

THE LOST LEGACY OF MARGARET LAURENCE: A REDISCOVERY OF
A TREE FOR POVERTY, THE PROPHET'S CAMEL BELL,
HEART OF A STRANGER and DANCE ON THE EARTH.

BY

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

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ABSTRACT

While the fictional work of Margaret Laurence has received much critical attention, A Tree For Poverty, The Prophet's Camel Bell, Heart of a Stranger, and Dance On The Earth have been ignored to the extent that they form a remnant that might be termed the lost legacy of this major Canadian author. This thesis is a call to re-read these seminal texts within the context of contemporary critical strategies that will rescue them from the oblivion to which they were consigned by thematic critics. In Chapter Two, A Tree For Poverty is appreciated as a text in which Laurence, as mediating presence brings the oral Somali literary tradition to voice; an apprenticeship for dismantling the binaries of centre and margin. The Prophet's Camel Bell, the focus of Chapter Three, traces the creation of a *mélange* text that mixes autobiography, travel literature and post colonial writing on a textual site that defies hierarchical assumptions. Laurence's early efforts in cultural decoding provide a paradigm for post structuralist Canadian writing in Heart of a Stranger, an occasion of *jouissance* and enlightenment that is reclaimed in Chapter Four. Chapters Five and Six examine the ecofeminist philosophy that is articulated in the fluid life writing experiment of Dance On The Earth. A module of matriarchal mutuality choreographed by the dance motif structures the memoir while the miscellany that follows is a palimpsest of Laurence's career from translator to life-writer. This thesis foregrounds the importance of new areas of critical and academic study that will bring these marginalized texts to critical attention and revitalize the work of Margaret Laurence for contemporary audiences.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated

to my family,

Sandra, and all the Margarets and Madelines

who dance on the earth

with me.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: A CALL FOR RESURRECTION

Post structuralists have alerted us to the significance of seemingly empty space. Silence speaks and absence announces surprising revelations. Articles, reviews, books, interviews, reminiscences, photographs, letters and anecdotes have accompanied the literary productions of Margaret Laurence since the early 60's and are now approaching critical mass. Scholarly interest has never waned and a bibliographic list of essays, theses and book titles reads like a history of critical theory from 1960 to the present. It would appear that a veritable symphony of critical voices from Japan to Italy announce the importance of her work. No silence here; or is there and if so how do you locate it?

The absence of serious study of certain of Laurence's texts is experienced as a profound lack. A Tree For Poverty, the collection of poetry and prose from Somali literature, a travel biography The Prophet's Camel Bell, the essays in Heart Of A Stranger, and the memoir composed in the year of her death, form a remnant that has been marginalized. Critics who mention these texts do so either as part of a larger discussion of her African fiction or to illuminate some point of Laurence's biography. In startling contrast, The Stone Angel, A Jest Of God, The Fire-dwellers, A Bird In The House and The Diviners have been essentialized by teachers, readers, and critics through the application of terms such as 'the Manawaka Cycle' or 'the Manawaka World', a practice which has created a false regionality by reducing the five novels to a Jalnaesque totality. Marginalization, blatant exclusion and suspicious absence betray a critical anxiety about the homogeneity of a canon. 'Thematic unity' and 'coherence' have become almost ritualistic terms for discussing Laurence's novels set in Manawaka,

and many critics imagine a metaphysical referent, reify it as 'vision' and track it back through the African fiction to some mythical starting point; but unity becomes problematic when it foregrounds the neglect of Laurence's non-fiction.

A dichotomy in the works presents itself. While parts of the Laurence canon have been named into a legendary 'world' or 'cycle' others have failed to command attention. A hierarchy looms that posits binary poles: a side that is valuable, germane, and essential faces an opposed other that is, by implication, incidental, irrelevant, and peripheral. A positive/negative paradigm has developed within the apparently benign body of work of a favourite Canadian author. This curious split is a suspicious re-enactment of the hierarchical divisions that characterize Western culture. A paradox is reflected in this awkward schism: a devalued set in this hierarchical equation is the result of exaggerating the importance of a perceived unity in the valorized set. Who created this artificial model and why does it align itself so conveniently with the logocentric patterns and grooves of patriarchal thought, colonial logic and Christian theology? These questions are blunt instruments but serve to stake out a middle ground wherein an examination of Laurence's non-fiction as border texts can take place.

To explain this odd rift within a major author's canon it is necessary to examine the nature of those works that form the undervalued subgroup. It would be logical to assume that correspondences exist between the neglected texts which might explain their exclusion, but no easy answer can be found. The collection from Somali literature, Laurence's first published book, and her travel biography may have failed to engage North American critics because of their African focus. The short fiction and novel set in Ghana, however, have not suffered the same fate. Recent books such as Fiona

Sparrow's Into Africa With Margaret Laurence and a number of articles addressing the African fiction reflect a growing interest in Post Colonial literature as a genre but this critical interest in Laurence's fiction, set in Africa, has not extended to the nonfiction generated by her time in Somali.

To the list of slighted works from the African experience we can add the essays in Heart Of A Stranger and the memoir Dance On The Earth; ruling out an ethnocentric bias for exclusion. We are left with the anomaly that part of this author's production has been pronounced major at the expense of other work which has been effectively ignored. The chronology of these books does not illuminate the issue, as they reflect various stages of her career, including her first published text and her last. Merit can be a criterion for devaluation but Laurence's translations in A Tree for Poverty have been accorded a singular place in accounts of Somali cultural tradition and cited by anthropologists and cultural historians, outside of Canada. Laurence was in demand as a convocation and occasional speaker, a respected Writer-in-Residence, a vocal activist whose written endorsements guaranteed an audience for any cause with which she aligned herself and an articulate theorist whose reflections on the process of writing became required reading for a generation of creative writing students struggling with the demands of form and voice.

Margaret Laurence was the unrivalled choice as a subject for interview in any media, and yet her published discourse beyond the fictional frame has not enjoyed similar prestige. The quality of her collected translations and autobiographical prose has never been questioned; it has simply been ignored. Is fiction therefore the paradigm for attention by Laurence critics?

To reiterate, Margaret Laurence's novels and short fiction have been the focus of critical attention while her autobiographical non-fiction, essays and collection/translation of Somali literature have received only obligatory mention. If we could define fiction by certain essential characteristics that are not shared by non-fiction or even move the discussion into another category such as literature versus writing that is 'not literature' the discussion would be simple and closed. The process of translation or paraphrase in A Tree For Poverty (from the oral Somali or Arabic to colloquial written English) required imagination and skill and presented a challenge greater than the imitation that reproduced the dialogue of the British colonials in This Side Jordan. Genres can no longer be seen as tight stable units that classify types of writing; the self-referential language of The Prophet's Camel Bell can be read as a mode of fiction and The Diviners recognized as a spiritual autobiography. Johnathan Cook, in Roger Fowler's A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms, confronts the phantom borders within 'discourse': "Truth is the unrecognized fiction of a successful discourse" (64). Essays such as "Open Letter To The Mother of Joe Bass" or "Road To The Isles" are based on some fact outside of the imagination, but the radical transformation that occurs in the play of developing language makes distinctions regarding empirical knowledge pointless. The estrangement or defamiliarization that the Formalists detected in literary language occurs whether one reads Laurence's modern mythology in Heart Of A Stranger, or A Jest of God; they are both made of words that infinitely refer to a world beyond themselves. The Stone Angel is a part of our tradition of national literature but Dance On The Earth would not be admitted to a central canon or taught outside feminist life writing classes. Both texts are reflective, use the narrative "I", flashback, dramatize,

and write the life of a woman nearing death, but the relative value accorded to one dramatically eclipses the other. There would appear to be something insidious about the way in which value is bestowed upon similar fashionings that throws the entire notion of a literary canon into crisis. The national literary tradition is a dubious construction that serves an ideology driven power network made present by the absence of books determined as not central or 'other'. The hierarchy of Laurence texts is the microcosm of a macrocosmic division within the Canadian canon; the split reception of her work is a deictic pointing a bony finger at the complacent, unexamined ethics of this metaphysical institution.

A text is not a bicycle. The Prophet's Camel Bell can not be measured, weighed or test driven against The Fire-dwellers for durability, utility or strength; these things are historically capricious with literary product. Ground that was negotiated between author and reader by a particular text such as The Fire-dwellers in the 60's may fail to mediate in the year 2000. The Prophet's Camel Bell is no less compelling as the autobiographical travel narrative of a foreign woman in Africa than Karin Blixen's Out Of Africa but Western interest in colonial narratives had waned in the four decades between their respective publications, and Laurence's text traversed a terrain no longer important to the reader. Blixen's book spoke to a world economically, socially and culturally committed to the philosophy of colonialism: Laurence's text appeared when a reading audience, disgusted by the assumptions of the American involvement in Viet Nam, could not value any account, however critical, of an imperialistic regime. It is instructive to note that the 1963 publication of The Prophet's Camel Bell was followed closely by its publication as New Wind in a Dry Land in the United States, the nation whose ruling

political, social and economic cartel was desperately attempting to justify its outdated colonial interference in South East Asia. Publishing statistics, distribution and success ratios reflect the power structure under which they operate, but literary critics must be more judicious in their choice of topics, theoretically shunning unpopular causes and seeming to appear on the side of moral right. In short, The Prophet's Camel Bell was embarrassing to Canadian critics who were moving into a brief period of conservative Canadian nationalism, with thematic criticism still ascendent. They could not, on moral grounds, applaud the book's theme that depended on the context of British power in the Somali Protectorate, nor could they conceive of any acceptable aesthetic basis for praise apart from the content. They did what most Canadian critics have traditionally done, and chose the Canadian setting of The Stone Angel and its safer novel style as their target, dismissing the travel autobiography with a few cursory reviews. The literary tradition of any nation calcifies along underlying formations of the dominant ideology; its veins and semes connecting with the power structures and relations that dominate. The literary canon is a constructed entity, determined by the value system that underwrites the society, and it becomes, in turn, part of the hegemonic process that disseminates those values. Canadian critical response affirmed and entrenched work that participated in this metaphysical canon and welcomed new books that replicated the central texts, thereby establishing a sterile auto-erotic system that discouraged experimentation.

Values are mutable and literary judgements historical; thus the canon can be reforged through time. Frank Davey's recent book, Canadian Literary Power, discusses the change in " 'literary' formations within those of the general culture" (preface) and

delivers the good news that global warming has affected more than Manitoba summers; the canon is melting. Davey claims that he and other critics exploring post structural critical theory have tried to change things:

since the early 1970's {they have tried} to open Canadian criticism to regional, ethnic, and gender difference, raised questions about value and legitimacy, pointed to the Ontario-centrism of most nationalistic Canadian canons and argued for theoretical understandings of language as constructive rather than mimetic. (49)

Opening, pointing to and arguing are important aspects of revolution, but his chapters "It's A Wonderful Life: Robert Lecker's Canadian Canon" and "English-Canadian Literature Periodicals" include an analysis of what sort of exclusionary practices had to be named, and an admission that this opening and pointing is still in its early stages. After a helpful study of eight English-Canadian Literature Periodicals, he confesses "Many of us have heard legends about quantities of radical criticism in Canada that can not find publication, . . . as an editor who has searched for this homeless criticism, it does not exist" and glumly asserts "Canadian scholars appear by and large to be writing criticism that the larger of the existing journals invite--that is, making critical interventions consistent with a generalist or inclusivist politics" (122). In The Lovely Treachery of Words, Robert Kroetsch points to the violence that makes an amputated hand the object of contemplation in La Guerre, Yes Sir! as necessary to "end the anxiety he {Joseph} feels about the war" (108). By extension, it is the anxiety we feel about "English-Canadian self-righteousness. . . . And boredom. And self-congratulation. And timidity. And self-deception" (115). Attention to the amputated works of the Laurence canon makes present a similar anxiety and authorizes violent methods to displace it.

The critical silence that surrounds Laurence's A Tree For Poverty, The Prophet's Camel Bell, her essays in Heart Of A Stranger and the autobiographical miscellany Dance On The Earth announces timidity and self-deception and demands an interrogation that will bring the polyphony of these works to voice. These books are not innocent: each contains layers of argument that fail to coincide with the narrative logic they seem to assert instigating a dialogic and disruptive clamour with one another and the privileged fictional work that has concealed them from view. Critical endorsement of omission, blindness to trace and gleeful celebration of thematic unity within the Laurence canon foregrounds the inclination of Canadian critics and readers to ignore spaces and gaps; reminiscent of the Eastern experience of Prairie geography which ignores some 1336 miles between Winnipeg and Calgary. Laurence's works elided from the officially favoured list are unruly, not easily tamed to a theory of thematic unity, and have failed the critical test of domestic utility; they are ornery and masculine. The texts that have been granted a lodging within the edifice of the Canadian literary establishment, are those that are framed in a genre that invites penetration on a familiar basis--face to face and predictable. Robert Kroetsch detects a "horse-house" (76) grammar in the Prairie novel; the space that exists between the house, containment, genre (feminine)--and the horse, disruption, anti-canonical (masculine) may be a no-mans-land but Laurence risked it by the open range of her work. The aporias that are created by the unequal acceptance of Laurence's work constitute a vulnerable field that signals the necessity for excavation and promises surprising revelations.

CHAPTER 2

A TREE FOR POVERTY: NAMING THE OTHER, NAMING THEMSELVES

A TREE FOR POVERTY Somali Poetry and Prose COLLECTED BY MARGARET LAURENCE is a fertile site, offering a rare opportunity to examine a unique moment of transnational literary interface. As a text, it bore an authorial signature on and within it, but it was collected rather than created; not born but fostered. This collection from the Arabic and Somali was an exotic pastiche that was not produced by a traditional process of translation. The book inscribed a national oral tradition for the first time, but this process was instigated by a person who was foreign to the culture. A stylistic polyglot structures the text: apologia, anthropological explication, imitation of scholarly style, anecdotal observation, notes, sensitive cultural reflection, and a genuine feel for the difference that textures language. It is successful in the terms Laurence set out for it in her Introduction;

The purpose of this work is not to arouse interest in the national literature among Somalis, since this already exists, but to record poems which otherwise will be lost in another fifty years. The work of recording the stories which are by far more numerous than the poems, will be a gigantic task, and it has not, as far as I know, been started yet. It is to be hoped that more and more literate Somalis will begin recording the literature of their people. (5)

It did arouse some interest for Somali poetry outside of that nation and encouraged the recording of prose narrative within the national culture. This collection was a road sign pointing a direction for the future of a country in which Laurence would have no stake. In The Prophet Camel's Bell, she describes the daunting task of translation as a "labour of love" (248) and like the labour in which a woman travails to bear a child it was a

process of externalizing interiority and one in which she strived to produce and nurture something that could, by her efforts, thrive without her; a paradoxical site of creation.

Hélène Cixous in "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays" describes the trope that organizes Western metaphysical discourse:

Where is she?
Activity/Passivity
Sun/Moon
Day/Night

Father/Mother
Head/Heart
Intelligible/Palpable
Logos/Pathos
Form, convex, step, advance, semen, progress
Matter, concave, ground-- where steps are taken, holding-
and dumping ground.
Man
Woman (559)

The trace of this submerged system can be seen to structure Laurence's life in colonial Africa. The British regime in Somaliland was the imposition of a supplementary system upon an original, a corrective to a deficient source. However, the Islamic people of this region were once colonials from across the Gulf of Aden who presumably made the move to satisfy some other originary lack. The search for some original first moment is constantly deferred but an impoverished source/corrective secondary is always fantasized by accounts of imperialism. Activity triumphs over passivity, the never-setting sun of the British Empire over the crescent moon of the Moslem Somalis, and Jack Laurence as a representative of Western Logos, Culture, MAN is sent to the Somali Protectorate to impose Form on Matter. The metanarrative of progress that vindicates intervention enables the hierarchical oppositions that place the Somalis, their culture, religion and land on the weak side of the ledger as recipient; the oppressed majority

dependent on the enlightened minority. Where does Margaret Laurence fit into this apparently stable account?

The Canadian engineer, Jack Laurence, was sent by the British Home Office to perform a task in the desert for which there was a certain precedent within the tradition of logocentric Western thought. Genesis 21:14-20 provides an account of God's mercy in which He sends an angel to respond to the weeping of Hagar over her son, Ishmael and to provide water so that this child (revered by the Moslems as a forefather of the Arabs), might thrive. The twentieth century analogy positions the British Home Office as a Transcendental Signifier that authorizes the engineer/angel to go to Somaliland to build *ballehs* (retention dams) that would ensure the continued survival of a people who are 'infidel' and marginal. The *ballehs* would become signifiers of all things British, guaranteed by their anglican God. The quality of this mercy is strange and will become strained with time. There is also an antecedent model, the old man who chose well sites for Morag's neighbours in The Diviners; "At least Royland knew he had been a true diviner. There were wells, proof positive. Water. Real wet water" (453). Jack Laurence's mission can be seen to serve imperialistic motives based on a divine burden or the older drives of sympathetic magic; the centre is ideologically constructed. Margaret Laurence recognized the duality of this trace narrative and deployed both stories that well from the deep time of myth, reinscribing them throughout her career. What is informative about these possible paradigms for Jack Laurence's job in Somaliland is that symbolic instruments of mercy, angel/diviner presuppose a transcendental source and are named as male.

Margaret Laurence comes to the Somali as a wife of the *balleh* engineer; she is at his side for most of the time of his work there. She has been allowed to accompany him because the Home Office had Jack's word that she was "an accomplished woodswoman, a kind of female Daniel Boone" (11), in the disguise of an almost male. Laurence, wife on sufferance, is denied a sphere of action; she can not create declivities to receive life-giving water (absences that signal a future presence) with a United College Arts education, so she comes as a self-confessed observer (passive/activist). ". . . carrying with you your notebook and camera so you may catch vast and elusive life in a word and a snapshot" (9). The woman, wife, is the concave ground that will receive and contain, but though her role had been prescribed as passive, permitted by the male, relegated to a marginal space, Laurence proceeds to carve out a site in which she can act.

