western languages, in all their features are entirely “male-engendered, male constituted and male dominated”. It has a phallogentric implication, according to Lacan. The domination is not simply physical, it is also linguistic. Dale Spender in *Man Made Language* (1980) finds that women have been fundamentally oppressed by a male dominated language. If we further go by Foucault’s argument that what is “true” depends on who controls discourses, then it becomes apparent that women are trapped inside a male “truth”.

Women share specific ways of thinking, feeling and articulating. But the general tendency is to ignore the distinctive feminine mode of experience or “subjectivity” in judging and perceiving oneself and the outer world. Woman’s language emerges out of this “subjectivity”, a distinctive feminine style of writing to subvert the existing pattern of linguistic usage in literary works. Major feminist critics emphasize reconstruction of language and narrative to deal with literature to do justice to female point of view. Patriarchy has controlled all domains - familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal and artistic and conditioned women to internalize *patriarchal ideology*. There is a crying need to find one’s own voice in constructing the feminine discourse.

Virginia Woolf, leading the first wave of feminism voiced about patriarchal social order that hindered or prevented women from realizing their creative possibilities. Women were denied access to literary domain being characterised only capable of mothering and caring. This worldview was challenged and male

assumptions were deconstructed while women started musing, philosophising and articulating themselves. French feminists, Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray emphasize that the “writing effect” of the texts, produced by female writers, *écriture feminine* is a type of proto-writing as Alice Jardine terms it. Hence “textualising women” is understood as a matter of utmost importance. Being traditionally excluded from all levels of discourse, women were left simply to deal with their bodies, the site of inscribed oppression of centuries. In *A Way In The World*, V.S. Naipaul observes:

In this setting where she is without language the woman has become her sexuality; to look at her and her thin cotton dress is to be aware of nothing else.

[1994:51]

Therefore, there is a need for women to reread the past texts, specially male authored ones (engendered with sexual biases and discriminations), as a “resisting” reader. The new reader resists the authors intention and design by a “revisionary reading” in bringing to light and interrogating covert sexual biases produced in male works. Men seem to be good in reading the “body” of a woman, but not her language -- they have difficulty in understanding that language.

Aritha Van Herk, in *Places Far From Ellesmere* intertextualises Ellesmere, the uninhabited island that symbolically stands for “woman”, while interrogative Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*, a masterpiece in Russian literature. Tolstoy’s Anna in her work becomes “a fictional mirror of a male reading of woman”(P.82). She subverts

the long-standing belief and arrogance of the male writers, who thought that North or the specific Arctic space was a male territory, strictly a “no woman’s zone”.

She recreates the character of Anna Karenina from a woman’s point of view and relocates her in the twentieth century granting her much freedom to read herself anew. The nineteenth century patriarchal portrayal of Anna is hypercritically examined by Aritha Van Herk. She deconstructs the stereotypical portrayal of women characters in male texts and questions, “How to read through past this male Historiographical fiction” (p.84)? She invites Anna, reading through *Anna Karenina* to be a co-traveler to the Arctic Island not only to subvert the male view of place, territory and domain, but also to rediscover herself with the author as an autonomous human being. Anna has been punished too long, it is time to take her to Ellesmere. She has never been there. For no one is likely to carry along “a woman as difficult as lengthy, as goddamned heavy as she is” to a place to analyse her. The remoteness of the island also implies the unaffected bonding between the author and a character rescued from a male text transcending time and space. This bonding is again extended to the vision of a community, while rescuing other stranded characters in the male texts and thus giving voice to them. She writes

Anna, all Anna women written by men, now re/read by women. The reader un/reading the Anna (P 85).

While preparing for the journey into the Arctic land she deliberately selects Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* to carry along, not any other text. She feels that this one book is much more difficult than packing the clothes. The enormous “weight” of this single book indicates the depth of women’s burden of centuries. The challenge is to

dismantle the male text and recontextualize it in rereading it “Anna is supposed to be the epitome of the nineteenth century psychological novel, its high water mark”, so “you can read her only at extreme north” Extreme north is still somewhat beyond the reach of the tentacles of patriarchy Transferring or transporting may provide a means to deconstruct the previous texts authored by male writers The vindictive urge makes her to pay back the humiliating statements of one of the most prominent Canadian novelists, who once told, “ women write only out of their viscera, so women will never be great writers as they do not set themselves great subjects like *War and Peace*” (*Places Far From Ellesmere*: p 80) Van Herk takes the opportunity to lambaste Tolstoy for the unkind treatment meted out to Anna She writes:

