ELI MACLAREN and/et PASCALE RYAN

Nora Foster Stovel. *Divining Margaret Laurence: A Study of Her Complete Writings*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008. 406 pp.; \$29.95 ISBN 9780773534377

In *Divining Margaret Laurence: A Study of Her Complete Writings* (2008), Nora Foster Stovel offers an intricate overview and in-depth analysis of Margaret Laurence's oeuvre. Stovel covers the span of Laurence's writings, from her earliest fabricated stories as young Peggy from Neepawa, Manitoba, to her celebrated Manawaka cycle as one of Canada's most acclaimed and accomplished authors. However, she attributes as much importance to Laurence's African texts, travel essays, and children's literature, ultimately weaving an elaborate yet accessible interpretive tapestry of Laurence's complete writings. Within this comprehensive study, Stovel includes insightful and logically organized commentaries, specifically arguing that all of Laurence's texts inform one another and contribute to her unique voice and writing style. She also emphasizes the extent to which these texts conflate fiction (or myth) and reality. In other words, the author presents Laurence's fiction as "semi-autobiographical" (226), maintaining that many of the recurring themes in her novels stem from her own personal experiences.

Stovel divides her book into four main parts: early writings, African texts, Canadian texts, and endings. Thus she presents the reader with a comprehensive record and analysis of all phases of Laurence's writing, while demonstrating the way in which each facet of her career helped shape her Canadian fiction. Opening with her earliest writing endeavours, Stovel stresses the importance of Laurence's childhood experiences and juvenilia in the examination of her later fiction, arguing that young Peggy's work "prefigures her Manawaka fiction in ... the rich vein of metaphor, myth, and musicality that renders her a poet in prose" (36-37). For Stovel, the relevance of Laurence's early writing is evident by the fact that many of her childhood stories and experiences appear within her Manawaka cycle (37), demonstrating the "*meta-autobiographical*" (58) quality of her mature

fiction. The author validates this section with various quotations from Laurence herself, as well as records of short stories and childhood games, while offering various critical points of view from a range of other scholars.

After Laurence's early writings, Stovel chronicles her travel essays and African texts, once again drawing parallels between these writing experiences, her later novels, and her own personal journey as a woman and author. She writes, "an exploration of the sequence of [travel] articles can illuminate not only Laurence's travels, but also her circular life journey and the inspiration for her subsequent fiction" (62). Indeed, travel can be read as a trope in Laurence's writing, representing the wider themes of process, self-empowerment, and homecoming. Stovel credits the distinct way in which Laurence conveys these themes in her Canadian fiction not only to her first-hand experiences travelling, but also to her time spent translating Somali folk literature and critiquing Nigerian texts. For Stovel, Laurence's African literature shapes the postcolonial point of view that later permeates her Canadian fiction. In this sense, the author establishes Laurence's Manawaka cycle as intrinsically linked with her study of African literary traditions and with her growing understanding of Canada as a postcolonial nation. Stovel emphasizes Laurence's own marginal position in Africa as a white Canadian woman who, despite being affiliated with the colonialist venture via her husband Jack, remained whole-heartedly anti-imperialist. Her sojourn in Africa, according to Stovel, ultimately shaped her perception of "the Other" (152) as well as of herself, which she then translated into her fiction.

The next section of the book explores Laurence's most highly praised series: her Manawaka cycle. Stovel begins with an overview of the series, examining the "mythical microcosm of Manawaka" (155) not as the fictionalization of Laurence's hometown of Neepawa, but as "*a town of the mind*" (quoted in Stovel 155). Manawaka thus exists as a space in which reality and mythology coexist and collaborate to create a distinct portrait of the Canadian Prairies. The following four chapters provide the reader with a synopsis and analysis of each novel in the Manawaka cycle. Stovel succeeds in offering a cohesive and thorough examination of each text without necessarily assuming that her reader has read the entire series. She also illuminates the ways in which themes present in Laurence's earlier writing re-circulate and expand in her later fiction; she traces the emergence of such images as birth, death, motherhood, womanhood, and imperialism throughout

the cycle, noting their connection to both Laurence's childhood and African texts, as well as to Laurence's own personal saga.

New to her later works, however, is Laurence's exploration of the creative process in writing. As Stovel notes, both *A Bird in the House* and *The Diviners* are "metafictional *Künstlerroman*[e]" (225). For Stovel, the "meta-autobiographical" (239) elements of these texts epitomize the extent to which writing and biography intersect in Laurence's fiction. Stovel further succeeds in highlighting the events in Laurence's life that contribute to the autobiographical component of her writing. She also touches on the editing and publishing process of *The Diviners*, exposing the often-overlooked role of the editor in shaping a text's meaning. In this case, Stovel focuses on Laurence's relationship with Judith Jones of Knopf Publishing in New York, in which Jones called for 107 excisions in *The Diviners*, despite Laurence's initial protest (248). Considering these alterations, Stovel concludes her examination of the editing process by questioning, "did Laurence's editors miss her metafictional aim" (252)?

Stovel completes her inventory of Laurence's writings with an examination of her unfinished novel, *Dance on the Earth: A Memoir* (1989), and of her four published children's books. In this last part, the author explores Laurence's relatively less known works in relation to her Manawaka cycle, emphasizing how the texts thematically reflect and encapsulate her celebrated series. In general, Stovel's book provides an excellent guide for the continued study of the life and works of Margaret Laurence. Beyond offering a detailed record and overview of Laurence's writings, this study gives us insight into her private experiences, inspirations, and aspirations, ultimately assisting Laurence in bridging the gap between reality and fiction.

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La Gazette littéraire de Montréal: 1778-1779, édition présentée par Nova Doyon et annotée par Jacques Cotman, en collaboration avec Pierre Hébert. Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval, 2010. 982 p., 49,95 \$ ISBN 978-2-7637-8609-4.

Comment un journal dont la durée de vie n'aura été que de 364 jours peut-il avoir eu un impact aussi fort dans le domaine de