The title page of her book is a sign; that she gives capitalization to "A TREE FOR POVERTY" and "COLLECTED BY MARGARET LAURENCE" but leaves "Somali Poetry and Prose" in mostly lower case, foregrounds her active role. The full title contains a double gesture; it announces itself as a text that is concerned with others--the anonymous male authors who composed the poetry and narrative, and points to her unobtrusive role as mid-wife to this presentation of masculine creative energy. However, the explicit capitalization of her role as collector and implicit position as mother to this text affirms a dynamic relationship far from the margins she pretends to inhabit. She assumes a dominant role enabled by her technological competence as writing person but expresses a phonocentric awe at the immediacy and life and death utility of a 'natural' oral tradition. Margaret Laurence is and is not duplicitous; she can not refuse the only

role she is offered but uses it as an entrance into the world of action and a way out of the passivity imposed upon her by patriarchal ideologies. Refusing to quietly join the *memsahibs* in the colonial outpost, granted an ancillary function to her husband in the camp and misunderstood by the Somalis, Margaret Laurence became a border dweller; one on the boundary of all the societies that made up her world. The boundary defines the outermost edges, but also acts as a membrane that connects the external and internal; the medium of invagination as explained by Toril Moi in the essay "Feminist, Female, Feminine": "the borderline is seen as part of the chaotic wilderness outside, and . . . it is seen as an inherent part of the inside: the part which protects and shields the symbolic order from the imaginary chaos" (127). From this position Laurence can navigate the space between oppositions such as colonizer/colonized, written/oral, male/female, Christian/Moslem, as a nomad in time and space. Cixious's "Where is she?" (558) can be answered by 'In the play of signifiers within the text', at a desk in a desert camp where she, like Morag in The Diviners, had begun to write: "Morag's magic tricks were of a different order. She would never know whether they worked or not, or to what extent. . . .In a sense, it did not matter. The necessary doing of the thing--that mattered" (452).

Morag's writing and Royland's divining, Margaret's writing and Jack's engineering, are gestures that are both magical and technological. The 'necessary doing' of A Tree For Poverty was a totalizing project that would package and make transportable that which had been portable and fluid, transmuting a communal oral system to a written one stamped with an individual signature. The act of translation is a form of mastery and the process can be as violent as rape or as calm as borrowing or collecting with the

intention of giving back something more whole or permanent. The performance of intratranslation required Laurence to align herself with the nomadic consciousness of the marginalized illiterate Somalis while remaining firmly located in the camp of the British Imperialists who defined the cultural centre; this multiplied perspective is disruptive to binary modes of thought. This is not to say that the collector set out to blend categories or to dismantle the hierarchical colonial system; but in the play between source and translation, miscegenation can occur that produces a third version in a space that confounds binary distinctions. Within her collection, hierarchical interdependence is shaken by glimpses of a logic that merges the marginal with the central, woman with man, colonized with colonial, and writing with orality so that they become imbricated in one another.

The presence of Somali Literature is so great that Laurence calls the Somalis "a nation of poets" (1) but she repeatedly laments its absence as "unwritten" (3). Unrecorded literature was deplorable to Laurence, and her talent for the technology of writing in an illiterate world paralleled her husband's engineering knowledge in a society of hunters and gatherers with only primitive agrarian skills. Although Laurence despised the imperialists, she engaged in the classic example of linguistic imperialism by inscribing, in the master tongue, the literature "of a highly imaginative race without a written language" (30). She apologizes throughout her Introduction for her methods, which were not, what Jacques Derrida in "More Than One Language" would call "translation proper" (252), and she cautions us "that a great deal is lost in translation" (4).

Still, Laurence never regrets her intention to transform the unwritten literature of the Somalis to text. What motivates her is that poetry and story have provided these wanderers with a respite from "The hardships of drought, disease and hunger" (2). Laurence recognizes that this nation is marginalized, by geography, illiteracy, poverty and even by the Arabic nation of Islam to which it adheres but she makes the Somali culture central through her attempt to faithfully record their imaginative account of themselves in love lyrics, heroic epics and founding myths. By this act, she affirms the importance of writing and denies the phonocentric values that she seems to acclaim.

Laurence has voiced the marginal in the language of the colonizer, despite her repeated confessions regarding the inadequacy and secondarity of her transcription, and has included it in a way that can not be ignored. A Tree For Poverty was published in 1954 by the government of the Somali Protectorate. This border work that is neither technological handbook nor Home Office guide became required reading for folks from the ideological centre going to the Somali, when the surplus copies were "bought by the Peace Corps for distribution among young volunteers going to the Somali Republic" (preface). Presence and absence flow into a text in which the margins become central despite their political exclusion. The next wave of colonials, the Peace Corps, from first world nations, take lessons from a written book that voices the colonized culture, reversing the priority accorded to speech. In ways that Laurence would never have imagined but would certainly applaud, her text became a discourse, slightly phased. A Tree For Poverty, fuses margins and centres and confounds hierarchical assumptions that placed the colonized far from the dominant ideology of Western imperialist thought and accepted writing as the handmaiden to speech.

A Tree For Poverty as a process of bricolage defies what Derrida in "Glyph 7" calls The Law of Genre: "as soon as genre announces itself, one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly or monstrosity" (203/204). Presuming to mix personal reflection, transcription from interview, paraphrase, extensive notes and quasi-anthropological observation, Laurence stirs together speech and writing to produce a text that was impure and monstrous; one that deconstructs the master genre of translation. The work is multivocal and is located upon a site of violence where rules concerning discourse are resisted and gaps are charged with dangerous explosive meaning. Issues of authority, power and ownership are raised in this 'outlaw' text and pockets of terrorist logic subvert the smooth progress of Laurence's work.

Laurence takes the title of her work from a Somalia *gabei*, or long poem, an act that praises the source while appropriating it to her own individual purpose. It becomes part of the inscribed master language and the name of a text by an individual author; as a proper noun deictic it will point henceforth to Margaret Laurence. The borrowing has been acknowledged, the debt recognized, and clearly there has been no attempt to claim ownership of the anonymous poet's words, nevertheless the imperialistic swerve has been enabled on the book spine. In a *gabei* composed by the Mad Mullah, Mohamed Abdullah Hassan, the image recurs "May God, in his compassion, let you find/ The great-boughed tree that will protect and shade" (36) but it is firmly tied to metonymic natural description; Laurence explains her title:

The interminable trek with the herds to find grazing and water is lightened by the sessions of singing and storytelling around the camp-fires at night. The hardships of drought, disease and hunger can be, for the moment, forgotten. Always available, the poetry and folk-tales are as free to the impoverished

nomad as they are to the Sultan. Somali literature is, in its way, "a tree for poverty to shelter under." (2)

She has adopted the phrase but performed a figurative transference; the tree is no longer a communal metonymic signifier but one individual's symbol that stands in for some essential concept. Laurence has elevated utterance above writing by ascribing to it a function of radical intervention with Being (life and death), a place formerly reserved for miracles and angels.

Oral poetry herds a small flock of symbols that can be maintained in the memory and reused as stock phrases, however her transcendent claim for it can only be made by a literal trope. A written language liberates poetry from cliché and enables the creation of an infinite body of individual imaginative expression; Laurence's seemingly innocent borrowing reveals the imposition of an anglican literary model. Displacing the oral tradition by objective collection, selection, and imposition is a conquering style that presupposes the source to be submissive, imitating a model that is both patriarchal and colonial. This determination to record puts her alleged respect for orality as primary, original and pure under scrutiny. Laurence compares the Somali literature to a tree; Art shares the properties of Nature which would seem to be high praise if one ignores the hierarchical implications that have been developed ordering Culture/Nature, Activity/Passivity, Male/Female. The Tree as a visual image, rooted and stable, is an odd emblem for a fluid portable oral medium and seems to participate in the logocentric desire to name some solid originary moment under which a final meaning can reside. In the desert, trees are signs made radical by their absence and Laurence's choice of "tree" to locate, as democratic and visible, a literary tradition that is constantly under

erasure by distance and primary orality, displays her cultural need to name, map, control and totalize traces and echoes.

The CONTENTS and ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS pages foreground the difficulty of presiding as scribe, handmaiden or midwife at the moment when pre-literate art is made visible. The illusion of self-presence in the spoken word makes orality somehow transcendent and writing its pale and limited mimic. The inadequacy of the plain line in writing is made a virtue in the oral; "One finds this again and again in belwo, and in the best examples a good deal of dramatic effect is achieved by the brief, almost bare lines" (11). The failure of writing to capture the drama of speech is made explicit: "It should be mentioned that the dramatic effect of these stories in the original is increased immeasurably by the storyteller" (24). To this free and movable feast of oral literature Laurence allocates mediation usually reserved for religion, God or Allah; "the literature of the Somalis compensates them for the bleakness of their usual life" (2). However, the pages that describe the contents and acknowledge the collaborations tell a story that describes the dialogic architecture of a text in which speech and writing are democratically involved in the *différance* and *déférence* that constitute language.

The CONTENTS contains a "I. INTRODUCTION" by the author who is not the author but the collector/transcriber /paraphrasist and then into sections of "II. SOMALI POETRY", "III. SOMALI PROSE". The "II. SOMALI POETRY" section is further subdivided into "BELWO" and "GABEI" followed by an internal distinction within the "III. SOMALI PROSE" between those stories which are translated and those paraphrased. In the "Paraphrased Stories" segment another split is announced between "A. ARABIC" and "B. SOMALI". Turning the page to confront the

"ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS", supplemental distinctions are manifest: help with the poetry came from Musa Galaal and B.W. Andrzejewski from literal translations and from the same source for directly translated stories. Hersi Jama is credited with performing the oral Somali stories that enabled Laurence's paraphrase; but Ahmed Nasir told the Arabic stories that she paraphrased. Categories somehow migrate and an acknowledgement for two stories paraphrased from the oral is given to Musa Galaal.

The multiplication of categories and co-authors is exhaustive but to this the knowledge that Andrzejewski and Musa Galaal are anthropologist/linguists and Hersi Jama and Ahmed Nasir are intimates in the Laurence camp engaged in the work of *balleh* building, creates yet another classification; the professional and the amateur. The amateur performer is a professional anthropologist/linguist, the professional poet, storyteller is the amateur linguist/translator. That there is an original, a source of some primal nature, is disavowed by these two pages of text. Hierarchical oppositions between source and secondary inscription, speech and writing, authority and usurpation, ownership and appropriation disappear and a heterogeneity obtains; any pretext of unitary self has been abandoned in favour of a dialogic enterprise.

Laurence's INTRODUCTION organizes her discussion of the life, customs and religion of the Somalis and the analysis of the literary elements of the respective poetry and prose tales under brusque subheadings. The prose of the first section "Role of Literature in the Somali Culture" combines strong and definite assertions with personal speculation and the determined scholarly style she attempts is undercut by cautious over modification of words in phrases like "But perhaps", "almost inevitable", "but probably" (1). Ambivalence is betrayed by the presence of a large number of negatives

and verbs of doubt and indecision "I would be inclined to doubt" "It does not seem" "It is not possible" "Although no final judgement can be made" (1). When she focuses on the literature, halting vagueness disappears and her style becomes deft; however even in sections with sub-headings as academic as "Somali Belwo" Laurence wanders into speculative cul-de-sacs musing about Somali wives, Sultans, and the evanescence of love. This INTRODUCTION, the only chapter that is not collaboration, seems at least doubly voiced; Margaret Laurence the literary scholar can not restrain the curious travel writer who ponders out loud and a conflicted dialogue blurs the "I"-site.

In a statement that is literally logical, if oxymoronic, Laurence announces "It is not possible to make exact generalizations" and then proceeds to stereotype the Somali people in a manner she claims is "reasonably true" (1). In a description that sounds curiously like the language of both Negritude and Phallocentrism, Laurence describes the Somalis:

natural poets and story tellers. . . . tend to be *imaginative* and *sensitive*, easily *enthused* and easily discouraged. They have a highly developed sense of the *dramatic*. Most Somalis that I have known are extremely *excitable* people who express *emotions* readily. (1) (the italics are my own)

The intention is positive but the result is a negative list; the qualities detected as present imply their absent and superior opposite: civilized/natural, reason/imagination, rational/sensitive, stable/capricious, intellect/emotion, history/drama, calm/excitable, logical/emotional. In Western culture, women's gossip and old wives' tales, their folkstories and plain talk, are the minor literature of an oppressed group denied access to power and such assessments come to mind with Laurence's description of the Somali literature as a free and portable comfort. The uneasy "couples" that Cixous posits (558), and that are under erasure in Laurence's racial typing, show up in her digression on

Somali women and marriage. It is clear that the essentialist Male/Female model of patriarchal thought holds:

Somali wives often have a good deal of indirect power in the tribal group, but it is dearly bought. Since their wits are their only protection, women often become very sharp-witted and shrewd, but lose the gentleness and appealing femininity they had before marriage. The change, in a few years, from the graceful, lovely girl to the withered, shrill-voiced matron is terrible to see. (10)

The master language of the colonizer has contaminated the space of the female writer in spite of her desire to name the other in a new way.

Throughout the INTRODUCTION an authoritative voice, judgmental and distant, imitates the professorial register, the man of pronouncements. Fortunately, this pompous academic tone can not suppress the joy, delight and amazement Laurence experiences in language and small pockets of personal reflection relieve the didacticism. "One finds this the case in real life here, also where hospitality to friends and relatives-- and even to strangers in need -- is something to be wondered at" (19). With sensitivity she collapses apparent paradox in the stories appealing to cultural realities: "Although our own literature and civilization are certainly not lacking in paradox, they have become so much more subtle and complex than the raw contrasts of our earlier history and are not always immediately understandable" (27), but the suggestion is obvious; there is a teleological movement in literature and "our own" is more evolved. The elusive origin of the *belwo* troubles Laurence; she is made nervous by a form that can not be traced to a specific historical moment and yet she seems undaunted by an entire body of literature that was written on the wind.

Laurence seems compelled to set up standards and establish norms for the literature she studies; devoting pages to the poet's training, the proper mode of composition, the

propriety of themes and images and finds lines that attempt to include European experience "highly unfortunate" (10). Fiona Sparrow, in To Africa With Margaret Laurence, quotes translations that Laurence excluded because they fell short of standards that she applied to her own work. She identifies what has been called 'kernel narratives' in the folk tales but this early Canadian structuralism is a natural consequence of colonial thinking. An empirical and imperial method is implied by the need to impose systems, reconcile contradictions, censure renegade material and leave nothing unexplained. The systematic attempt to create safe categories to hold ephemeral emotions like love and the ineffable play of language with which it expresses itself, is a philosophical project that parallels the British paternalism that dreamed a system of *ballehs* marching in a regimental line across the map of Somalia, or the Anglo-Canadian impulse to erect garrisons in the forest.

Garrisons can be constructed to shut out what can not be accommodated to the reductive metaphysics of totalizing systems but, like building a European fort on an indigenous burial ground, the site is haunted by the trace of the other, always already there. In spite of Laurence's training, the monologic scholarly voice is frequently overwhelmed by moments of joyous response to bizarre characters. She delights in the abnormal consciousness; the literature boasts a carnival of magicians, grotesques, dream poets, prophets, mad heroes, extraordinary women and uncanny events that elicit her best efforts. The outlaws that defy rules and uncrown the hierarchies free Laurence from the sonorous necessity to speak from the centre, and her discourse expands to include the polyphonic margins when she tells their tales. She brings the sad passion of the poet Elmi Bonderii, Elmi the Borderman, to life in a four page section of *belwo* and

notes. The Mad Mullah, was both poet and Dervish revolutionary; (like Riel or Piper Gunn), and this combination of poetic heroism within the context of tribal resistance to the colonizer, has a strong attraction for Laurence. The stories of the poet-lover and warrior-poet are given epic grandeur by their oral performance and Laurence will return to them in The Prophet's Camel Bell and the essays "The Epic Love of Elmii Bonderii" and "The Poem and the Spear" in Heart of a Stranger. In a world where women are silenced and abject, the tale of a female monster, Deg-Der who produces only daughters and terrorizes men, is one that Laurence tells with delight. The Arawailo stories that boast an all powerful Queen whose "chief fury . . . was reserved for the men of the tribe" is a cautionary tale in a patriarchal culture and Laurence notes that the shrines to Arawailo receive rocks from men and green branches from the women (123). The carnivalesque, the uncanny and the gargantuan are destructive to norms and systems; they deny a purely rational order and push narrative beyond monistic barriers. The inclusion of violence, wild women, and mystic poets in A Tree For Poverty seems to liberate the collector from a ventriloquism that mimes the register of the pronouncing man who must patrol the borders with language.

The PREFACE TO THIS EDITION textually precedes the CONTENTS but chronologically postdates it; added in 1972 to the 1954 edition. This preface is a minor graft to the reproduced text, marginal and supplementary, but its apologetic subject position reflects the problematic unity of the original text. The first paragraph is structured by a temporal binary that opposes the 'then' of the first publication to the 'now' of her preface to the second edition and a grammar of self-contradictory parallelism is generated. The complexity of "If...but...probably" transformers between

the clauses of the first sentence sets up a denigrated status for the past effort of translating but reverses the charge and values youth for its inhibition and ends with a statement "That probably isn't a bad thing", meant to assert a positive value but freighted with negation and doubt. The second sentence continues the pattern: the translation is called "amateurish" and compared to more recent ones that are "much more scholarly and accurate". This is followed immediately by a "However" that repeats the dubious assertion of merit from the first sentence in a more positive form but one that is still modified "I think it was a good thing." The progression of the first paragraph meanders in this fashion undercutting its own logic with dilation/conflation until it ends, abandoning logic with the declaration that the author still has much to learn "But I know it now" (i/ii). The negations, verbs of modality, passive constructions, qualifications, and 'now/then' deixis go beyond simple modesty to a retrospective stammer.

The second paragraph refers to the details of publication and Laurence describes not only absent copies but a government that no longer exists, lost copyrights, untraceable files and a "now-defunct Colonial office". The context of the original publication is entirely under erasure. Her final comments express incredulity at the idea of this second edition and highly modified confidence in the utility of the project but ends with the subjective observation "Whatever its short comings, it was my first published book" (ii). The logic that deprecates the original as deficient and then defends it on similar grounds, describes the anxiety that surrounds the entire text and her final statement abandons logic altogether to validate the re-publication on personal grounds. With this she names herself WRITER and elevates the production of text above all other

considerations reversing all the supplementary peregrinations of logic by the direct affirmation of desire. Laurence has abandoned the masculine attempt to defend some generic garrison, left off the pose of feminine humility and allows herself maternal joy in her creation.

Throughout A Tree For Poverty, Laurence reiterates a belief that a culture and consciousness can be apprehended through a study of its literature; its practice signifying her need to believe that language constitutes an individual or a race. In the course of a work that involved naming the other naming themselves, Laurence announces herself as a Being composed in language and acknowledges in The Prophet's Camel Bell that "the strangest glimpses you may have of any creature in the distant lands will be those you catch of yourself" (10).

CHAPTER 3

OPENING THE BORDERS: THE PROPHET'S CAMEL BELL

The announcement of herself in language, that occurred when Laurence engaged in the process of collaboration and compilation that characterized A Tree For Poverty, actualized a textual possibility that beckoned her in the way that the Haud had called her engineer spouse.