Tolstoy mad with theological tracts, with pleas for vegetarianism, with fulminations against liquor and tobacco? Tolstoy the sermonizer convinced that women were the seat of corruption, Tolstoy the moralist, Tolstoy the refusnik? A man so childish he ran away from home at the age of eighty-two, following his viscera? (P 81)

Anna is humiliated for daring to be different and making choices for her life that allegedly violates social norms as she is a married woman The paradoxical truth is that a person is highly applauded for his involvement with a married woman, but the married woman is despised for the same involvement This is an outrageous state of an affair to victimise woman Anna, the beautiful, expressive woman, who

possesses “a woman’s way of seeing things” refuses to be contained, handcuffed, but ironically, Tolstoy cut off her hands. A bourgeois respectability is imposed on her to repress or eliminate emotional and sexual needs. Self-denial and desperate efforts to control one’s “needs” are considered virtuous for a woman. Otherwise she becomes a “fallen woman”, who is to be pitied, despised. Anna cannot retain her sexuality and be happy, she cannot enjoy her appetites as simply and enthusiastically as Stiva does. “Anna’s eroticism, the power she exerts, is continually mis/timed and she is damned”(P 107).

Vronsky, Anna’s lover is allowed to be a Casanova without a tinge of abhorrence. Stiva, her brother, “an incorrigible womanizer”, having relationship with governess, ballet dancers and other women is not condemned. Societal approval is seen in the silences towards these men. To Tolstoy, “women are sluts”. It is time to un/read the language, hence “Stiva is a slut”. Both Vronsky and Stiva represent the masculinist domination seeking freely sexual gratification/pleasure without any respect for women. This conventional male attitude had been popularised and idealised to keep woman “in the line/enchained”, to remind them that women must exercise good sense and self-control in order to achieve respectability. Stiva acts as male agent to convince that adultery is the conclusion of monogamy. Still Stiva is spared, not Anna as Van Herk maintains:

... but he doesn’t throw himself under a train far from it. Tolstoy lets him get away with it (P.92).

As mentioned earlier, it is considered an honour for a man to pursue a married woman rather than a maiden-- it is nothing, but a game where the man does

not lose anything. Tolstoy made Anna suffer in the hands of her lover for who she endangered her position in society -- “ a woman who gives up everything for love” and destroys herself. She suffered alone and her agony knew no bound She started hating her as she was trapped in such a situation that she could neither join her lover nor could she surrender herself to the heartless, insensitive Alexi, her husband Vronsky is the physical translation of Anna’s subversions, along with her so-called intelligent husband with the sack of his bureaucratic incomprehension She is a “shadowed woman” and the shadow metaphorically stands for “persistent male lovers” who keep persuading a woman “until she succumbs to her own damnable rebellion, her enforced destiny/curse” Initially Anna is full of vitality and energy having an unsatiable appetite for life, being the cynosure of all eyes. She does not sit passively to talk of her children like others, does not wait to reach “a male destination”. Instead she acts passionately and astonishes everyone by her daring For the choices she made, Tolstoy turns her to a vamp

Tolstoy annihilates Anna for acts, which are considered wrong by men In destroying her, Tolstoy destroys a human being not a woman. He writes about her to the possible meanest end forcing her in designing her own death while taking revenge on the perpetrators. She is sick of society, tired of life She throws herself under the train; to register her protest for making her adulteress, sinner and morally corrupt, in that, she designs her own death,

because she was sick of being held morally responsible, of being snubbed, of being held up as an example, of being deemed a sinner (P 129)

On the other hand, Stiva describes Vronsky as a man who will go far, too far in seducing and travelling as he is privileged to be a man -- an ambitious man, who has his own preferences, enjoys life undertaking new ventures. New rhythm of life continuously follows to keep him occupied. He is not deprived of normal life like Anna. In fact, he is granted society and dignity and never publicly humiliated.

Van Herk is equally critical of Stiva, who suffers from a mid-life crisis, "male menopause" and forgets things quickly and gets attracted to visible things. He opens the prologue on adultery for Anna, but remains unaffected by virtue of his gender. In fact, he used Anna as a mediator to clear the misunderstandings with his wife. It is now, according to Van Herk, woman's turn to reverse the scenario. Van Herk angrily protests :

... someone should push him under a train, his long-suffering wife might enjoy that pleasure( P.92).

