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## **Isolation- A Solace to the Characters in the Novel My Last Continent by Midge Raymond in Connection with the Isolation of the Last Continent**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

“It’s always been hard to explain why a place like Antarctica is perfect for me” (33). When the majority world of literature fills its sources by traveling towards the aspects of tradition, culture, growth, and evolution including the themes of love, happiness, domination, empowerment, and so on, a few intuitive writers pop up from the minority world to put forth their insights towards the betterment of the future world. These Ecologists or the Eco-fiction writers bloom out with the writings concerned with nature and environment where, Midge Raymond, an American travel and fiction writer brings in the themes of not only nature and environment, but also speaks about the interconnection of the characters’ isolation and the importance of the continents’ isolation. This paper deals with the intricate details of isolation and how this insulation can turn out to be the saviour of the entire planet.

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**Keywords:** Isolation, Comfort, Antarctica, Penguins, Admiral Byrd, Love triangle.

The novel *My Last Continent* covers a wide range of themes. A few are love, concern towards nature, precautions to protect the environment, misunderstandings, connections and departure, safety measures to be taken on a voyage to the ice sea, etc.... But these themes are interconnected. One theme cannot outshine without the help of the other. One such important theme that intertwines with the others yet stands to be the most prominent is isolation. The title itself gives the idea that the continent belongs to an individual. The word My and the narration of the protagonist helps us identify that the continent, contextually belongs to the narrator Deb Gardener. Continent Antarctica belongs to the world but is merely shared by many without any particular reign. “ANTARCTICA IS NOT a country; it is governed by an international treaty whose rules apply almost solely to the environment” (40).

Considering the point of view of isolation, the world knows that there are seven continents and the only continent left aloof or secluded is Antarctica. The continents of the world share a variety of flora and fauna, even human beings. And that’s how each continent or each country in a continent differs in their ways of culture and values, except for the last continent i.e. Antarctica. The final most point on the Earth is the South Pole, fixing its aloof white continent. Thus, Drake Passage’s first half motto is “Fin del mundo,” which means, “The end of the world” (14).

Antarctica is almost isolated during seasons. When all the continents of the world enjoy their summer and winter with living creatures including humans, the last continent stands still with a wide variety of unknown sea animals and birds and a few human beings, probably Researchers and Naturalists during summer. In the case of winter, neither the sea animals nor the birds give company to the continent or to the selected workers who stay back enduring the six-month darkness.

The continent turns busy a little when the sea friends return home from the North during summer giving way to the members of the APP-Antarctic Penguins Project (47-48) and the tourists. Cruise ships pop out from various countries, as a way of disrupting the peace and isolation of the continent and its sea friends. Though the cruise liners take several measures to prevent the humans from degrading the pure land, one way or the other, the white land responds to the ambitions of the cruises. Midge points out one such incident through Deb in the novel where she says,

“It reminded me of what people once said about the *Titanic*.

The last disaster down here happened a few years ago, when a small tourist ship sank fourteen hours after colliding with an iceberg. . . . - but of course thousands of gallons of fuel were spilled, coating penguins, destroying their waterproof feathers (43).

Deb Gardener, who works as a cruise liner as well as a researcher under the APP in the novel, spends her time in the ice sea, researching a variety of penguins, their census, and habits. And that’s how she finds solace in the continent rather at home. Hailing from Oregon, she finds it difficult to get along with humans out there, but gels easily with the penguin family. Her loss of love with Chad during her research period, her uneven relationship with her family where her mother was more concerned with the son and not with her, and her love towards the penguins in the South helped Deb find solace in the silent, isolated continent. And that solace was, remaining with her beloved penguins. She also feels connected to a tourist named Dennis who purposely stays back from the cruise to end his life. He saves his life for a night, explaining his loss and outpouring them on Deb. He comforts her, leads her to experience a new life in the isolated land, but later leaves her away, unlike the male emperors.

“DURING THE ANTARCTIC night, tens of thousands of male emperors huddle together through months of total darkness, in temperatures reaching seventy degrees below zero, as they incubate their eggs. By the time the females return to the colony, four months after they left, the males have lost half their body weight and are near starvation. Yet they wait. It’s what they’ve programmed to do. Dennis does not wait for me” (38-39).

After a year, Deb finds solace in Keller Sullivan, an attorney turned dishwasher in Mc Murdo, then turned to be a cruise liner and researcher serving the *Australis*. They always prefer a place without any company. The only company they entertain is the white continent and the penguins. Keller reaches Antarctica, to be isolated from the loss he had faced in Boston. The loss of his daughter Ally, and the parting with Britt, his wife helped him find comfort in the hard white land. He also befriends one male Gentoo, whom he names Admiral Byrd. This Gentoo stands as a link between Keller, Deb, and their daughter Kelly, who never got the opportunity to see her father, as he goes missing in the Gullet when the *Australis* hit the iceberg. The isolation that Deb practices in Oregon help her weave a comfortable relationship with Nick, her neighbour who also enjoys solitude.

Midge brings in a couple who had different views on life. On their travel to the South with Deb in the *Cormorant*, the couple shares certain characteristics with Keller and Deb. Richard being insane, not literally, seems to be brave and content and wishes to take up adventure at any cost. Kate is more like Deb sharing the characteristics of care, love, longingness, and towards the end being pregnant. All the characters, who once wished to be isolated from the outside world, gradually find their life apart from the white dry land. Richard dies and Keller goes missing where Kate has a daughter and Deb has Kelly.

Though the characters slowly drift away from isolation, the only solace they experience completely is in Antarctica, among the penguins. On the whole, the white dry land is isolated. Richard and Keller isolate in another world, whereas Kate and Deb find comfort in a new world. It is necessary for the world to be isolated because any place a man lands is polluted and not far from destruction. Antarctica being South and aloof from all the continents without a high population is a boon to the white land and iced sea. It’s better for the land to be secluded and preserved than contaminated by tourists and cruises that spill oil and other harmful materials. Some way or the other, isolation keeps revolving in the lives of the characters and the continent. Here, isolation means the company of Antarctica, Admiral Byrd, and Kelly, where Deb says,

“Keller’s body now belongs to the Southern Ocean, I like to believe we’ll see him one day – that we’ll experience a *fata morgana* and glimpse him standing up amid a cluster of penguins, his red bandanna around his throat, squinting as the sun’s reflection off the ice bounces into his eyes. That he’ll see us and smile. That he’ll say, as he used to, *Fin del mundo*, and we’ll respond, *principio de todo*” (306).

This isolated love triangle among Keller Sullivan, Deb Gardener, and Antarctica proves that their love for the continent comes first more than anything else. “I remember telling him that the Adélie will sometimes mate for life, but they are loyal first and foremost to their nesting sites – and now it seems that Keller and I are no different, loyal first and always to the continent” (79).

And yes, Antarctica is the best place for Keller and Deb and people like them, who relishes isolation without harming the continent and accompanying the penguins. Continent Antarctica i.e. the last continent loves being insulated or accompanied by the isolated beings who accept the Drake Passage’s motto, “*Fin del mundo, principio de todo*” which means “The end of the world, the beginning of everything” (14).

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