He felt a need to work for once on a job that plainly needed doing--not a paved road to replace a gravel one, but a road where none had been before, a job whose value could not be questioned, a job in which the results of an individual's work could be clearly perceived, as they rarely could in Europe or America. (11)

This land, represented by colonial discourse as empty, allowed inscription; whether by *ballehs* or translation. 'Real wet water' was the result of Jack Laurence's efforts and this sign was visible and circulated by the voices of the tribes in their discourse of survival that may or may not have included his name as benefactor. Margaret, as his complimentary other in the venture was represented by the Somalis as *Ingrese Memsahib*, naming her into the colonial power system in spite of her anti-imperialist feelings. The pidgin equivalent of "English" is "*Ingrese*", one of those eccentric locutionary acts that illuminate the semiotic play of language. Laurence, mistaken for English, might well be seen as a figure of 'ingress'; the etymology of the word containing the innocent Latin '-to enter', and accumulating to itself the meaning of a 'right to enter' and 'intruder or invader' (O.E.D.) covering the range of attitudes prevalent among the ladies of the colony. Similarly *Memsahib* is a term from the period of Indian Raj colonialism to designate literally 'Mrs. European' or a married European

female, a necessary supplementary feminine construction of the dominant *Sahib* or European. These signifiers describe and distort in their attempt to represent the human referent, Margaret Laurence, generating a grammatology of *différance* and *déférence* that she must enter as writer.

After her pioneer inscription of self in the Introduction to *A Tree For Poverty*, Laurence moved to the less troubled narrative site of fiction and produced the novel and short stories set in Ghana. The "I" of these works could represent fictional subjectivities, confused and conflicted, but they were not sites of struggle in which Laurence had to confront the resistance of language to produce a unified self. Returning to the West, she wrote the manuscript for what would become *The Stone Angel*, a text out of Africa and set in her homeland. A decade later, after the death of her beloved 'Mum' and experiencing strain in her marriage, Laurence opened her journals from the British Protectorate of Somali (by now Somalia and independent) and restructured an account of her time in the desert. Contemplating departure from marriage and Canada, she returned to the site of the Biblical Exodus, a text in which God reveals himself in language as "I am". (Exodus)

The return was not accidental. Laurence, at a crossroad in her life needed a site that would permit reflection and reconstruction of a self-in-transition and the matrix of genres and discourses that inform *The Prophet's Camel Bell* reflect an abandonment of the pretence of a unified "I". The diary from Somali was a palimpsest that could be reconstituted to enable a dialogic subject position in which quarrels with former assertions and disputes with prior opinions could be enacted. Margaret had decided to embark for England with her children, separate from her husband's desire to take up

a job in East Pakistan. In Dance On The Earth, she describes this book as a "farewell" (157) to Jack and chronologically, it marked a departure from Canada to England, from marriage to single parenthood, a rest break from the production of The Stone Angel, a voyage into a linguistic space that allowed her to create a persona that might explain, to herself and to Jack, why she needed to go away to come home. The Prophet's Camel Bell was a writing site of change, the zone in which she could recreate the life they had shared, the flowering before the emotional *jilal* (winter drought) had withered their marriage.

This book, like A Tree For Poverty, has been treated as an anomaly in the Laurence canon. It has been received as an autobiography, with examples trotted out of context as evidence for the growth of her humanist sensibility. The dominant readings (epitomized in Clara Thomas's Afterword to the 1988 edition) have treated the text as a weak *Kunstlerroman* or in the words of the Saturday Review, on the book's back cover, a "small masterwork of perception, humor and love"; but its power as a 'border text' that makes an attempt to decolonize both self and other has been overlooked for decades.

The "travel" genre seemed to perplex Laurence critics. Unlike the book's initial persona "eager for all manner of oddities" her readers have shied away from "creatures splendidly strange as minotaurs and mermaids" (9); the hybrid text. Strangeness has traditionally been associated with female travel writing, structuring the text and frightening the less adventurous critic. Paul Fussell in Abroad: British Literary Travelling Between the Wars asks a loaded question "Is there not perhaps something in the genre that attracts second-rate talents?" (220) His concern seems to receive

affirmation in appraisals of Laurence's text that are as obtuse as they are dismissive. What do the words, quoted from the Saturday Review, mean? What is a "small masterwork of perception, humor and love." (1963. jacket)? Can one write anything from Euclidian geometry to a grocery list, without humanity and by what measurements do we determine what is both small and a masterwork? It sounds suspiciously as if we are being invited to read a 'second-rate' book.

Traditionally, women's travel accounts have estranged critics; the female adventuress has been dismissed as a comic or unreliable narrator while her male counterparts have been treated as authoritative authors. The Prophet's Camel Bell was relegated to a minor position within her body of work, as juvenilia (she was in her mid-30's at the time of writing) or as a quirky detour; a sentimental journey. In Kafka: Toward A Minor Literature, Deleuze and Guattari describe minor literature: it "does not come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language" (16). Kafka's Prague German and Laurence's gender diminished English are both examples of the colonized parole within the colonizer's langue. Both use 'deterritorialized' language:

that produces an active solidarity in spite of skepticism; and if the writer is in the margins or completely outside his or her fragile community, this situation allows the writer all the more possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility. (17)

Laurence explodes the site, subverts nostalgia and creates an uncontaminated space to make room for something entirely new and revolutionary; the possible community infused with a new consciousness and sensibility.

The problem with textual space is that there can be no wholly successful representation of experience within it; least of all a representation of reality

characterized by shifting boundaries. The boundary text is one in which lines of demarcation blur and borders shift, where reality is always already provisional and relative to the moment of contact. At the same time, this instability is also the source of its revolutionary energy. Writing that acknowledges the impossibility of transcribing anything other than a provisional reality or eternally negotiating a no-man's-land between subject and object is freed from some of the conventional constraints of discourse. The border model suggests the ideal, but the perfect fluidity of quantum physics may never be realized in language. (Roland Barthes Empire of Signs tries to 'read' Japan in this way). Laurence's text gestures toward a deterritorialized zone and imagines the possibilities but falls into traps that seem unavoidable and obligatory. Nevertheless, it is high time that the effort manifest in The Prophet's Camel Bell was appreciated as something more than an apprenticeship for the Manawaka Cycle or proof of a young Canadian's developing humanism.

The introduction of her specific and gender encoded "I" into this alien nation required the construction of a persona that is both Laurence and not-Laurence. She resurrects the subject position of a legion of male authors who had ventured into the unknown: authors like Melville who desired amazement, like Sir Richard Burton who travelled incognito to penetrate forbidden places, and more pedantic individuals like Ralph Drake-Brockman who delivered mimetic descriptions (complete with diagrams and photos) to substantiate an experiential 'reality'. Laurence also incorporated the inter-textual tradition of the female travel writer who augmented the masculine style of telling with a showing that comes through exploring interpersonal relationships with the indigenous people, the other, in ways that may distort but always includes their

difference in a deferential gesture. It is interesting that she mentioned her male precursors even as she parodies them, but never alluded to Karen Blixen, Beryl Markham or any of the other female travel writers who preceded her attempt to speak 'Out of Africa'.

The unmistakable voice of Hagar Shipley, the fictional heroine of the book that shared the writing time of The Prophet's Camel Bell, can be heard in the self-deprecating humour and courage of Laurence's narrating "I". Hagar, who left her husband, the failed horse breeder, to ride off into the West (sunset and old age) leaving her spouse in the crumbling house, deconstructs the Western meta-narrative of the cowboy and dismantles the horse-house, male-adventurer/female-domestic binary. Laurence further deconstructs the Western male's horse text, which David Arnason in "Robert Kroetsch's Seed Catalogue: The Deconstruction of the Meta-narrative of the Cowboy" calls the "hors-texte" (81). She takes it East where camels replace horses as symbols of mobility and wealth, bear the *agal* (the hut materials), not the man, on their back and are never ridden, only led --by women. In a type of pre-enactment of a performance that has still to occur, the voice that speaks in the second paragraph of The Prophet's Camel Bell, "prepared for anything, prepared for nothing" (9) is rehearsing the heroine's voice of A Jest of God, as yet unwritten: "Where I am going, anything may happen. Nothing may happen" (201). None of these voices are identical with Laurence, and yet all are contained within the subject position that enables a diegetic narrative from a pose of mimetic reportage.

Dawne McCance, in "Julia Kristeva and the Ethics of Exile" speaks of, "the responsibility . . . of putting . . . a fluidity into play against the threats of death which

are unavoidable whenever an inside and an outside, a self and an other, one group and another, are constituted (25). This fluidity is essential to the deterritorialized language of border texts and the way in which women must travel. Whether women move across a dimly lit parking lot or cross the dark continent, they move within the knowledge of their otherness and with an awareness of others. This experience requires the learned strategies of disguise, invisibility, intuition, negotiation, fluidity and deconstruction of their environment. The modern city is increasingly a deterritorialized lacuna for all its inhabitants, but what is becoming phenomenologically true for the white male in the late 20th Century has been a knowledge that women could only, ever ignore at their peril. Sarah Mills has described the unique dialogic nature of women's travel writing, in Discourses of Difference, as "their struggle with the discourses of imperialism and femininity, neither of which they could wholeheartedly adopt" (4). In The Rhetoric of Empire, David Spurr deconstructs the master narrative of imperialism to "a series of colonizing discourses, each adapted to a specific historical situation" (1) and identifies "a series of basic tropes which emerge from the Western colonial experience" (3). The Prophet's Camel Bell is a site of discursive struggle and the rhetorical tropes that Spurr has recognized, exist, under erasure, haunting the text. The reception of Laurence's travel book as a "Roughing It In The Desert" or "The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Liberal" has been reductive, revealing the paucity of critical methods and a sentimental myopia.

The initial five paragraphs of The Prophet's Camel Bell are a primer for reading the text. As orientation to the Orient "east of the Suez" (9) they are strangely disorienting. The traditional male travel account features an authoritative "I" squarely

positioned in exotic adventure but taming it for domestic consumption in the West. He is a swaggering presence who indulges his audience's fascination with the dangerous 'other' while mediating the terror by having his heroic persona stand in for the timid fellow holding the book back home. Laurence's first paragraph parodies gestures of male bombast, but the two questions that make up this unit are far from rhetorical and suggest a desire for confirmation, a plea for authentication. The complex verb phrases "May THEY not just possibly be true, the tales" and "Will there be " (9), betray anxiety about knowledge in a disquieting swerve that replaces the expected terror of the alien with the fear that things might be ontologically too familiar. Laurence's enthusiastic traveller uses "may they" more as a prayer, a plea for the exotic, than a question.

The paragraphs that follow offer the portrait of a narrator who is as strange to the male tradition of travel writing as the metamorphic creatures included in the first paragraph are to empirical reality; "prepared for anything, prepared for nothing, burdened with baggage- most of it useless, unburdened by knowledge" (9). Laurence's naive persona parodies masterful male narrators like Sir Richard Burton, showing that she is truly 'unBurtoned' and free from the anxiety of such traditional male influence. The Laurence-traveller admits to apprehension, hope, eagerness, and pretence; she confesses a potential for naiveté, carrying too much baggage and too little knowledge, and insists on a childish assumption that being herself, and not someone else, will protect her from harm. This wayfaring persona is "bland as eggplant and as innocent . . . as a fledgling sparrow" (9), the tourist as tabula rasa; completing the sketch of an inept amateur who has abdicated the generic role as mediator by a most unmanly insistence on dragging us into the scene by her use of the second person singular "you".

Clearly the authorial voice foregrounds a femininity that confirms all the stereotypes from an Eve-like nonchalance to snakebite to an obsession with luggage. The introduction ends with a twist of logic; "the strangest glimpses you may have of any creature in the distant lands will be those you catch of yourself" (10). The mirror image hints that this account will go beyond imperialistic peering at that which is alien and suggests that the Western gaze will be returned in a manner that will create the postmodern hall of mirrors. Laurence's mirror metaphor approximates Satre's comments in his preface to Frantz Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth:

For we in Europe too are being decolonized: that is to say that the settler which is in every one of us is being savagely rooted out . . . First, we must face that unexpected revelation, the strip tease of our humanism. (24)

This introductory section is set off from the body of the text by a typographical distance and a poetic quality that fails to prepare us for an abrupt immersion in the apparently transparent language that begins after a gap of four lines. What happens in this gap?

The radical transformation of the original persona occurs within the typographical pause; the feminine eccentric becomes a masterful recording eye that appropriates what she surveys as subject matter and aligns herself with the male world in which engineers seek to inscribe virgin territory and sailors toast ancestral Vikings. The discourse of femininity that destabilized the anticipated introduction opens the textual site to surprise. The persona of the following section can quote the patriarchal absurdities of Exodus; "*how the Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son*" (18), and unabashedly report the sailors' diminution of her to "our little sporty guest" (14), while her husband is hailed with nautical toasts to a shared patriarchal descent from the

Vikings. The tone seems to share complicity with the patriarchal power to name the other as marginal. However, this is simply an indication that discontinuity will become the narrative norm. Language will be desexed and unmanned and assumed as a gender disguise in the fluidity of this dialogic text that will affirm the colonial imperative as often as it inverts it; the way in which a woman remembers and saves her life.

Spurr names 'Surveillance' as a trope in the rhetoric of imperialism. Laurence, switches from the 2nd person pronoun of the first paragraphs to begin the body of the text with a "We" that appropriates the angle of vision of others, though the subsequent text denies that arrogance. This is not to suggest that she deliberately undertook to deconstruct the methods of male travel writers. Rather, she assumes the position but at crucial moments she refuses the omnipresent imperative to gaze on the other, in favour of engagement with individuals; at these points she reverts to the discourse of femininity and represents herself as a zealous maverick who rushes in where angels (in the house: read *memsahibs*) fear to tread.

The visit of the Sheiks, in Jack's absence, features the author classifying her guests with colonial vigour and reading their appearance in a fashion that would have done justice to later structuralists. Alas, this unfeminine insistence on standing in for the imperial male, by expounding the *balleh* scheme, results in the triumph of the feminine discourse in the text. She reads the Sheiks' regalia but ignores their umbrage and this becomes a cautionary tale; her attempt to assume a male position transgresses the linguistic co-operative principle of the culture, creating suspicion and bringing humiliation upon herself and Mohammed, her translator. A stereotypical feminine gaff for which she must make amends in an 'oh silly me' type of apologia.

A collision of the discourses of femininity and imperialism cause a tension in the narrative that Laurence resolves by portraying her naive younger self with self deprecating humour and describing the re-enactment of this visit, a supplementary amendment, in which her husband, the proper (culturally appropriate) subject of speech, shows us 'how it's done' and Margaret assumes the silent, invisible role on the margins. This role is a cameo and clearly not one that is 'in character' but it facilitates first hand observation; thus, it is paradoxically imperialistic for all its apparent subservience. In disgrace, she is freed from even the most benign forms of hospitality demanded by the discourse of femininity, and denied access to the conversation of patriarchal subjects, she can become the perfect transparent transmitter of aleatory event.

The Prophet's Camel Bell mimics the oral folk tale, insinuating that the story is chronologically ordered although it is a literary construct and its episodic progression is halted by digression, accelerated by implicit ellipses, and complicated by the inordinate time required to render memorable scenes. Such anachronies foreground the author function and temporal play informs the signifying practice of the text. Laurence's stalwart persona affects a concern with the engineer's agenda of building the reservoirs, but the details of day-to-day construction are rarely central to her narrative. Recreation of the past involves selection and evaluation from the present perspective. Few passages are free from analeptic revisions, reminiscent of the preface to A Tree For Poverty and they become sites for excavating the difference between Laurence, 'then' and 'now'; the discontinuous self. This examination of difference seldom produces conclusions; rather, it defers any attempt to make absolute pronouncements about meaning,

suggesting that closure is impossible in life ; "When can a journey be said to have ended?" (10)

What is remembered are the individuals who inhabited the Laurence camp, and their lives are given form and meaning in language. Spurr, in The Rhetoric of Empire, claims that the typical discourse of colonialism lumps the colonized into a racial homogeneity, subject to surveillance, classification, and appropriation; a collective swarm characterized by negation, debasement, insubstantiation, and naturalism. When Laurence offers ethnocentric or racial classification, it is often framed as the dialogue of another European or some literary antecedent such as Burton. Somali jokes that debase Migdans, (similar to Irish jokes in England or Neufie jokes in Canada) are repeated and the denigration of the Yibir tribe as sorcerers is reiterated, but these examples are distanced from Laurence, attributed to the Somalis.

Here as in A Tree For Poverty, Laurence affirms something like a Somali racial identity bred of the harsh and pitiless environment; this naturalism allows a rhapsodic evocation of a 'people' that stand in a relationship to their world that has not changed from the days of Exodus. "I felt they had something of the same timeless quality as the hills and the sand" (115). This poetic comment seems innocent but it is a form of idealization. (Spurr associates idealization with imperialistic discourse.) It generates a rhetoric of negation that represents the land as blank and history as absent with no difference marked between past and present. (Spurr's "Negative Space/ Negative History" {93-99}) Laurence was born in a country "still... suffering from a colonial outlook" (25), and despite an acquaintance with more radical ideals fomented in North End Winnipeg's socialist circles of the 40's it would be unrealistic to assume that her

liberalism was uncontaminated. For the most part, the colonial discourse is veiled and a type of resistance writing that is characteristic of post-colonial literature evolves. There is one blatant exception. Laurence makes no effort to resist generalization in her aggressive attack on the English imperialists. That many of these 'English', scathingly recalled from her youth in Canada, were, in fact, Scottish or Irish is overlooked in the traditional manner of Scots, who have never forgiven or forgotten the Act of Succession that followed Culloden. Fortunately, she revises this bias over the course of time and her narrative is balanced by the stories of exceptional imperialists that elevate the individual over the collective group. Regrettably these redemptive figures are all male and the *Memsahibs* are characterized as a gang of gossiping racists with too much time on their hands. (This Side Jordan redeems this generalization with superb portraits of British wives in colonial Ghana.) Jack Laurence is imbricated in the "we" that changes places with the narrative "I" and he is a central player in most of her memories, although hardly the hero of the book as one critic has suggested. (Sparrow 40) He emerges as a rational, intelligent man whose imperialistic motive for coming to Somalia is tempered by the sensitivity he has for his workers and the determination he brings to a frustrating and discouraging job.

Miniatures of people who pass through Laurence's life in Somalia are deftly created and the six chapters that are devoted to The Italians, Hersi, Mohamed, Arabetto, Abdi and The Imperialists recall individuals in a style that is marked by the heterogeneity and polyphony of a border text. It is in the fragments, the sketches that lift an anonymous person out of context, that Laurence creates the fluidity "that must be put into play against the inevitable threats of death" (McCance 25) and most of these haunting

moments revise androcentric amnesia and celebrate the forgotten divinity of the female. The mother in the desert, transcends anger or fear, "past all such emotions" (78), gives her child the precious water; becoming the *Stabat Mater* and a model for Hagar's movement past grief. The child prostitute, "Asha's half-wild, half-timid face with its ancient eyes" (158) haunts Laurence, who recreated her in "The Rain Child". She is not eroticized nor debased in the description, but seems elevated to Marian humility. The young wives of old men, victims of ritual genital mutilation, the child drawing water who could give a radiant smile to a stranger and make her welcome, all leave Laurence speechless: "I did not know what to say to these women" (75). "All other words had ceased to have meaning" (78) apart from Islamic benedictions of faith and farewell. She resists the temptation to examine her silence, allowing an *aporia* to fill with significance beyond words; transparent pockets form in the imperialistic march of words, inverting the logic of a linear narrative.