It sounds vindictive, but the situation demands this cruel decision. Because Anna is not spared even after her death. Tolstoy allowed all the nasty tongues lash mercilessly at Anna even after her death. He treated her in a vile manner and let Anna to be vilified by the community:

... yes, she ended her days as a woman of her sort could have been expected to do. Even the death she chose was low, despicable .... She was a bad woman.

[ *Anna Karenina*. Trans. 1978:395]

Van Herk's Ellesmere is not Tolstoy's nineteenth century Petersburg or Moscow, but a women's own world. It is an utopia and is different. There is no norm to be followed or violated, no body sits in judgement there. It is free, without limits. Ellesmere also promises resistance that is articulated in reading previous texts and retrieving stranded characters in male texts. It provides a space to be entered, to be called one's own. Anna is travelling to Ellesmere along with the author, because "this Anna needs a friend, a woman friend, a reader" to share her experiences. For "Husbands and lovers are only and always creatures of fiction". Tolstoy authoritatively designs everyone's fate. Women as readers and characters in his work need to be voiced and for this reason he has to take note of what they say; "we had such awful husbands. Tolstoy are you listening" (p.103)? But in Van Herk's work these characters are invited to a geographical location to vent out their passion. In this sense the implication of *geografictione* becomes transparent for places, people and passion. The author starts questioning everything in order to change Anna's fateful course of life and eventual death. She says:

Tolstoy could have let her run away to Ellesmere but he was not aware of Ellesmere perhaps. He could not bear it that there exist another northern island unexplored (P.99).

The implication seems to be quite comprehensible that terror of north is equal to the oppression of women. That is the reason why princess Myagky is shut out of the novel and ignored. Tolstoy never allowed this lady to come to the front with her sensible reasoning power and a tendency to stand by Anna. Perhaps he feared the feminine bonding which could have evolved if only he allowed it to happen, so he nipped the probability in the bud. Van Herk maintains: "The Princess reads with

devastating accuracy but though she is mis/read, she reads her mis/reading with the most astute readings”.

ah, Princess, what you whisper to yourself, if only  
Tolstoy listened to you more (PP 102 – 103)

Transcending time and space, Anna “created by a man written by a man, read by men, revised by men”(p.122) now moves to Ellesmere only to be set free from the darkness of pages of Tolstoy’s work Only the north, the isolated region can show what reading means It is altogether a different experience, a journey to rediscover a woman written by man who did not do justice to her The landscape provides pleasure, the pleasure of oblivion, to soothe the bruised hearts It articulates emancipation and escape The two women are visibly invisible to the world, stay away from being watched, and condemned A new kind of visibility emerges to enact one’s own moment in the world, for “Anna can invent herself in an undocumented landscape, an undetermined fiction”(P 125)

This ~~geografictione~~ allows one to read beyond the written words and the travel beyond fictions. Anna left everything behind-- relationships, institutions, norms, practices and relives through experiences that bear upon reading about love, taking readings on love, and redefining passion in a perpetually frozen world Van Herk feels happy in announcing for Anna that, “you are on Ellesmere Island You are free to un/read yourself, home, Anna, the rest of Canada, all possible text”(P 91)

Van Herk’s intention in this work is essentially to emancipate Anna from Tolstoy’s patriarchal bondage In writing an epitaph for Anna, Van Herk finally retrieves Anna’s autonomy and restores honour to her

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## **CONCLUSION**

What is at issue is the performative nature of differential identities: the regulation and negotiation of those spaces that are continually, contingently, 'opening out', remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference – be it class, gender or race... difference is neither One nor the Other, but *something else besides, in-between.*

*The Location Of Culture:* Homi Bhabha

## CONCLUSION

“Acknowledge us oh God, before the whole world.  
Give us also the right to our existence”.

[Radclyffe Hall. 1995.437]

This collective demand of the Radclyffe Hall's novel *The Well Of Loneliness* (1995) comprehensively reveals the fact that despite the transformations in the existing social set up, the plight of women in relation to men and society remains almost the same. The quest for an authentic identity inspires one to insist on change, but securing that identity goes beyond inspiration. Change makes its way through unfamiliar provinces and encounters the unknown. To change the existing power relations between women and men in any society is a challenge and also a possibility. In asking questions to or interrogating authority, challenging hitherto held assumptions; one articulates or creates the desired space for the authentication of identity. The one concern of Feminism today is to seek and secure women's identity and autonomy of selfhood.