The chapters devoted to stories of individuals are the structural centrepiece to the narrative of Laurence's travels. They are anachronic in the chronological memoir, and like the recapitulation of her translation work that is the subject of the chapter "A Tree For Poverty", they read like folktales as she adopts the story telling style.

Mohamed's courtship and marital complications are carnivalized into a drama complete with kidnapping, furious tribal rows and an evil mother-in-law. Somali marriage customs, alien and archaic by Western standards create an Arabian Nights orientalism, effecting rhetorical tropes that Spurr identifies as idealization and insubstantiality (93-99). The harsh life of the desert disappears in the mock-heroic tale of the bride's abduction; wherein poverty and dust are banished, for a moment, by the

perfumes and mystery that surround a happier, Somali version, of Romeo and Juliet. Arabetto's history describes the hybrid man, the *isolato* in whom past and present converge in a post colonial alienation. "A Teller of Tales" celebrates Hersi, the artist, who transcends physical and economic barriers by defining himself in, and by, language. The story of Abdi's relationship with the Laurence camp has been set up in earlier chapters but "The Old Warrior" section allows Laurence to scrutinize the psychology of colonialism in a case study that betrays the dark side of the blithe narrator's experience of the 'other'. Once more, she accepts the inevitable failure of language to embody anything more than a gesture toward difference, and she forgoes the comfortable explanation in favour of an honest deferral of meaning. "Perhaps his is the face of Africa--inscrutable to the last. My feeling at this time was that I would never understand" (207).

The landscape becomes one of the major characters; "The land was not aware of me. I might enter its quietness or not, just as I chose" (37), and seeking a place in this land required her to relinquish the frenetic pace of Westerners, the perpetual urge to progress so antithetical to the patience of a faith that left the future to the will of Allah. Laurence acknowledges her debts to the land and people of Somali and hopes that she will pass into the culture; that some image of her will remain. "For all we know, fifty years from now the Eidagalla in the Haud may be chanting a *gabei* called The Thief of Selahleh " (109) a tale that would transform a midnight raid on the Laurence camp into legend.

Through the process of writing herself into the culture an exchange has been performed, the experience of Somalia has been authenticated to a living artifact made

of language. The Prophet's Camel Bell and A Tree For Poverty are named in the latest Historical Dictionary of Somalia under the heading "literature", thus she has entered Somali history as an individual distinguished from the mass of colonists. The amniotic fluidity in which the border person travels is like Maori dream time; a movement through aqueous space/time that Karen Blixen in Out Of Africa recognized in native Africans and described as "this art of swimming" (27). Like Laurence, she involved herself in the life of the colonized, wrote their stories and hoped that a free exchange has been made:

I know a song of Africadoes Africa know a song of me? Would the air over the plain quiver with a colour I had had on, or the children invent a game in which my name was, or the full moon throw a shadow over the gravel of the drive that was like me, or would the eagles of Ngong look out for me? (76)

The announcement of self in language and particularly as self-the-traveller is one of the earliest narrative plots. From the literature of the Greeks, through Old English and Old Norse, men have chosen the paradigm of the journey to express their fascination with the alien that lies without and within them. Homer, Old Irish Immram poets, Melville, Conrad, Kipling and Hemingway, all legitimize the narrative of voyage and adventure where the pen seems incidental to the sword, harpoon or gun in nations where nature and native are marginalized and violated. These men are called major authors.

Since the 17th Century thousands of diaries, letters, memoirs and books by women have been produced and received as minor literature; they are politely denigrated as "prose pastoral" (Blixen cover) or "delightful" (Laurence cover). Some have been slandered as forgeries written by conspiratory males (Markham) or exaggerations (Alexandra David-Neel) but most have been lost and forgotten until recent feminist interest has sought to recover them from centuries under erasure. Buchan's prose is

leaden compared to Mary Wollstonecraft's lively reports from Denmark, Beryl Markham, at the controls of her Gypsy moth high over the Serengeti, scouts herds and prides to stack the deck in favour of sportsmen like Hemingway, and Blixen finds her spiritual other in the Africans where Conrad found only the demon of his unconscious.

If merit, authentic adventure, and spiritual depth are not lacking perhaps it **has** something to do with the gun and harpoon. Those phallogocentric weapons of power that enable both imperialism and patriarchy seem to be at the centre of male travel literature, linking it with other hegemonic representations that support the domination of the 'other' (non-male/ non-white/ nature). Women like Blixen and Markham hunted as an occupation or for food, not for dominance over nature. Laurence held a revolver in the stand-off with hostile tribesmen, and this moment locates her at the centre facing the margin of the irrevocably 'other'. The power and technological sophistication the weapon represents destroys the border space and this scene is one of the few in the book that is monologic; a tableaux.

The Prophet Camel's Bell is a border text that resists the patterns of discourse that surround its composition and often destabilizes their authority. The Somalis are marginalized by race and colonization, the Italians by war, the Somali women by their culture and the old imperialists by the coming of Independence. Laurence, marginalized by gender, can share a space with them and open it to all the voices that are present; the native poets, the obsolete imperialists, the silent women, the lyrical Italians and the nascent post-colonials who would voice a reality so new it could only be imagined. The Prophet's Camel Bell is an experimental text that transcended the limits imposed on it by the discourses embedded in Western philosophy and challenged the critic to find new ways of thinking about genre and gender. A challenge they have failed to accept.

CHAPTER 4

HEART OF A STRANGER: AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE IMAGINATION

The first page of print in Heart of a Stranger functions as an editorial deictic that foregrounds radical change. A Tree For Poverty with its curious printface, reminiscent of government documents, began with a title that was a strange collocation of upper and lower case. The odd typography betrayed a confusion about whether top billing should be accorded to Somali poetry and prose or to the collector/translator. The title page of The Prophet's Camel Bell was anchored with the logo of a major Western publishing house and signalled a change in the status of the author since her first modest publication. The first printed page in Heart of A Stranger welcomes the reader with an imposing list of titles that march in an unjustified column down the page headed by the words "Books by Margaret Laurence". Each title is accompanied by a date but collected under an impressive number of genre headings FICTION, CRITICISM, TRANSLATIONS, CHILDRENS, and TRAVEL.

Facing this left hand testimony to Laurence's success is a right hand title page, arresting in its minimalist white field, bearing only the bold but understated words "Heart of a Stranger". The two adjacent pages seem to assert the pre-eminence of the author on one hand while isolating an orphaned title on the other. Two pages later this lonely refrain, "Heart of a Stranger" shows up again following yet a different title page, publication details and the Table of Contents. Its second appearance on what would be page 9 of the text, is again on the right hand but now faces a blank left page increasing the starkness of a textual landscape it haunts like a doppel-ganger. The sense of exile,

that the title as signifier represents, is graphically amplified; evocative of the prairie landscape of vast winter spaces and human distance.

The location of the introductory pages in this sequence by design, accident, or whim configure a message beyond the words they inscribe. By the time Heart of a Stranger was published, in 1976, Margaret Laurence was solidly in the canon; as author of the Manawaka novels, she was popular with the public and critics alike. However, Heart of a Stranger received little attention. It was neither fiction nor autobiography; rather, a miscellany that included non-fiction, written between 1964 and 1975, containing traces, primal echoes, and ghosts of characters that would later find a home in her fiction. In an interview with Donald Cameron, entitled "The Black Celt Speaks of Freedom", she has confirmed this: "I was working out these themes in a non-fiction way before I found myself ready to deal with them in the broader form of the novel" (12). The first pages of Heart of a Stranger counterpoint the impressive list of published work to the stark semiology of a title that intimates permanent exile; prefiguring the fugitive place the book would occupy in Laurence's body of work. The essays of Heart of a Stranger probed the comfortable mythologies of our culture with a keen intellectual rigour that challenged the image of Margaret Laurence, popular in 1976, as the motherly creator of prairie novels.

Almost a decade after Laurence's death, it is possible to glimpse in Heart of a Stranger the palimpsest of something more elusive than the evolution of her novels; the rising vector of a vision that would come to determine her life's work until her death. Rigid liberal humanism had failed her in Africa and had been jettisoned in favour of a more fluid organic philosophy that would inform her writing in The Diviners and

become the powerful spirituality articulated in her memoir Dance On The Earth. These "travels and entertainments" (12) interrogate a matrix of mythos and logos, experience in a cosmos that is alive and articulate. Laurence uses the energy of language to penetrate the cramped opacity of fact and to multiply signification. Although Laurence had newly repatriated to Canada, her work, like that of Joyce or Kristeva, is enabled by the clarity that distance gives the permanent exile, the "perpetual traveller, an explorer of those inner territories of the heart and spirit" (12). The small works that compose this text may have seemed trivial after the monumental sweep of The Diviners, but they predict a shape or a form of writing that Roland Barthes perfected in Mythologies, his columns for Le Nouvel Observateur, and The Empire of Signs.

In "Day by Day", Barthes described his columns for Le Observateur as a "soft form . . . suppose there were minor events whose tenuity none the less does not fail to involve meaning, to designate what is not well with the world?" (116/117). Adopting this 'soft' form, Laurence creates what Barthes calls, in The Grain of Voice, the "novelistic . . . a mode of discourse unstructured by a story; a mode of notation, investment, interest in daily reality, in people, in everything that happens in life" (222). While Laurence seeks for the myths that sustain her own life and writing, she exposes flimsy public alibis that have become unexamined cultural myths that neither sustain nor nourish. The essays are like the field journal of an inveterate sign reader who reads event, architecture, technology, monuments, gestures; the myriad cultural objects and trends of twentieth century life as a language to be understood. This art of decoding casts Laurence as the true diviner, open to connections and revelations that empower the familiar as well as the extraordinary. In "Many Solitudes: The Travel Writings of

Margaret Laurence", George Woodcock, with singular insight, describes Heart of a Stranger as "an arrangement of personal myths in their order of relevance" (22), but Laurence is a transcultural myth seeker whose 'soft form' is porous, dialogic, and elastic enough to escape the narrowly personal myth of the unitary "I".

In a memorial issue of Canadian Woman Studies dedicated to Margaret Laurence, Alice Olsen Williams shares a narrative that explains how she inscribed her Ojibwe-Norwegian heritage, a University education, the knowledge of Native Canadian symbols and traditional colonial forms into quilts of unique and stunning significance. The centre symbol would be Ojibwe, the frame or quilt block was of traditional North American design; all incorporated the original teachings of the Elders that "keeps in our vision that it is a good thing in Life to be thankful, to always strive to live a Good Life as set out by the message of the Creator, the mother of us all" (11). This was a project Laurence understood, encouraged and supported and her personal quilt was to feature as a central Life Symbol--a loon.

Laurence died before Olsen completed her 'loon quilt' but the arrangement of work in Heart of a Stranger shares this patchwork structure. Explorations of mythologies that inform her life take place in essays, articles and travel pieces that are juxtaposed, like quilt blocks, less chronological or thematic than ideographic. The process of Heart of a Stranger is a rehearsal of the form that will truly become the life quilt in Dance on the Earth, but the thematic clusters suggest a pattern or blueprint for her life. Although the book would not be called an autobiography, Laurence emerges as first person narrator and storyteller. The first and last pieces in the collection, written in 1970 and 1972, frame the collection and concern founding or origin myths. Between "A Place To

Stand On" and "Where the World Began" a variety of pieces in the "soft form" suggest an intricate pattern. The writing spans a dozen years, half a dozen genres, and recreates registers of voice and subjects from Agamemnon to the international tribe of cabbies. The integrative structure on this desegregated site predicts the border crossing that will come in Dance on the Earth, her final book.

The framing works "A Place to Stand On" and "Where the World Began" concern the founding stories of Laurence's life and "Road from the Isles" and "Down East" (offered midway through the collection) develop as leit-motif echoes of the original themes. "A Place to Stand On" introduces the keynote of our beginning places; topos that have archetypal and powerful mythic importance in all lives but especially in the lives of those compelled to write their stories. The connection between this first place where perception is gained and all our subsequent journeys resolves into the dominant tone in the final essay "Where the World Began". Ecological revolutions, notwithstanding, Laurence knows she owes as much to the native culture that inhabited our birthplace as to the colonials from whom her genealogical trace proceeds, "This is where my world began. A world which includes the ancestors--both my own and other people's ancestors who become mine" (219).

This imaginative archaeology forecasts such works as Robert Kroetsch's "Stone Hammer Poem". "Road From the Isles", separated by divertimenti on other places, ancient, modern and politically charged, reintegrates the myth of origins with that of archetypal stories; "even a more distant past which one had not personally experienced" (13). Laurence makes the distinction that Morag had to discover in The Diviners, that 'Mock Scots' was her legacy as a first generation Canadian of Scottish ancestry and

that the sensitivity she felt to the Highland site on which the diabolical Clearances took place, was more intellectual than mythic. The true narrative of her actual experience in Scotland was the inversion of the original myth; her psychic response was to the place names that recall her Canadian birth place--Kildonan, Bannerman, Mackay, Selkirk, Gunn and Glengarry. The homeplace evoked was the Selkirk settlement of Southern Manitoba. What had seemed familiar in the Scottish landscape, "the spruce, the pine, and the birch with moss around the roots" (156) was its similarity to the Manitoba landscape around Clear Lake, the childhood place. The power of the mythic for the post colonial resides in our beginnings that are an amalgam and an inversion; racial and geographical transference. "Down East" recalls the "dominant myths" (159) that create an allegory of centre and margin in the mind of a child and describes their displacement as the adult experiences the reality of the new place. Beliefs that are popularized at "the semantic roots of . . . folk culture" (158) seem natural; imbibed as essential myth. Laurence exposes this insidious cultural phenomenon, demythicizing the other place, the Prairie's geographic alter-ego, as she integrates Southern Ontario as the latest home place in her personal geography. These frame works anchor and secure the other accounts of legendary heroes, places exotic, or such common fare as taxis, planes, and the television interview. The effect is contrapuntal; one piece refers back to another and forward to a third in an infinite expansion of meaning; each individual section enlarging, diminishing, reconstructing a pattern that exposes the public endoxa against the primal mythos that informs our lives.

The metaphor of exploration; the perpetual evacuation of sites, geographical, historical, political, ontological, technological and spiritual unites the disparate pieces

in Heart of a Stranger while it deconstructs the myth of the solitary creative artist. "The whole process of fiction is a mysterious one" (12), but for Laurence, not one undertaken by some Romantic mental traveller alone at a desk, courting the Muses. The "I" of these pieces writes from a subject position within a maze of culture, history, myth, and society, as art mediates the places she inhabits. The trio of travel pieces, "Sayonara Agamemnon", "Good Morning to the Grandson of Ramesses the Second", and "Captain Pilot Shawkat and Kipling's Ghost" are readings of place where the conflation of myth, history, geography and culture provide a rich sense of signification. They are also motivated by the less lofty consideration of cash commission. The myth of the artist, cherished by readers in the West, is paradoxical; we grant them a spiritual status far beyond the common herd, but eliminate them from the material system of reward. This niggardly philosophy allows us to share in the garret festivity of La Bohème, satisfied that the manuscripts being tossed on the fire token an unending flow of creative genius. The obscure preface note to the Egyptian pieces in Heart of a Stranger contains a sign we would prefer to ignore; the junket nature of these cultural ramblings. The analysis of the cultural sites on which Western civilization rests is complicated by the knowledge that what is received as eternal, timeless, was produced within a grid of historical and social necessity by anonymous artists.

In "Sayonara, Agamemnon" and "Good Morning to the Grandson of Ramesses the Second"; the text in hand is culture; past, present and future. The tombs and temples are the trace of some event announced by history as inaugural; the tour purports to view the retained past in some fleeting present moment, but Laurence mediates both historical events by her presence. "A Place to Stand On" and "Where It All Began", the

framing essays, introduce a sense of time that is inhabited like space where discrete events are juxtaposed in a pleasing temporal anarchy. This debunking of the traditional time line erases the troubling gaps and aporias where the past fails to coincide with itself and the present evaporates like a vapour trail behind us. The ancient and modern merge to produce a post-modern text, larger than either and open to new values and meaning.

Travelling to Olympia, the tour bus "seemed like a time machine in a science-fiction story, . . . a metal-and-glass bubble . . . Herr Beck begins to sing "Lili Marlene" (27). The stone road bears the groove of Agamemnon's chariot wheels, the old narrative tells of blood, death and man's eternal will to power, but Laurence chooses to construct the alternative stories.

A sketch in the register of a Hollywood gossip columnist suggests the possible fate of an aging oracle after her Delphi Days. On the windy heights at Mycenae, Laurence feels "at last the actuality of the past" that has been drowned out by the Babel of the tour bus but it is not the vainglory of Agamemnon's return that she sees; rather, his queen's revenge; "And her, terrified, but with the memory of the child burning at her, their youngest child whom the king had sacrificed to the gods for luck in war" (31). At that moment in Laurence's story, a small girl materializes from nowhere in place of the mighty king. The title is an aphoristic sign; the only foreign word two American children learn in the cradle of Western Civilization, heavy with legend, is an Eastern word taught by a Japanese woman who amused them with origami magic. The informing story is a new one that fuses 'past' and 'present', 'East' and 'West', those arbitrary words our culture has naturalized to embody agonistic states. Laurence foregrounds the arbitrary

and confusing semiotics history maintains in the face of constantly changing global reality.

Laurence's heterodynamic reading takes place in the carnivalized space of the Four Day Ultra Classical Tour where mythic levels repel one another and rational logic is suspended by the violence of potential systems that compete for significance. The monologic account dominated by representations of power is displaced in "Sayonara Agamemnon" by a reading of place and event that includes the chorus of voices silenced on the margins of patriarchal history.

In Egypt, Laurence finds a deep time in which pasts are layered but shifting with tectonic subtlety. In "Good Morning to the Grandson of Ramesses the Second," the unimaginably distant past of ancient Egypt" is both the cause and the effect of "a more recent past, the end of the last century and the beginning of this" (87). The antiquities, preserved in this arid place with a frightening immediacy, had the indwelling power to attract the curious from marauding Romans to the great German and British archaeologists of our century and these seekers constructed a narrative of the ancients based on the monologic remains. The generations of intervention and appropriation invested the site, its tombs, monuments, and artifacts with a proliferation of meaning so vast that the signs Laurence reads are replete and sticky with interpretation. Like post-serial music, the text of Egypt disrupts the logic of language and requires the writer to do more than simply read the place as it is delivered up by history. She must feel and participate in the local narrative to produce a collaborative score that can be reactivated with each new reading. Laurence conjures ghosts: of Lord Carnarvon, Queen Nefertari, Rimbaud, Shelley, Rekhmire the vizier, the Mamelukes' horsemen, Napoleon's armies,

Wolseley's British dragoons, along with all the grave-robbers and guides whose audacious spectres haunt the scene. She reads hieroglyphics from the dawn of history and creates modern found poems from graffiti and random placement: Nasser's photo beside a film star's glossy poster on the wall of a hut. The land is dense with names that were meant to live forever, but the most powerful messages are silent and anonymous; the clamour of warriors and pharaohs is submerged beneath the whispers of the members of Laurence's own tribe, the artists and scribes that bore witness. "The artists seem close, certainly breathing, absent only momentarily" (107). There are no empty spaces in a land so full of time and the new stories Laurence finds here are fused and discontinuous. The ancients share the moment with their descendants, the old gods with all the new ones who have come, in their time, to fill the human need for order and meaning. She ends with the intertext of a post card from her Egyptian guide; a sign in English and Arabic pointing to the eternal past as an open site, available every morning to all. "Good morning, everyone" (108).

With the third foreign travel piece "Captain Pilot Shawkat and Kipling's Ghost" Laurence's sensitive reading of cultural signs goes beyond entertaining reportage. The persona of the wide-eyed writer on holiday is abandoned and with only slight semantic modernization her language and method could be aligned with the work of certain European structural semioticians that examine the social text as an elaborate sign system. She reads the Suez Canal as one would read a text: it is "very much more than a place, . . . its *meanings* extend vastly beyond the *function* it serves" (for 'meanings', substitute 'signification' and replace 'function' with 'signifier'). "Variously it has been an *omen*" {sign, (109)}. (emphasis added) Laurence introduces a list of phenomenological

historical ideas that the Canal has embodied. The Canal as linguistic signifier of a geographic or technological object, she suggests, is arbitrary and unmotivated but the Canal as sign is "emotionally loaded" (110). The life of this sign is global and complex.

There is little levity in this text, no amusing anecdotes about fellow travellers or the curious tribe of tour guides. Laurence shares her background reading but the narrow historical particulars are incidental to the universals that can be unhidden in a poetics of power and ideology in the Middle East. The Suez offers a topography of codes that Laurence negotiates with eager curiosity and stunning perception: she reads human gestures, domestic and commercial design, billboards, nautical terms, military strategies enacted in language, shops signs, clothing, food and monuments. A transcultural menu on which "PIPSI COLA" and "SODA LARGE AVEC WHISKEY" is quoted as artifact. (123)

Laurence's apparently innocent description of events, people and places encountered on the Canal trip veil a disturbing subtext; slightly phased. Michel Foucault in The Order of Things explains this as a zone of 'hetrotopic spaces':

There is a worse kind of disorder than that of the incongruous . . . the linking together of things that are inappropriate: I mean the disorder in which fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry, of the heteroclite . . . In such a state, things are "laid," "placed," "arranged" in sites so very different from one another that it is impossible to find a place of residence for them. (xviii)

The memory of the Suez visionary, Ferdinand de Lesseps, whose prone statue rusts in harbour weeds, is kept in a derelict museum. The oxymoron of a derelict museum implies the inappropriate. The aura of decay and neglect that has invaded a site of commemoration reflects historical caprice. A brief encounter with the young Wanderbirds and the psychopathic Sailor who holds them with glittering eye and hard

drugs segues into the story of the "expatriates in their own country" (126), the sad café society of the Kamals. The portraits of these floating exiles have the emotional impact of the flotsam and jetsam of the dislocated colonials of Somali or Ghana adrift on "The Perfume Sea". The lines between fiction and non-fiction begin to blur in the 'novelistic' style of this selection, the form of the Blue Guide type of travel piece is dislocated and the bricolage of advertisement, shop signs, billboard, popular song, navigational orders, combines with dialogue and the extra-literary form of the business letter to create a *mélange* text. Laurence has created an open postmodern space where an anachronistic communication dislocates the narrative with possibility when "individual presence breaks, through, sometimes tragically, sometimes ludicrously" (128).

The four biographical sketches included in this volume have a common denominator. Each is the portrait of a border man living within the context of a changing society. "The Epic Love of Elmii Bonderii" is an elaboration from earlier notes on the life of Elmii the Borderman, the Somali poet who died of love. The introductory note to the story contains Laurence's attitude to the wavering intertext between myth and reality:

This tale may be myth, in the sense that it has undoubtedly become changed over the years and been given a kind of dramatic splendour missing from the original events, but myths contain their own truth, their own strong reality.
(77)

The few facts suggest Elmii was displaced from the nomadic ways of his ancestors to become a town dweller and his passion for an unattainable woman transformed this simple teashop attendant into the most popular love poet in Somali history. The tragic plot is enhanced by Laurence's genuine belief in the mysterious and ineffable nature of the creative process, a conviction that becomes an entrenched personal myth as her career advances. "The Very Best Intentions" traces the history of a personal relationship

between two fierce individualists "somehow out of tune with the respective societies in which {they} we lived" (37). Two border dwellers caught in the chaos of pre-Independence Ghana, Laurence and Mensah persist through a cultural minefield to deconstruct the "popular mythological terms" (34); those social, historical and ideological constructs that have become naturalized as if guaranteed by some transcendental truth. The mapping of the course of this friendship exists as palimpsest of the Miranda Kestoe - Nathaniel Agembe subplot in This Side Jordan; Miranda-Margaret's persistent liberalism in blundering confrontation with Nathaniel-Mensah's defensive sarcasm, as they make their tortuous way toward trust and understanding.

A dozen years separates the writing of "The Poem and the Spear" and "Man of the People" but they read as companion pieces. The story of the Mad Mullah is a thrice told tale existing in kernel form in A Tree For Poverty, enlarged to a chapter in The Prophet's Camel Bell, and expanded, in this article, to embrace not only the portrait of an enigmatic hero but the new theme of "a tribal people faced with imperialist opponents who do not possess superior values, but who have great material resources and more efficient methods of killing" (44). The tragic dynamics of colonial oppression that extinguish the spirit of a people and their traditional way of life is powerfully recreated as Laurence resists the monologic biographer's voice, choosing to punctuate her account with Mahammed' Abdille Hasan's stirring *gabay* and impassioned letters to the British that voice the private anguish that accompanies the defeat of Hassan's Holy War.

Christie Logan's lamentations on the Highland Clearances and his apocryphal history of Piper and Morag Gunn in The Diviners have the same note of despair and

defiance that ring through the Mad Mullah's rants. Laurence experienced the compelling nature of oral poetry around the campfires in the Haud, and she tunes the ballads of Jules Tonerre to the minor key common to men who know with certainty that the voice of their people will soon be silenced. This desperate mourning can be heard in the diary of Louis Riel, and the story of his faithful lieutenant, Gabriel Dumont inspires Laurence in "Man of the People". In the story of Dumont, a new register of the author's voice appears for the first time;

We have largely forgotten how to live with, protect, and pay homage to our earth and the other creatures who share it with us--as witness the killing of rivers and lakes; the killing of the whales; the proliferation of apartment blocks on irreplaceable farmlands. (211)

As passionate as the Mullah, more lucid than Christie Logan's prophesies, Laurence's voicing of a spiritual mission is female, maternal and balanced. It will come to replace the accounts of male cultural heroes and fictional characters in Laurence's writing from the time of this essay onward.

Five articles, written for the Vancouver Sun between 1970-1973, "Put Out One or Two More Flags", "The Wild Blue Yonder", "Inside the Idiot Box", "I Am A Taxi" and "Living Dangerously By Mail" were written mid-way through Laurence's work on The Diviners. She describes the imperative that governs this project in a letter to Al Purdy included in A Friendship in Letters: "Have to write 3 articles for Van. Sun. Wrote one three times and tore it up three times. This is getting boring. I must do them, tho, as I both want to write them and want the money" (196).

Light and witty, these personal narratives strike the perfect register for public feature page consumption; life in the comic vein that is reminiscent of Canadian journalists like Gregory Clark and Stephen Leacock. It is a disconcerting image: the

artist in the throes of creating the darkest passages of The Diviners removing the legendary manuscript from her typewriter to agonize over perky journalism. We prefer our spiritual mediators at some height above the banalities of plumbing bills and rewriting 1500 word articles. Surely not MARGARET LAURENCE! But, the same self-effacing, honest voice shares a series of personal glimpses in these vignettes. The vignette style of representation structures a series of experiences on one theme in a vertical line of reminiscence from past to present; the first person character is the focus with the background details moving in a cinematic series of shorts. The "I" takes us on adventures, or at least caprices on planes, in taxis, around the home, that through Laurence's willingness to play the mock heroic role, transform the mundane to a picaresque romp.

The "I" is unquestionably the author but the author, as one of us, or at least one of the girls. Although never fully developed, each piece is like a sit-com featuring the good-natured character in predicaments that range from being "locked in the john" of a "dinky aircraft" (137) over the Gulf of Aden to subduing a "PONTIFEX'S NO-SOUND" (141) toilet tank with a house full of guests; like the Cosby Mom, she copes with admirable humour. The facts--that the plane is taking her as a guest to the Somali Independence celebrations, one of only 10 foreigners so honoured, and the pesky toilet is situated in a 200 year old 6 bedroom English home--do not destroy the illusion that she is just like us. Of course this is utterly false. The likelihood of most Sun readers appearing on T.V. talk shows or taking taxis through Athens, Cairo, or the Black Isle is as remote as the chance that they might remember the exact and hilarious dialogue of their drivers. Laurence may have struggled with these pieces, but it was worth the

fight; her comic vision is developed with the mature talent that was momentarily diverted from The Diviners. The subtlety with which we are drawn into the antic progress of an 'ordinary' woman in the world allows us to forget, for a moment, that the famous author who has lived in exotic and romantic places, is extraordinary and singular. On expense paid junkets or more banal excursions when a "small daughter threw up all over the airport floor" (133), Laurence is saving anecdotes, storing interesting dialogue, accents and all, filing experience that may one day delight readers and pay the bills. The image of Laurence, eight months pregnant, like "a galleon in full sail" (132) or immortalized on film wrestling with a Great Mullein of the Figwort family (and losing) is a supplement to the 'great author' on the pages of literary history.

The spunky character of these features is a woman, on her own and in control; she engages her readers, allowing them to participate in the unique life of a female artist who carnivalizes public space generally dominated by men. In an airplane, in taxis, on television or through the mail service, the rules and regimes of ordinary, day-to-day existence are uncrowned. This site of inversion, where rules are suspended, extends to life at Elmcot as described in "Put Out One or Two More Flags".

This intergenerational place where "agreeable anarchy" reigned was the Laurence base in England for ten years, a matriarchy in which "we all fulfil what we conceive to be our individual responsibilities, and astonishingly enough, it all seems to mesh" (143). Throughout these articles, Laurence combines the formal literary phrase with the cliché, adds a colloquial or nonstandard form to an archaic or poetic expression to democratize the textual space. Slang words and idiomatic expressions appear along side the lofty poetic turn of phrase and the result is a readerly prose that might be characterized as

the textual equivalent of the agreeable anarchy of the Elmcot household. Each article is approximately 1500 words but there are multiple scene changes, characters enter and fade, and virtually each frame has a sprightly dialogue. "I Am A Taxi" pans in and out of a dozen cabs, and Laurence's ear approximates ethnic syntax with phonetic spelling and italic inflection to reproduce nine distinct accents and dialects from Yugoslavian to North End Winnipeg.

The five pieces explore the infrastructure of life in the modern world; the family that is no longer nuclear but atomic, mass transportation by air, by taxi, and communication through mail and television. Each of these life spaces has its jargon, habitués and familiars; the Elmcot family of Canadian exiles and visitors, the cabbies, the television studio types, the airport transients, and the letter writers are like tribes into which Laurence has been initiated. In "Day by Day with Roland Barthes", he defends the 'soft form', "ought we not to make heard today the greatest possible number of 'little worlds'?" (117) The personal, the anecdotal, the vignette view of Laurence's Sun articles provides a view to one side, slightly phased from the extravagant lure of the colossal event that sells papers. The comic vision that transforms the prosaic occasions of life to mock epic performance is a type of political statement; inserting sanity and balance into a news space that alienates us by making the tragic and horrific our only model.

Two articles written in 1974 for Weekend Magazine explore the roots and branches of personal history in a space that melds past, present and future. "Upon a Midnight Clear" returns to the original childhood trunk of tradition, primal memory, and desire to examine the Christian founding moment as experienced by a child in the Scots-Irish

Presbyterian milieu of a small Prairie town. The way in which family traditions evolve, by adapting new life circumstances to customs carried like luggage from our youth, forms the burden of this occasional piece. The description of Christmas at Elmcot is already in the past tense. Like the always already there of the Neepawa Christmases, the present of Lakefield is yet to come, but all are held in the focus of a commemorative celebration of communal significance. The Northern Lights over Neepawa, the rigid Scots Presbyterian order of family events, a memorial gift of turkey, chocolates and lichee nuts, are eclipsed by new communal observances that replace carols with folk songs and the Blues. Laurence was born into a society that treated the Christian occasion as a founding myth. The memories from that place exist in a realm in which fact is irrelevant. "My memory, probably faulty, assigns the northern lights to *all* those Christmas eves, but they must have appeared at least on some, . . . It was easy then to believe in the Word made manifest" (194). The Elmcot traditions will become submerged by future yet-to-be made Christmas rites at Lakefield. Laurence writes a tender account of Christmas celebrations, but the text is also a recognition that signs exist under erasure in an endless layering as new signs superimpose a more current meaning, slightly phased from the original. Her awareness, that a cultural narrative rewrites itself endlessly, might have been demoralizing to another, but Laurence seizes the textual opportunity to make room in the fragmented modern world for awe that can be experienced and recognized.

"The most loved place, for me, in this country has in fact been many places" (187). "The Shack" begins with a paradox that foregrounds Laurence's sense of the text as a spacio-temporal reality with elastic boundaries. The article describes her new home, the

locus of her writing, the prototype of Morag's final place; it is a stylistic accomplishment that weds form to content. This is the place where all her travels come together and allow her to complete the novel that her Celtic 2nd sight predicted would be her last. As an amalgam of all the past places, fictional and real, it is at once a geographical location and an imaginative centre, a topos that will nourish a powerful ecofeminist philosophy. The essays in "Heart of a Stranger" explore a variety of secularized mythologies of race, history and culture that are symptomatic of modern confusion about the sacred, and they offer resistance texts that confront the dangerous lure of media's reductive totalization of events. "The Shack" goes beyond critique to suggest that a sacred atmosphere can be reclaimed in which the world can speak to man through rhythms that can be understood. What critics, like Clara Thomas in Margaret Laurence, have called Laurence's "substructure . . . a morality which insists on the dignity of the individual" or her focus on "the universals" (34) had expanded to gather nature and the non-human from their marginal place in modern patriarchal society to the centre of an interconnected web that dethrones hierarchical binaries.

The ecological revolution that accompanied the colonization of North America destroyed the way of life of indigenous tribes, murdered their gods and desacrilized nature. The subsequent consumerism of the 20th Century has finished the job, poisoning rivers and making the social interaction with nature and the non-human the subject of clichéd Disney interpretations and government lies. In "The Shack" and perhaps at the shack on the Ottonabee River, Laurence enters a site where the integrative system of ecological reason informs her humanism and her writing.

In this brief article of no more than 1500 words, at least 100 are neologisms or compounds that fuse two linguistic signifiers into a new one that is different and amplifies the original. This textual site is like a cyclotron, alive with the play of charged signifiers that multiply and defer, approximating the organic relationship of the ecosystem that Laurence celebrates in this piece: "moss-hairy fallen logs", "water-related trees", "the dance-like flight of the swallows", "purple-and-white wild phlox with its expensive-smelling free perfume". The landscape is mad with colour and demands the invention of a revolutionary rainbow of signifiers: "mist-covered", "ale-brown", "silvergold in late summer, greengold in autumn", "orange-black flash" "black-patterned yellow feathers", "greenish grey-yellow", "orange-gold angels". The loon-shocking "humanshriek" of "ego-tripping skippers . . . whose violent wakes scour our shorelines" can be redeemed by "unpolluting canoes and rowboats . . . homemade houseboats, unspeedy and somehow cosy-looking". "The Shack" is a place where longed-for magic happens: "the half-moon leap of a fish, carp or muskie, so instantaneous that one has the impression of having seen not a fish but an arc of light" (187-191).

Deep correspondences occur at the "secret meeting of river and sky" or when "At sunset, an hour or so ago, I watched the sun's last flickers touching the rippling river, making it look as though some underwater world had lighted all its candles". Laurence reinvests language with the desire to represent the ineffable; "The black sky-dome (or perhaps skydom, like kingdom) is alive and alight." Invoking the turtle tribe, she aligns herself with lost aboriginal myth and the world of the future in which the maple saplings her neighbour planted the summer before his death are "a kind of legacy, a declaration of faith" (189-191). No longer reading cultural signs naturalized to myth, she now read

natural signs that connect her to a world of infinite transparency through which the trace of first things shine.

"Open Letter to the Mother of Joe Bass" was written six years before Laurence moved back to Canada to take up residence on the site that inspired the visionary tribute to 'the shack'. However this piece written for Purdy's The New Romans, reveals another thread in the weave of her emerging ecofeminism. In Prophet's Camel Bell, the abjection of Somali women breaks through the narrative to confront the reader, and in "Sayonara, Agamemnon", Laurence's inversion of the Agamemnon myth, avenges his queen and murdered daughter. Such epiphanic moments prepare us for Laurence's sensitivity to the sorrowing mother. Questions that Hagar ponders about her son's death from accident or design in The Stone Angel resurface: "do such things depend upon what goes on outside?" (144)

In the letter to the mother of a black 12 year old wounded by Detroit police, Laurence has an answer. Things that go on outside; hatred, violence and war begin in the personal and private. The face of Joe Bass interchanges with the loved face of David Laurence, in a way that is not only symbolic but metalingual, defining the essence of metaphor. The media image sticks to Laurence, like napalm from another newspaper photo of a North Vietnamese mother peeling pieces from the face of her child; Laurence, like Stacey, the mother in The Fire-dwellers is pursued by the enormity of the represented event. Brutality has been naturalized by our constant exposure to distanced scenes of horror so that we take tragedy with our morning coffee. Laurence destabilizes the comfortable alibi of media language like 'collateral damage' and "By accident" and deconstructs what we accept as the inevitable icon of our age, the Stabat Mater,

replacing it with the image of childbirth where we "look over God's shoulder" at a miracle that reaffirms the deep mysteries, reclaiming the sacred. (201)

The diction of the letter is simple and most sentences telegraph emotion from the heart of one mother to her counterpart: "Mrs. Bass, there are two pictures. I know they are not fair." The questions are asked and left open, free from what could only be the muddle of erudite platitudes. Laurence offers no consolation beyond empathy and acknowledges that words are partial and inadequate: "this imperfect means is the only one we have." The archaic form of the open letter, a public epistle usually on a political theme, runs across the grain of the content--the necessity for a politics of solidarity among women. The history of this genre comes down to us as a predominantly male preserve; with the exception of Mary Wollstonecraft, other women of words that may have sought access to the public sphere have been silenced by a patriarchal canon formation and are only now being rediscovered and published by feminist presses. The formality, rhetorical bombast and anger, that characterized the authoritarian pronouncements of the male writers working in this form, is absent from Laurence's version. They are replaced by uncertainty; "I am not sure who is responsible" and unanswered questions "would I be able to go on writing novels, in the belief that this was a worthwhile thing to be doing in this year (as they say) of our Lord? Mrs. Bass, I do not think I can answer that question." The representation of the gunned down child "pillowed in blood" does not degrade the simple horror with sensational description. Like the hollow faced Somali women who make their brief appearance in the travel book, the most powerful picture is the least contrived. "He was lying on the sidewalk, and his eyes were open. He was seeing everything, I guess, including himself" (202/203).