Feminism patronizes bonding since it is a wonderful support system that helps to raise awareness and facilitate communication, while breaking silence. As a movement it is based on solidarity and sisterhood of women, who are linked to one another in a common struggle. The struggle is political, according to Ashcroft et al, "...feminist theory stresses for the deconstructive and the political to go hand in hand. It opposes sexism, where women write as a biologically oppressed group, and endorses feminism as part of a political project, to raise and transform consciousness"(1987.177) Gayatri S Chakravorty says that as a

discourse of resistance it, “fills the literary form with its connection to what is being read: history, political economy – the world” (1987:95). “Femininity” is a masculine construct and is subject to patriarchal domination. In deconstructing patriarchy, Feminism privileges gender transcending geographical, ethnic, racial, sexual, religious boundaries. Through the years feminists have been projecting “a world without gender” and working towards an “equitable” world order. However, to reclaim and articulate such a possibility, an “utopian” notion of freedom is necessary. It may, on the face of it, look a fragile possibility, but such a notion helps constructing a discourse that is purely feminine. It may be argued that the utopian factor in feminist thought is grounded in the revolutionary nature of the project.

Feminist writers have been exploring this issue in their writings. The only weapon that women can successfully employ are words, the language that helps them to create the world of their own. Louky Bersianik maintains:

I put on words as on a string, I obtain a ball of  
synthetic material, non-allergic, fire and theft proof.  
At last I have the opportunity to name and unname.  
I must grab this chance/before Adam begins again.  
[1978:107]

Women have started to grab this opportunity to construct their own identities through textual and intertextual possibilities. This possibility is ironically linked to women’s survival. They have to still survive, despite the pangs and heartbreaks -- “That’s what” Van Herk thinks of women and feels that women are “survivors”(The Tent Peg: P.136). For her at “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 am beginning to think that unless we take some action ourselves, it may never come”(ibid. P.173)

Each moment anticipates a fresh choice, a new direction, a new beginning. Feminists have already started a new discourse – “Cyber feminism” moving into a fresh territory without any pre-existing discourse. Cyberspace again is an invented space, beyond the reachability of the conventional world. It too creates utopian possibility for women. One can be anything that one wants to be. *Cyber feminism* offers a scope to reconstruct identity, sexuality, gender along with new languages, programs and myths through technology. Desire has already taken a new form in demanding “a space of one’s own” synchronising it with “a literature of their own” like “a room of one’s own”.

Aritha Van Herk, while dismantling *Anna Karenina* is recreating new possibilities to re/read Anna, while re/reading gender. An uninhabited island, cut-off from the rest of the world generates this possibility as it is free from the pre-conceived normative ways of reading/unreading one’s own fiction. Van Herk is not demanding something extra, but only pleading that women should be treated in a more humane way, with respect and honour. Questions of morality and immorality should not be imposed only on a woman letting men go scot-free. The hurt-feeling becomes aggression that allows one to be vindictive in attitude and manner. Women should not be forced into such situations. This social parameter that deals with gender-relations has to be changed

This study draws on its own conclusion that it is time to “un/read and re/read” the literary texts of the past to analyse women’s position who are excluded as the “other” or subjected to male desire, domination and gaze. Aritha Van Herk is successful in bringing such issues to the forefront in an invented genre of *geografictione* through the medium of a powerful rhetoric and linguistic play. Although utopian, her work is more valued for allowing voice to all the suppressed characters in the pages of fictional works of the past.

“Conclusion” is etymologically associated with “closure”. It marks the end of a discussion/ debate/ argument for the time being with the anticipation of an emerging decision. But the subdued impact of such discussions/debates/arguments constantly moves on assuming different ramifications that eventually take different shapes in different contexts. The act of deconstructing too is a continuing process. This very text, *Places Far From Ellesmere* may be deconstructed by other authors in future to reconstruct new texts with fresh contexts and issues, adding new perspectives. New visions will emerge and the “commonality” of the female experience will surely act as building blocks in the process of constructing identity, attaining selfhood and autonomy. It is in this sense, one cannot conclude a study, for conclusions are in fact new beginnings. For any conclusion on Aritha Van Herk’s *Places Far From Ellesmere* is only another beginning opened to fresh questions.

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## **BIO DATA**

**Name:** *Ms Swapnalee Devec*

**Father's Name:** *Mr Rohit Nath*

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**Educational Qualification:** MA in English.  
Diploma in Journalism.  
B.Ed

**Permanent Address :** Department of English  
Darrang College  
Tezpur – 784 001

**Teaching Experience:** Teaching at the undergraduate level for last six years.

**Marital Status :** Unmarried

**Any Other :** Have interest in journalism, social work and computers.