Gayatri Spivak, in "Other Worlds", advises us to question representations of the other: "Who is the other woman? How am I naming her? How does she name me?" (150) Margaret Laurence addresses Mrs. Bass as a sister member in a global tribe and knows that this naming, names herself. A new voice speaks for the other, silenced, marginalized, and violated by the patriarchal society in "Open Letter to the Mother of Joe Bass", "The Shack" and "Man of the People"; a voice that no longer speaks through the mask of fictional characters like Stacey and Morag, for Laurence had found a centre space for her own strong voice in the life quilt of her writing.

CHAPTER 5
AN ESSENTIAL CHOREOGRAPHY: THE FOREWORD TO
DANCE ON THE EARTH

The discussion of a text that calls itself a memoir presupposes an examination of the matrix of language and self, the way in which the self is constructed through and by language. When this memoir is the work of Margaret Laurence whose career was the construction of lives in language, it becomes important to determine how her own discourse had already constructed her. By 1976 Laurence had assumed many subject positions creating a vast polyphonic chorus in language. Although she had fused the registers of the traditional binary oppositions male-female, adult-child, white-black, European-native, rich-poor, nature-culture in dialogic texts that crossed boundaries of genre and nation, Laurence's readers seemed determined to identify the author with some muddied notion of 'humanism'. Laurence's work was far from monologic or univocal, but its reception was invariably reductive as articles, reviews, critical essays and interviews returned monotonously to her 'universal' themes as if each book parthenogenetically duplicated itself. More adventurous writers traced the development of Laurence's legendary humanism and/or her talent through successive publications but writing about Laurence from this period exposes the poverty of thematic criticism and reveals the astonishing willingness of Canadians to essentialize their heroes. By the duplicitous act of ignoring anything that did not serve thematic coherence and fastening onto a theme that could subsume virtually any difference, those who took Laurence as their subject, effectively recast a radical activist in her late 40's into the stone angel of Canadian Literature.

Fortunately, the river does flow both ways and the rigid thematic approach to Laurence betrays an uncanny insight that was far from the rational logic that these familiar theses intended. Among the writers and critics she fondly referred to as her 'tribe', Margaret Laurence had assumed the position of an elder with powerful authority. However, once an author has been set up as a cultural icon dealing in universal truths, the old hierarchies obtain, and Laurence's pronouncements were treated as transcendental utterances.

When Laurence announced that The Diviners would be her last novel it was neither a decision nor an act of will but a prophesy prompted by her Celtic second sight. Otherwise solemn academics greeted her prediction with dismay but never questioned the extraordinary source of her knowledge, so thoroughly had the 'Black Celt' persona become invaginated with the identity of the author. With what could only be described as a convoluted logic of exclusion, thematic critics had obsessively reduced Laurence, the novelist, to a single theme which they then applied to Laurence, the person, while maintaining that biography had no place in the text. In a 1974 Maclean's article titled "Face To Face", Margaret Atwood seems compelled to immortalize a Laurence 'presence'. Struggling with a variety of responses and impressions through a lengthy introduction, Atwood finally abandons the failed language of psychology or mimetic description and chooses the imaginative to represent the charisma of Laurence: "She looks a lot more like an exotic Eskimo witch" (39). Atwood's last words in this piece express a communal hope that Laurence's oracular words are premature; "This is the way Margaret Laurence feels about writing, about the prospect that she may never start

another novel. It isn't for her sake that we may hope she's wrong this time: it's for ours" (46).

By speaking for us and articulating 'our hopes', Atwood positions Laurence as the tribal wisewoman whose silence would be a loss to the holistic consciousness of a community. The linguistic tension, evident in Atwood's attempt to inscribe what seemed to be the ineffable quality of Margaret Laurence, foregrounds the transformation that was taking place. Atwood shows remarkable perception, and her strained witness is not a flaw but a record of her acuity; the simile, "like an exotic Eskimo witch" (39) captures Laurence in process and not merely as she had been constructed by the reception of her own discourse. By this act of naming Laurence, Atwood names herself as a sister diviner. The proliferation of memorial collections, magazine 'special' issues, newsletters and book length collections of critical essays about Laurence have obscured the fact that writers long before her death shared a tone usually reserved for posthumous tributes. This premature reification of Laurence is a conflicted gesture; consecrated as a national treasure, she became a caricature that suffered a curious kind of erasure. When The Diviners came under attack by an organized minority, they were met by an equally passionate majority and an emotional holocaust ensued that lasted nearly a decade (1976-1985), a dispute in which both sides argued, not the content of the text but the morality of its author.

Misread by fanatics, fundamentalists and fans, it is not surprising Laurence was determined "to write her life story" with a "new approach" (xi). In "The Black Celt Speaks of Freedom" Laurence explains to Donald Cameron that the autobiographical is present in all writing:

In a profound sense there is something of you in all your characters; they are almost all of them in a way disguises for you in one or another of your aspects, and very often you discover things about yourself through the characters that you hadn't known before. (100)

Her fiction as a process of self discovery had unearthed crones, mothers and virgins, exposed patriarchs, prophets and pedants, and expanded the Canadian literary landscape to include fan-dancers, garbage men, folk singers and other border dwellers. All of her writing could be seen as a rehearsal for the memoir Dance On The Earth, but this text has suffered because it is not the novel, 'we' hoped would confound her prophesy.

As a "memoir" it escapes the denigrated title of women's autobiography. A hybrid form, the memoir allows the writer to honour others, interrupt narrative to rant, plead or exalt, ramble in and out of linear time, leave whole parts of her life in shadow, and basically break with the expectations of her audience. The form that she chose allowed her to finish the text when her health failed, but it was not a choice dictated by her illness. Begun in 1984, the book permitted her to immerse herself in projects driven by her emerging ecofeminism without abandoning the life writing adventure.

Atwood was right. Margaret Laurence had become an 'exotic Eskimo witch'. Her Christianity had undergone a change to include an earth centred spirituality reminiscent of matrilineal aboriginal cultures and took on distinctly anti-patriarchal tones. Laurence had always claimed that second sight informed her life's decisions, from house purchases to book titles. Accounts of the way in which characters had been 'given' to Laurence as voices breaking through from another ontological level correspond to the spirituality of native American religions that share marked similarities to the Yoruba world view that informs the work of Soyinka and Achebe, writers that Laurence introduced to

Western audiences in Long Drums and Cannons. A synchronic continuum joins the world of the dead, the living and the unborn to a level which Soyinka describes in "The Fourth Stage":

the no-man's land of transition between and around these temporal definitions of experience. . . . a chthonic realm, a storehouse for creative and destructive essences, {that} required a challenger, a human representative to breach it periodically on behalf of the well-being of the community. (2/3)

At times when the worn out commemorations of old religions cease to connect with the deep levels, it is more often the artist than the priest who must find ways of reminding the human community of its original connections to the Earth and founding stories through artistic re-enactment. During a period of personal transition that was geographical, spiritual and literary, Laurence began Dance On The Earth, a self-story that would dispel fragmentation through personal experience, to ground a unique collage that would reflect her life in an authentic way.

Dance On The Earth was a courageous model; Helen M. Buss in "Dance On the Earth Reviewed" called it an "important moment in the history of the genre, as well as an emotional homecoming in terms of female wholeness" (46). It substituted the maternal story for the patriarchal one, disturbing the 'family plot' in which the woman's story leads to and ends in marriage. Laurence works out of a different kind of time; a dance measure that enables bricolage. Distinct memories resurface to share the same space as imagined past, present tirades erupt from the recollection of tranquility, and apocalyptic warnings explode from the contemplation of fierce love. 'The personal is the political' has been repeated so often in defense of border texts that it risks joining the tired patriarchal lexicon of clichés but Laurence's memoir redeems the phrase and rearms it with a fresh grammar, a radical energy.

Dance On The Earth has a narrative movement like modern dance in which each performer actualizes time into the space of their dancing. Chapter 1 "FOREWORDS" frames the work and with each subsequent chapter a mother-dancer emerges whose time is made present through their stories. The natural rhythms and cycles of female lives structure the sections, and the necessity of dictating the final revisions makes breath the unit of composition. The dance, the eternal circle of generation, the moon, the female cycles are archaic symbols that are regenerated in the memoir, and Jocelyn's preface, composed after the death of her mother, actualizes the process of maternal intrasubjectivity. The collaboration that included Laurence's revision on tape, Joan Johnson's transcription to manuscript and Jocelyn's critical editing exemplify the female fluidity that is symbolized by the dance. Laurence began her career with transcription from the oral Somali and ended it with her own orality transcribed, a circle that encompasses her creative life.

While the academic folk were in the process of installing Laurence onto a cultural pedestal, she was beginning her final book Dance On The Earth. Unfortunately, its posthumous publication precluded serious examination, and the text was lost in a flurry of memorial tributes. A few perceptive reviews resulted, but for the most part, her death stranded the text in time. Contemporary interest in post colonial literature, life writing, ecofeminism, feminist theology and border texts will no doubt re-evaluate Dance On The Earth, as a revolutionary book. Ironically Laurence's memoir was treated in a sentimental way, as a nostalgic volume of closure, instead of the radical work of a mature author. Dance On The Earth establishes Laurence as a diviner who had not only retained her gift, but who exercised it with amazing power.

Although Laurence never uses the term, 'ecofeminism', Françoise d'Eaubonne's "Feminism or Death", forged the connective "eco-feminisme" as a short hand version of her thesis that "the destruction of the planet is due to the profit motive inherent in male power" (64). Rachel Carson had written The Silent Spring in 1962, but personal attacks and discreditation by 'big business' undercut her pioneering effort and made women wary about disclosure and confrontation with the patriarchy. The fear that motivated the censorship of The Diviners was no more than patriarchal terror inspired by a woman who had survived the domination and dared to name it through Morag Gunn. No doubt Laurence had read Rachel Carson's book, but we can not say whether she read the authors who first made the connection between the dual oppressions of nature and the female. Nevertheless, Dance On The Earth is a prophetic book that prefigures theory only recently published by ecofeminists, and can be seen as a model for the process by which the dual philosophy would be integrated with activism to drive movements as disparate as peace collectives and covens. Recollected life experience confirmed a holistic philosophy that integrated mind and body, identified personal desires with larger social programs, and embedded the human within nature.

The FOREWORDS chapter of Dance On The Earth proceeds in a serendipitous fashion; anecdote and free association dictating the narrative flow. The nonlinear structure would once have been (and perhaps still would be) denigrated as 'feminine', intuitive, and natural. However, over ten years have passed since Laurence began her memoir; a decade in which postmodernism, French psychoanalytical theories and post structuralist philosophies have informed our critical thinking about literature. A style in which symbols choreograph deep patterns of signification without strict adherence to

linear chronology or rational logic, is no longer considered a faulty absence of structure. Rather, symbolic narrative structure like the unconscious or dream state, seems most appropriate to the selection and association process of memory that inspires the memoir or spiritual autobiography. Laurence had tried the linear narrative but for autobiography it was flat: "After hundreds of handwritten pages, I had got myself to the age of eighteen. I was bored. I knew what was going to happen next" (xi).

This honest admission foregrounds one of the difficulties of the genre; bound to adhere to a predetermined chronology and to honour the 'truth factor' of event based history, Laurence could not invent the characters and plot that energize fiction. Technical skill, subtle changes of tone and voice, an alternative to the linear plot, would have to be balanced by an economy of language and unerring selection of detail to produce a text that would have the vitality of fiction. *FOREWORDS* resurrects a technique that Laurence used for Hagar in *The Stone Angel*; scenes from the past seem to rise from some vast pool of memory triggered by a word or phrase to illuminate the present moment of the narrative, then fade to allow progression. In the introductory sixteen pages, this style is established and focal nodes are inaugurated that touch on every issue that will be developed throughout book. Powerful symbols are established in the initial section that fuse concrete, cultural and mythic meanings to supply the coherence that is threatened when a nebulous form is adopted. The dance, as a model of mutuality, is the symbol that weaves together what Jocelyn Laurence identified as the "issues that most concerned her: nuclear disarmament, pollution and the environment, pro-choice abortion legislation" (xi) with the feminist spirituality that affirms life.

Laurence's fiction, non-fiction, and children's books had never separated the social and the personal. Stacey's apocalyptic daydreams arise from fear for her children, and Laurence addressed the fate of aging women in a society that values women as sexual objects in The Stone Angel. The animal companions on Jason's Quest critique human racism, greed and violence. What had been artistically embodied in fiction or partially expressed in essays and the travel book, is gathered together in the memoir and powerfully affirmed.

FOREWORDS sets the tone for the book. There will be no need to speculate whether Laurence is a feminist, a Christian, or a pacifist; she tells us directly what is wrong with patriarchal manipulation of religion, literature, nature and women's lives in unequivocal terms. The diction announces straightforward confrontation; she has only a short time to live and will take no prisoners, but her tenderness relieves the invective and a spirituality that finds a place for righteous anger and overwhelming love, maintains balance. The either/or, us/them, power-over dominance of patriarchal schemes is displaced by a holistic consciousness that is far from naiveté or blissful serenity. This memoir forced Laurence to examine and declare her life with an honesty that precluded the false optimism or simplistic answers that infect texts that sum up, foreclose a life's work. Despite its posthumous publication and Jocelyn's moving preface, there is little sense of closure in the book. FOREWORDS introduces the subsequent sections with the generational dance poem, and the present tense declaration "I know their dance", and "FOR MY SISTERS", with its semantic play and rhythm takes leave of the memoir with the music still playing. Helen M. Buss, in "Dance On The Earth Reviewed" confirms the literary energy that galvanizes reader to text: "It reaches out

the hand of a dying woman, its language places that hand across yours, and it (hand/text) does not go away when the book is closed" (16). A linguistic act as supplement to a life, originating at the interstices of secondary orality and print elicits a response that is usually reserved for human subjects; this text has become a healing hand. A reader needs to engage with the text, partner the dancer.

"11 Verna Simpson Wemyss" begins in the kitchen of the Big House with Margaret's child eye view and we shadow her trip upstairs, wheeling her birthday big-girl bicycle to the final visit with her dying mother. This is fact, but Laurence does not adopt the register of a four year old to authenticate the time; she speaks from the present of a mature woman remembering, and what is beyond recall is imagined. Revisioning has become an integral part of contemporary women's spirituality that allows them to create or accept histories, symbols and rituals in which women have an equal place. The erasure and absence of a feminine principle in patriarchal systems requires the cultivation of this perceptual faculty as a crucial sixth sense for women engaged in a quest for meaning in their lives. This radical remembering is how Laurence finds her birth mother in the absence of much concrete memory over a distance of fifty odd years.

Beginning with the absolute authority of the Simpson family Bible, Laurence spirals backward to trace the Simpson family history in Southern Manitoba and visualize what life with "three older brothers and two older sisters" (27) must have been like for Verna, the second youngest. The Wemyss family story is based on oral history, but the dates and names anchor the telling. The family Bible, photo albums, a baby book, the letter from her newly engaged parents to an aunt, a lock of hair; "the harmless archives of love" (39) form the extra-literary subtext that documents a life and allows an opening

for narrative. Like young Morag searching the photographic representations of her parents, Laurence tries to see beneath the monologic relics that represent her absent parents. Baby book entries, in her mother's hand are strangely familiar "so much like my own sprawling penmanship" (26), another text/hand reaching out through time to touch the living. Verna's maternal record prompts Laurence to a tirade that welds feminist anger to ecological outrage in a passionate defense of pro choice, regret for the impossible choices earlier women had to make between career and family, and she is moved to "enormous rage and anger at the chemical pollution by commercial firms committed to making money" (39).

Laurence moves in a continuous present that includes past and future, subverting the usual conventions of time. Two photos of Robert Wemyss 1916 and 1918 tell the war story that made the Wemyss brothers "old men at twenty-one and twenty-four" (31); his text is *The 60th C.F.A. Battery Book* with its valedictory words in honour of violent death move Laurence to rage. This silent witness is an encoder that opens the text to a denunciation of the evil language of warmongers, "torturers and exploiters and purveyors of brutality and racism" on behalf of the oppressed and "mother's everywhere" (32). As in "Open Letter To The Mother Of Joe Bass". Laurence's hatred of violence is interwoven with her focus on the maternal, "the conquest of the whole world would not be worth the life of my son" (32). This anticipates the way in which 'matriarchal' would come to be used by contemporary ecofeminists, no longer meaning an exclusive 'rule by women' but rather a kind of power inimical to the patriarchal.

Time buckles inward to form a pocket of invagination at the end of chapter 11. A young mother, dear to Laurence, died in 1981 and this passing allows her to experience

a pain she "thought buried too deeply ever to be touched again" (41). Her own motherhood had redeemed the mourning she had mistaken for self pity; "I used to think I was the unfortunate one, losing my mother when I was four. . . . Now I grieve for her, for Verna, for her having to leave" (41). The repetition of the preposition with pronoun, proper noun, pronoun has the cadence of liturgy or chanting, and the underlying orality heightens the sense of revelation. Like Rachel at the close of A Jest Of God, Laurence has become the mother, not only to her biological children but to her own parent; "Sometimes I think of her as my long-lost child" (7). There is immanence in the way time and space are encapsulated in a moment, contained in the self. The love, strength, courage and artistic talent of Verna and Margaret flow both ways like the reciprocal movement of a partnered dance. The incantatory rhythms invade the prose narrative once again in Laurence's final tribute to Verna Wemyss;

I mourn that young mother of mine still, and always will. Yet she passed on marvels to me. Humour. Music, although my music has been made with words. She danced on the earth, in her way, in the time that was given to her. Danced laughter, danced youth, danced love, danced hope in a child. She passed her dance on to me. (42)

Laurence begins her third chapter "111 Marg" with a contradiction in which imaginative reality is more 'true' than fact; maternal logic uncrowns empirical knowledge. "I don't remember a time when I didn't call her Mum. . . . But of course for the first four or five years of my life, she was my aunt Marg" (45). In a cruel universe, there are only biological categories: mothers and aunts. The death of a mother creates an eternally motherless child. Laurence's universe is a compassionate site of interconnectedness, where hierarchical absolutes dissolve; an aunt becomes Mum and a motherless girl is made a whole daughter again. This phenomenon, like the myth of

Demeter and Persephone, validates women's power to triumph through selfless love and discredits the images of women offered or allowed in society and literature. The usual model of the 'wicked stepmother', monstrous mother-in-law or the daughter doomed to life long quest for a mother figure is made joyfully obsolete by Laurence's account of not one, but three, empowering mothers. "Frankly, given all the deaths in my family, I think it is a miracle I'm as steady as I am" (49). Laurence is quick to assign the miraculous, not to a distant transcendental Father, but to her mum/aunt: "The miracle, of course, was a gift given to me by my stepmother, by Marg, by Mum" (49). Gifts and miracles are at last the province of the female, and Laurence's recognition forecasts the work of ecofeminists in the decades since her death.

A studio photograph of the "Simpson Girls" captures the fashions of femininity at the turn of the century in Neepawa; the clothing is artificially decorative, stiff and confining. The stifling sameness of their clothing is a sign; women should fit a common mould, skin of neck and wrist must be hidden and the actual shape of the female body should be artificially augmented and distorted. The fashion restrictions were replicated in education; the Simpson Girls were limited to study for feminine careers; nursing or teaching. The sections that describe Marg Simpson's career as a teacher reprise the sense of loss articulated in FOREWORDS when Laurence laments the hard choices forced upon women.

The 'might have been' refrain resurfaces in "111 MARG ": "in a later era she would have gone" . . . "She might have encouraged a whole generation of women academics" . . . "she might also have struggled for the teaching of more books by women writers and by Canadians" (46). (my emphasis) The modality of ambivalent

verbals has a paradoxical effect; they suggest, not the failure of the subject, but Marg's massive accomplishment that foregrounds profound regret for her lack of scope. Photographs and a school inspector's report are artifacts from the time before Marg became Mum, and Laurence speculates over them like a shaman seeking meaning. Laurence can only repeat that she 'wished she had asked', and forms questions that will never be answered. The Presbyterian community saw privacy as the privilege earned through diligence and propriety, and the taboo against asking intimate questions was not a silence imposed on women alone. However this regret tells of the special need Laurence had for answers about her female parent; she does not scan snapshots of Robert Wemyss with intensity, nor is she moved to speculate about his dreams and desires. The silence that surrounds the personal lives of even the closest family members was especially debilitating to women who could find few images of themselves in literature, politics, history or the arts. Their models were personal, but the taboo on intimate sharing made the transmission of women's knowledge a process that involved intuition, non verbal communication. Although Marg Wemyss did not articulate her feelings, her actions proved that the "jokes about wicked stepmothers" (50) were cruel cultural constructions. Laurence probes the gap between such stereotypes and her Mum's example: "Or is it perhaps to say that only a birth mother can be brought under society's control because a stepmother may be a more independent woman?" (50) The reaction of the town worthies to the marriage of a woman to her deceased sister's husband gave Laurence her first insight into the ironies implicit in patriarchal religion; denied the traditional white dress of a virgin, Marg Simpson had to run off to Brandon for a 'civil' ceremony. "I can only guess how she felt" (49). The need for continual

conjecture betrays the absence of affirmative words in a woman's lexicon and validates the need for revisioning as a life-saving strategy.

Retelling Marg's story allows Laurence to take her own selfstory forward to 1957, when she was living in Vancouver with her husband and two small children. The blending of life stories facilitates a partnership in narrative that pauses to allow a singular female or a chorus to appear in parataxis with the dominant narrative. Marg Wemyss' story proceeds, but allows increasingly more detailed memories of Margaret to share the spotlight. As age brings more complete self-awareness to the individual, so teenaged Margaret logically remembers more, and Laurence can now supplement the telling with greater intellectual depth and insight. Marg's financial and emotional struggles to keep her small family afloat are recognized, retrospectively, and they provide the springboard for memories that locate a juvenile Margaret Laurence in the world of proms and promises. Entering her adolescence, the discourse of small town femininity is a shock and Margaret's ambivalent reaction to adolescence verifies the unique example of Marg Wemyss, who did not consider intelligence a feminine disability and suggests that, even then, Laurence resisted any partial definition of self.

The death of Robert Wemyss elicits a strikingly different response from the powerful revisioning of the connection between Laurence and her birthmother. She honours his skill, affirms her love for him, but the mystical subjective bond does not enter her description. What is not stated is none the less present. The strength and love of Marg Wemyss sustains her stepdaughter and helps her bear this second parental loss. Margaret's coming of age story and her frequent digressions on sexism, racism, war and writing seem natural outgrowths of the kernel narrative of her Mum's stable and caring

life; the style of telling imitates the subject. What remained constant, through changes of residence and fortune, was Marg Wemyss, and in a very real sense her grounding permitted Margaret's story to unfold as it did. Marg's strength and the independence of her sisters is directly located in their own mother, Jane Bailey Simpson; the dance as a concrete symbol of female joy and creativity is elevated to include the mystical power of matriarchal communication of strengths and gifts through the generations. Margaret can grow and achieve because of Marg whose equilibrium is grounded in her mother's example of self sacrifice, gentleness and love. The connection between these women implies a backward spiral to all the nameless anonymous women who preceded them in the dance that redeems time.

Grandmother Simpson might well serve as a model for the Victorian 'angel in the house', and Marg, as widow with children an early version of the single-parent female of our time. The towering patriarch, Grandfather Simpson, shrinks when his wife dies, making explicit the feminist notion that such women were mirrors in which their men were reflected to an exaggerated size. Marg heroically takes her mother's place, running the Simpson household, but she does not assume the mirror role. Even as a young adult, Laurence absorbs the lesson, an atypical one in this small prairie town where rigid gender roles dictated the possibilities for women. The unique circumstances of Laurence's early life, her two mothers, and first hand domestic immersion in two different generational sites was, in a curious way, liberating. The majority of female writers of Laurence's generation speak of the long and difficult process involved in replacing the old family romance story with a new and more authentic one. Laurence,

denied the conventional story, is raised with not one model but several: a grandmother, birth mother, stepmother, and a supplement of career oriented aunts.

Adrienne Rich examines the necessity of coming to terms with the woman who was the first source of love and language in Of Woman Born and Carol Christ suggests that for writers of Laurence's generation, this process usually involves abjection, awakening, insight and a new naming. (Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest) Carolyn Heilbrun in Writing A Woman's Life claims that some extraordinary event, some breach must occur that allows the conventional marriage plot to become the quest plot and that a mother's only worthwhile gift to her daughter, is the example of her own life. Laurence's early life had been marked by extraordinary events that dislocated the traditional family plot, but provided a powerful example of female autonomy in the person of Marg Wemyss.

From the point in the narrative weave where Laurence leaves home for United College, Marg's story sustains a subtle underlay, although she recedes from the narrative action. Laurence escaped the small prairie town and was caught up in the fervour of social and religious debate that characterized the liberal arts campus in the last days of the war. Laurence graduated with the highest marks for English and a poetry prize, and although she still thought of writing as her vocation, it is balanced in this section with the excitement of social and intellectual revelations. She recalls sorority teas, dormitory life, feminine fashions, and the 'cattle market' of dances with fond humour, free of irony. She confesses that she signed her first published poem-- "Steven Lancaster" but there is no trace of feminist rebuke; in retrospect Laurence seems to find the disguise amusing. Wartime may have provided a transitional milieu that allowed

female students a brief period of equality in which they could take part in the great debates surrounding world events. Perhaps, Laurence chose to leave her recollections free of feminist observations in an attempt to be true to her character, the young Margaret, for whom terms like 'liberation' and 'oppression' meant freedom for the Russian people or nations occupied by the Germans.

The soft conversational style that seems so appropriate to her memories of United College is pierced at intervals with breathless rage at the futility of war. This abrupt change of tone and voice not only disturbs the lulling recollection of golden youth, but it shatters any notion that an intelligent person **could** enjoy a golden youth in the chaotic timeframe of Dieppe, the holocaust and Hiroshima. Although she uses the present tense, the now of her writing, there can be no question that her mature amazement at humanity's potential for evil echoes a horror at catastrophic events that shrapnelled a carefree adolescent consciousness.

None of us could conceive of the buildup of nuclear arms that has been taking place for so many years, at such dreadful hazard to life on earth. Yet we did know, somehow, that the world would never be the same again. (100)

The radical loss of innocence that alienated an entire generation has been expressed by others, historians, male writers with greater logic and control of their narratives, but rarely with the accuracy of Laurence's brief passage with its unorthodox fusion of future, progressive and present verbs and overlapping chronology. The psychic terror that the news from Hiroshima must have inspired in thoughtful young people was a dark knowledge that could become numbing nihilism or spark a lifelong commitment to peace. Laurence disturbs the gentle flow of her own narrative with harsh invective that dislocates a one-dimensional evocation of bright college days in a revolutionary gesture

that sacrifices the consistency of form and voice for a larger coherence. Like the apocalyptic mind movies that erupt through the everyday of Stacey Cameron's life in The Fire Dwellers, these dramatic interruptions ring true. Nuclear destruction is not only real, but surreal and awareness of its potential changed the logical parameters of space and time; what we gleefully call the postmodern was enabled by 20th Century physicists who allowed the random to become normative. Laurence realized the gentle narrative flow ended on August 6, 1945 and has never let her readers forget it.

Laurence's liberation from the claustrophobia of a small prairie town and coming of age in wartime Winnipeg within the vital culture of New Left socialist intellectuals reads like a quest plot worthy of any young male writer in the late 40's. However, after her graduation the script reverts to the most conventional of erotic scenarios; her first meeting with Jack Laurence is recounted with honesty:

This may sound silly, but one day I came into the house and on the stairs stood a young man. I thought his face not only was handsome but also had qualities of understanding. I said to myself, 'That's the man I'd like to marry.' (102)

It is a remarkably validating act that Laurence, an avowed feminist and a writer whose strong female characters struck responsive chords in thousands of women, would admit to 'love at first sight'. She makes no excuses for the experience, nor disables it with anterior explanations or examples of Jack's inadequacy. Laurence continues the story of a conventional wedding and her willingness to follow Jack to the 'ends of the earth' to bear his children with a joy that lasts for fifteen years of married life. She recounts, fondly, her wedding gifts from Mum, but does engage in some retrospective admonition of a society whose matrons and medical patrons would conspire to condemn a young woman to sexual ignorance or worse, unplanned pregnancy.

The remainder of this chapter returns the focus to Marg Wemyss through accounts of four visits shared before her death. Laurence summarizes the early years of her marriage "I was out there dancing on the earth" (108) and from other autobiographical writing we know her time in Africa was an adventure that enriched her life. Nevertheless, it was a quest subplot within the central narrative of Jack Laurence's life. The visits with her aunt correspond mostly with the births of Laurence's two children and finally with the death vigil in Victoria; the cardinal points of the generative cycle. Even during the most hectic visits, mother and daughter, found time to discuss Laurence's writing and just before her death, Marg read the manuscript of This Side Jordan. Marg's last gift, the valiant effort to concentrate and communicate about her daughter's novel, prefigures the brave completion of this memoir in which her heroism is immortalized. This Side Jordan was dedicated to Marg Wemyss and her spirit is embedded in Laurence's final work, Dance On The Earth.

Chapter " IV ELSIE" is a singular passage. A brief seven pages, it forms the perfect structural bridge, honours a foremother and explodes the cultural myths that obscure the real bonds between women. Like the introductory statement in chapter "III MARG", Laurence begins with subversive logic "My mother-in-law was one of my mothers" (125) and ends with a radical transformation of syntax that validates such an irrational statement under a new code of meaning: "Mother, my mother-in-law, my mother in heart, beyond any law, my friend" (131). The patriarchal system that underwrites social connections and legislates what relationships are available to women has been maintained by writers, male and female, who perpetrate the entrenched stereotypes. With the exception of the story of Naomi and Ruth, our culture is bereft of examples

that would reflect a relationship that was no doubt common from the beginning of time. Laurence supplies the lack with a mother/mother-in-law story that breaks the silence. That Laurence's husband was Elsie's son, is incidental, and is dealt with in three lines of text; their maternal relationship continues to grow from the ruins of the marriage. The symbol of the dance with its interchange of energies or gifts takes on another dimension in this chapter as it is freed from the conventional loyalties of blood, debunking the Oedipal plot that had dominated our psychology and literature. In Elsie, Laurence found a kindred spirit who had integrated the roles of woman and mother, writer and wife at a time when this seemed impossible for any but the wealthy and childless like Virginia Woolf or Gertrude Stein. Elsie gave Laurence her understanding, her love and most important, her true story:

She told me in a letter that at the end of the First World War, when Jack was two and her husband had just returned from the war, she seriously considered taking her young child and leaving her husband so she could concentrate on her writing. (129)

Laurence is freed from the ambiguity and speculation that haunted her celebrations of the lives of her birth and stepmother, enabling a new type of story in which her symbols take on a powerful spirituality.

Chapter V is Margaret's own story, but it is woven through with the presence of her mothers and spiritual sisters. It begins with the birth stories of her children, an anachronic loop that circles back to a time before the end of Chapter III; it mimics stylistically the defeat of closure the dance image projects. Birth stories are sacred to the child and allow people to participate in the deep history of their race, their archetypal past. "Women don't really *converse* on this subject, . . . It isn't the stuff of idle chatter. It is the core of our lives" (135).

In texts written by men, it is often irritating to encounter that risky pronoun "our". Like "man", it frequently proves to mean exclusion of the female. In this case, with the stories of Jocelyn's and David's births and the inclusion of Jack's responses, the choice of "our" over "their" is a lesson on how a writer can use the language to hand, responsibly. There is a sharp contrast between the birth of Jocelyn in England in 1952 and the birth of David in Ghana three years later. Laurence is anesthetized for a difficult forceps delivery to bring her daughter into the world, while a Ghanian midwife enabled Laurence to see her son at the moment of his birth. This experience offered the mother a genesis moment; "I felt as though I were looking over God's shoulder at the moment of the creation of life" (149). Two radically different medical experiences led to the same deep knowledge that everything is embedded in a web of connectedness from which "by an extension of the imagination, all children are mine" (141). The birth moments allow an access to the sacred that is not separate but an integral part of the body, just as the dance image invokes the transcendental through a linking of hands. Laurence's birth experiences, still moments at the nexus of two worlds, the unborn and living, are remarkably similar to the Yoruba fourth stage of artistic trance. They allow glimpses of a spiritual continuum that is immanent and indwelling, the type of awareness that inspires many ecofeminists.

The mother-miracle of Jocelyn's birth is followed by a frantic wife-question about how long it will be before she can sleep with her husband. A month after David's birth, Laurence, mother, wife and novelist, had worked out a strategy for writing by allowing servants to take care of the domestic chores; a trade-off in which she accepts the necessity of becoming the dreaded 'memsahib' when her writing is at stake. The

married mother is a sexual being, a nurturer, a help mate, but if she is also an intellectual with a vocation that will not be denied, the conflicted nature of these roles must trouble the standard marriage script. Returning to Canada in 1957, Laurence struggled to integrate the demanding roles: "There were times when I didn't succeed and felt like I was attempting an impossible juggling act" (157). The frustration of being mother, lover, housekeeper, cook, and writer is described as an impossible performance but there is no indication that Laurence feels 'self-negation' or 'self-hatred'. She does not even feel particularly inadequate as a juggler; only that the act, the stage direction that forces women to juggle at all, seemed impossibly wrong and unfair. By 1962 the marriage was over and she had decided to take her children and go to England rather than to follow Jack to his next assignment in Pakistan.

Volumes have been written by women who find their own stories through the painful process Carol Christ neatly outlines in Diving Deep and Surfacing: experiences of nothingness, awakening, insight, new naming and much of what they write concerns coming to terms with others: fathers, husbands, children, mothers, lovers. (13) Laurence devotes little space to the reasons for her separation from Jack and apparently some critics found fault with this as concealment. "I suppose I should say something about Jack and myself" begins Laurence, anticipating the criticism; she offers eleven lines of obligatory explanation about his negative response to The Stone Angel and ends abruptly with the words that should be immortalized in every feminist-life writing class on earth, "Strange reason for breaking up a marriage: a novel. I had to go with the old lady. I really did, but at the same time I felt terrible about hurting him" (158). The pain that the impossible binary writer/wife forced on Laurence is described metaphorically, calling

Hagar in as believable scapegoat, sparing herself and the reader the deep analysis that had been successfully completed long before. The reader may sense concealment or learn a new way to tell authentic stories, but as is often true in the best of fiction, our response to Laurence's subtle explanation, tells us more about ourselves than it does about the author.

From her three mothers and specific experiences with other families such as the Wisemans, Laurence had been blessed with freedom from the deep anxiety and ambivalence about parents and parenting that seems to plague a number of feminist writers. Empowered by "the strengths that had probably been given to me by all my mothers" (158), Laurence embarked on a new life, in a new country, with her confidence challenged, but intact. Her account of the harrowing first year includes her comment on the suicide of Sylvia Plath, a close neighbour in Hampstead. "No thanks to me, and no blame to Sylvia Plath. I had been given, as a child, as a teenager, so much strength by my mothers" (162). Plath's mother, in the introduction to Sylvia Plath's Letters Home, describes her experience of matriarchal fluidity with a critical difference: "Between Sylvia and me there existed--as between my own mother and me--a sort of psychic osmosis which, at times, was very wonderful and comforting; at other times an unwelcome invasion of privacy" (33).

Moving to Elmcot, another ancestral female lent a comforting presence to Laurence. The portrait of Lady Maclean became "in a sense the spirit of the house" (169), and Laurence who never subordinated intuitive to rational knowledge, welcomed the strength that seemed to come from the presiding house spirit. The cheerful anarchy of Elmcot described in "Put Out One Or Two More Flags" in Heart of a Stranger is recreated in

the memoir, complete with cats, moles, roses, children, Canadian visitors and a demanding writing schedule; in the Elmcot years Laurence revised or wrote nine of her sixteen books. In the memoir version of her Elmcot days, Laurence does not conceal the dark side of single motherhood: her domestic and financial worries and the loneliness of living without a man. To the "unambiguous choices" (136) faced by writing women that she has already outlined, Laurence adds:

Still, male writers seem to have a kind of glamour attached to them while the reverse is usually true of female writers. Far from having an aura of glamour, we are positively threatening. And if we happen to have a couple of children, we simply become invisible as women. (171)

This sexual invisibility was often confounded by a reverse type of critical prejudice that insisted on reading all her novels as autobiography. This was a double bind; she was either the prototype for her characters like Morag, Stacey and Rachel, all of whom enjoyed passionate affairs, or she was sexually invisible. Reification by sentimental critics or vilification by censors compounds the same error; an error that Laurence's dialogic writing dispels.

The "MARGARET" chapter that began with the birth stories of her children seems to divide naturally into a second story when Laurence returns permanently to Canada to settle in Lakefield in 1973. Motherhood is always a constant but with her physical separation from her grown children, Laurence's maternal love and caring becomes less specific and evolves into a larger spirituality, that like ecofeminism, demanded advocacy with a global focus. The fortuitous way in which her various residences 'found' her, the Lakefield home's history as a funeral parlour, the date chosen to move in, the divining launch for her last novel; the way in which things seemed to fall into some kind of numinous order in Laurence's life is ascribed to a kind of magic. The special knowledge

or belief, beyond the empirical, that was historically denigrated as feminine intuition has come to be recognized as part of a spiritual nature that does not seek miracles and transcendental sky gods that are distant from the world we inhabit. A sense of immanence informs this magic; a wholeness Laurence describes in "The Black Celt Speaks of Freedom"; "I don't think, personally, that we do live in a universe which is as empty as we might think" (112).

Recent ecofeminists, like the shaman Starhawk, describe the consciousness of the immanent in "Consciousness, Politics and Magic" as "the awareness of the world and everything in it as alive, dynamic, interdependent, and interacting, infused with moving energies: a living being, a weaving dance" (177). Starhawk, who heads one of the largest covens in California, writing in 1981 and Laurence writing her memoir at the mystical shack at Lakefield in 1984, shared a revelation. Laurence had been hailed by Margaret Atwood, a decade earlier as "an exotic Eskimo witch" as a tribute to her perception and honesty. Fortunately, the fundamentalists of Peterborough County lacked Atwood's insight and in the time honoured manner of frenzied patriarchs since Malleus Maleficarum, began a witch hunt to remove The Diviners from the school curriculum and brand Laurence as a pornographer. "We know that Margaret Laurence's aim in life is to destroy the home and the family" (216). Laurence, though "extraordinarily damaged" (214) by this fight, continued to write under the banner of hope grounded in an emerging spirituality that defied hierarchical divisions.

During the 'controversy', Laurence wrote The Christmas Birthday Story, a nativity story that would be acceptable to Jews, enlightened Christians and ecofeminists: "Joseph and Mary were happy because soon they were going to have a baby. They didn't mind

at all whether it turned out to be a boy or a girl. Either kind would be fine with them" (221). This child of whatever kind, might well have been a version of the uncorrupted apocryphal Jesus who exhorts his disciples to dance. Laurence concludes her story with a warning to world leaders who "either wittingly or inadvertently, {may} succeed in destroying all life on earth, not only humankind, but all creatures who share the planet with us" (221). Her final words share the knowledge that her "dance of life has not much longer to last. It will continue in my children, and perhaps, in my books. . . . May the dance go on" (222). Like the women, who followed in the '80's and '90's to recover a mother-centred spirituality in Goddess and Gaia traditions with their reclaimed rituals of water, magnetic places, and the dance; Laurence, beside her inspirational Otonabee, created her lifestory that will continue like the beloved river to 'flow both ways'.

The miscellany of prose, poetry, public address and letter that comprise the **AFTERWORDS** section is a connected text that focuses on issues raised in the **FOREWORDS** life-writing. The dance symbol, developed throughout the memoir, gains liturgical energy in the poems. Passion, associated with women's speech and located in the body inform the prose of **AFTERWORDS** and these pieces record the growth of Laurence's ecofeminist philosophy in the last decade of her life. Although this section belongs with the memoir, it deserves a critical evaluation of its own. Chapter VI will examine this work.

CHAPTER 6

AFTERWORDS TO DANCE ON THE EARTH

'Afterwords' are words that exist beyond the body of the text usually serving a critical or biographical purpose; but the "AFTERWORDS" to Dance On The Earth are more like a textual montage that add depth to the memoir. These selected words were written over a decade between 1976-1986; located in poems, a letter, song, prose, and public address, they are meant to be read after the memoir's words, in a reading space consecrated by the life-writing. Different shapes and figures of words exist side by side; genres mingle like separate bodies, but the dance motif controls textual space, giving form to all of the writing. Spiritual, social, artistic, ecological and political concerns move together in individual pieces and link as themes through the whole and any one selection or all would be at home in the 'books of hope' that ecofeminists have created in a proliferation of texts since the death of Margaret Laurence. Early veneration of Laurence as the Mother of the Manawaka Cycle resulted in a premature sense of loss. Many readers and critics, like disappointed children, wanted that elusive 'next' novel, not children's books, activism, or ecofeminist healing, and refused to see that motherhood involves more than simply giving on demand. In Dance On The Earth we get what we desperately need and not simply what might entertain us or enlarge our literary canon. "AFTERWORDS" can be seen as the penumbra of the memoir, dispelling shadows that have prevented critics from appreciating her works of non-fiction.

"Old Women's Song" presents itself as a poem but it reconnects us to the beginning of all poetry in music and ritual. The rhythm is the breath and heart beat; the enjambed

lines of the chorus verses with their repetition of "I see old women dancing" moves words forward from one section to the next, like a dancer's glide. Sophia Drinker, ecofeminist musicologist, writes in "The Origins of Music: Women's Goddess Worship": "These Great-Goddess-Mothers were generally represented as giving speech, music, and the art of gesture to humanity, and as being themselves dancers and musicians" (41). The dance of life questions unnecessary death--from the deep past of prophetesses to the children "not yet born"--and through its spacio-temporal solidarity the image contradicts and reclaims the patriarchal Danse Macabre. (225-228)

In The Politics of Ecofeminism, Charlene Spretnak affirms the importance of women's ritual: "Consciousness can be fed from irrational as well as rational sources, and women's ritual has emerged as a channel for that nourishment" (162). The Christmas-Hanukkah leave taking ritual for Chaika Wiseman that Laurence describes in her letter from January 1980 acts as a spiritual channel for its participants. "At her instructions, near death,...we draped the tablecloths, plus Audrey's pillowcase . . . my book The Olden Day Coat . . . We then, with enormous love, grouped around her bed" (240). The tablecloths, like Grandma Simpson's quilts, were Chaika's own domestic art, embroidered with prairie sheaves of wheat; the handworked pillowcase featured the Tree of Life. After Chaika's death, a letter Laurence wrote to her in 1950, is returned. The letter is a gift, offering Laurence a glimpse of her younger self, from the woman who loved her enough to keep it for 30 years. In the Post Script to the present letter, describing these events, Laurence asks for its return so she might pass it on, in turn. By these custodial and transmissive literary acts, the procession of women's knowledge is assured; in this way, the dance continues.

Separating the introductory poem and the account of the life-leaving ritual is the 1985 article "A Constant Hope: Women in the Now and Future High Tech Age". The title is a deconstruction of the motto on the Scots plaid pin that Morag reads in The Diviners, "My Hope is Constant in Thee" (432). The static patriarchal "constant" of an externalized male God in heaven, far removed from the web of life, is subverted by the generative adjective that transforms the abstract "hope" to a progressive, dynamic force centred in women. Laurence condemns the mostly male, medical establishment that estranges women and the T.V. and video game marketers that conspire in a "softening-up process of the young" (232) preparing, predominantly male children to take violence for granted. Laurence offers a corrective to the facile logic of male writers who feel women are ill at ease in such electronic milieu as the Swift Current E-Mail project: "I would guess that a more relevant reason for women writers' almost complete absence is *lack of time*" (235). With a dry irony that is supposed to be absent in women's writing, she articulates what every woman professional has always known: "every writer needs a good wife; . . . if you are a female heterosexual writer it's not so easy to find an understanding and unpaid housekeeper" (236). As a wisewoman who has seen cultural transitions over six decades, she reminds us that women "have always operated machinery of all kinds, when it was to the advantage of society for them to do so" (237).

If the dance of future women is to be animated by freedom, decisions about the way in which technology will be used must be made today. Contemporary women have a responsibility to prevent the reification of machines. The social denigration of women past childbearing age to hags, crones, and witches has been deconstructed by

ecofeminists who have restored to such terms their archaic sense as honorary titles that value experiential knowledge and wisdom accumulated through time. There is a powerful authority in Laurence's cautionary words; her wisdom represented a 60 year engagement with a changing world, one that has been altered radically by an unprecedented wave of technological innovation. Recycled experience, presented in compelling prose by a gifted artist who commands public space, reclaims the vital storytelling function of the old woman of the tribe.

By the 80's, Laurence had been en/titled to call herself an Honourary Fellow, a Doctor of Literature, a Companion of the Order of Canada, and the first woman to have offices at Massey Hall, an impressive list of patriarchal signifiers, but she chooses to call herself and Adele Wisemen "the elders / wisewomen" (247). Her Convocation Address at York University is delivered in this spirit. Laurence begins in the time honoured way of elders, with an evocation of what things were like in her youth and weaves a warning for the present and a benediction of hope for the future. Wisewomen are traditionally present at times of passage; childbirth, death, initiation and the convocation ceremony is a modern coming of age ritual, complete with costumes, gifts, tribal music and dance. In solemn language, Laurence reminds the celebrants that the present is "deeply troubled" (283) but shares her divination of the deep causes of the cultural sickness: our leaders' failure of imagination, "increasing demeanment of language" and spiritual pride or personal withdrawal "forgetting that we are an integral part of all humanity everywhere" (281). Laurence urges a program of ecological and social responsibility incumbent on each individual, the legacy of "all the men and women who have throughout the centuries stood up and struggled for those human values in

which they believed" (282). This story offered at a rite of passage is the oral accompaniment to the dance, the passing on of hope and courage to the next generation.

In the "Foreword to *Canada and the Nuclear Arms Race*" (1983) Laurence becomes the "prophetess/praying life may last" of the "Old Women's Song" (227). She begins with the image of life as a fluid process. The present contains past and announces the future: "Our lives and the lives of all generations yet unborn" (287). Birth stories, the core of our lives, should be the spiritual motivation for a social activism that will stop the madness of the nuclear arms race. The bizarre language of our political leaders-- "overkill", "deterrent", "limited or winnable" (288) -- is interrogated as obscenity and Laurence names the absence at the spiritual core of patriarchal systems: "Have these men absolutely no feelings or simply no imagination?" (280) The politicians are named and their policies questioned; Laurence, as the respected elder, accepts the prerogative of casting curses, assigning blame. Her own community, Canada, is charged with collusion and admonished to declare for world peace. Laurence speaks for generations of children and demands a collective responsibility for the future of humanity and the Earth that can only be rooted in something like a maternal caring.

Caretaking of humanity and Earth, is spiritual stewardship and inspires the ecumenical "PRAYER FOR PASSOVER AND EASTER" that integrates the Star of David and the Cross to a new graphic symbol announcing Peace/Shalom. This unity defeats the dangerous dualisms that have infected the Jewish and Christian religious traditions conspiring to separate earthly politics from transcendental spirituality by dangerous philosophical hierarchies: spirit/body, God/man, culture/nature, man/woman, domination/oppression. The ritual repetition of "May we/ . . . May our" (263), the

internal rhymes and alliteratives suggest the incantatory or processional. This is a solemn dance around a fresh symbol of a faith, a pavan inspired by the discovery that mutuality is immanent in the world. The elder must pass on her wisdom as it was passed on to her by her foremothers. Laurence pleads: "may we learn / Not to hurt" (263) and her words are offered in the belief that the violent history of our human race can be redeemed by personal desire and the communication of wisdom and strength across generations. The awful question posed in "An Open Letter To The Mother Of Joe Bass", (1974) whether one, in all conscience, can go on writing in this terrifying world, is answered by this text.

The peace prayer that would be a welcome addition to any church or temple service is followed by "The Greater Evil" that negotiates the complexities of the censorship issue. The juxtaposition of these two pieces is a reminder that the author of the prayer was "scorched mentally and emotionally" (265) by the burning times between 1976 and 1986, in which Rev. Buick and his Peterborough posse attacked Laurence as an agent of evil and The Diviners as an obscene and blasphemous novel. Laurence shares some of the more absurd accusations and their pathetic self-righteousness makes the 'controversy' almost carnivalesque. However, the prose of this essay is stiff, and the logic of her argument suffers from repetitions and honest ambivalence. Perhaps the topic is inimical to logic, and to write from conscience, intuition, and sincere emotion is the only sane response to the threat to liberty implicit in censorship. But Laurence had been 'burned', and she chooses a more pompous authoritarian style to prevent further misrepresentation. The profound spirituality that empowers all the other pieces in AFTERWORDS had been maligned, and Laurence sheds the intimate relational tone

for the restraint of a more distant register to disguise and control a deep hurt and anger. Adrienne Rich in "Diving Into the Wreck" describes a similar register of "dogged tentativeness" in Woolf's A Room Of One's Own :

It is the tone of a woman almost in touch with her anger, who is determined not to appear angry, who is *willing* herself to be calm, detached and even charming in a roomful of men where things have been said which are attacks on her very integrity." (92)

Laurence's distinction between the erotic and pornographic and her exposure of the dangerous linguistic incompetence of the Criminal Code is astute and rigorous. On the last page of this essay, Laurence drops the attempt to reason in the lofty voice of the court, phases out the academic references to Milton's Aeropagitica and resumes the vastly more effective tone that appeals to our heart as well as our head. It is as if, she has written herself beyond the personal pain and back to hope.

This is as close as I can get to formulating my own beliefs. It is an incomplete and in many ways a contradictory formulation, and I am well aware of that. Perhaps this isn't such a bad thing. I don't think we can or should get to a point where we feel we know, probably in a simplistic way, what all the answers are or that we ourselves hold them and no one else does. (273)

"For My Son/ On His Twenty-First Birthday" and "For My Daughter/ On Her Twenty-Sixth Birthday" are companion pieces, gifts for a rite of passage. The Daughter poem marks a magical date, "this once/ I'm twice your age"; in a chronological mirroring, similar to the story of Chaika Wisemen's age-relationship to Margaret and Adele. The three symbolic ages of woman: maid, mother and wise elder are progressions that mark stages of knowledge and attainment of skill in the art of dancing on earth. At 26, Laurence became a mother for the first time and on her daughter's 26th birthday, she can revision that joyful life change. The Son poem honours the traditional legal age of manhood in our society but augments this somewhat arbitrary

commemoration with women's wisdom, reflecting the organic source of knowledge: eternal cycles: "from trees and the river/ and children/ who become/ man woman/ mother father/ ancestor". The maternal transference includes the necessary participation in generational rhythms by the giving and receiving of "mysteries strengths". The poem for her daughter takes for granted that her daughter possesses the knowledge of cycle and generation, but refines the nature of the bond: "connected related / but not bound / by blood by love". The troubled nature of the mother-daughter dyad that disturbs some feminist critics evaporates in the triumph of a relationship that celebrates "speaking out some common language"; the kind of speech that made possible the collaborative experiment that became Dance On The Earth. Both poems are tender and stately with individual emphasis; for her female child she wishes warmth, wisdom, and grace, for her son-- "grace sureness honour / and the gift of acceptance / of joy". The ability to rejoice was the hard won victory that Hagar, raised in patriarchal pride, found so difficult to realize. To this she adds the assurance that although his blood people may have to leave him, her son will never be alone, addressing the archetypal loneliness to which biology has doomed the male who will never experience the potential or reality of having another embedded within them. Both poems / prayers communicate hope and courage to be passed on through the family (250-254).

"FOR A SANSEI WOMAN/ BORN ON THE FIFTH DAY OF/ THE FIFTH MONTH" is a title that embodies the essence of Japanese naming for auspicious dates. Laurence transliterates, not only the idiom and syntax of the Japanese language, but also the spirit of the Buddhist world view. It is rarely possible to give a translation that

will fulfil the spiritual, emotional, intellectual, linguistic, and artistic intention of the original, but Laurence's poem is courageous and successful.

As in "A POEM FOR MY DAUGHTER", Laurence returns to the cycles of nature and organic imagery in the faith that this woman, "Sister, Spring-born," will understand not only her meaning but will accept the words that she offers by a shamanic voicing of prayers and assurances that the mother would have given, had she lived. In this poem Laurence speaks through the mask of her friend's mother. With a voice that is uncanny; that is not the register of Laurence the novelist, the person, the activist-- comes the words: 'I bring you word of your mother/ Gone but never gone". Like Dan, draped in his dead mother's shawl in The Stone Angel, the poet gives comfort, hope and courage. Transubstantiation, the patriarchal miracle, is mimed with a feminist twist. This poem demands no patriarchal leap of faith, no eucharistic acceptance or monologic commemoration of mystic event; rather, it actualizes the immeasurable gift of revision, reenactment of a mother's voice to a daughter who was denied the hearing. The mother had been incarcerated by the wartime hysteria that had named West Coast Japanese Canadian citizens as enemy and 'other'. In the non-linear time configuration of ecofeminist spirituality, Laurence can easily change places in the dance with Mary's mother and the words she utters have an authentic value missing from the rote of religious formulations. They are not the words of Jocelyn Laurence's mother, they are similar in spirit but the diction and syntax are those of a Nisei woman, first generation but raised in the language of the Issei, born in Japan: "Gardens abandoned and left to die / Trees strong-seeming, need respect and care." The artist, like the priest in Soyinka's fourth stage, becomes, for a moment, the mouthpiece of some power that can

help to heal the gaps for the community, even one that seems intent on destroying itself internally with racism. The power of language and imagination can restore to 'Mary', her lost birthright (255/256).

Language, shaped to honour an individual, is an ancient tradition. From the Middle English lyric onward, such tributes by gifted artists were prominent in the canon, falling into disfavour only in the last half century. Of the eight poems in *AFTERWORDS*, half are written in honour of the natal day of a beloved person. Like the gift quilts of Laurence's Grandmother Simpson, the quilt lent to her by Alice Williams in her illness, the Tree of Life pillowcase, David Laurence's photos, Jocelyn's editing, and her mother-in-law's inspirational letters, Laurence creates from her particular talent with words, a gift for her "sister friend" Adele Wiseman's 50th Birthday. This poem begins with the image of "the river flowing / both ways" a recycling of shared experience that qualifies them as "elders / wisewomen" by their half century mark. The laughter, the endless words on paper, in person, on the telephone between two writer-mothers are remembered as more than communication; words that resolved, helped things happen "our talk of them being / a kind of prayer itself." The memoir is punctuated with letters to Adele from every period of Laurence's life. The indefinite pronoun "them" is a deictic that points to the parallelism of children and work in the lives of women writers. "Talk of family! / talk of family " recreates the idiom of Yiddish humour and the intimate "Baba" and "Zeyda" brings the warmth of remembered orality to the poem. The extra literary "*do you read me? you read me?*" recalls the wartime static in which their friendship was born as it makes explicit the image of the typewriter as radio transmitter, the private shaping and sculpting of language to enter the public world where women's

voices were still tentative and misunderstood. The 'common language' Laurence claimed for herself and Jocelyn in the daughter poem, is extended to embrace the work of Wiseman, so close to her own; ". . . at heart so common" (247).

Adrienne Rich's "Dream of a Common Language" is a reality for Laurence voicing the Nisei mother, the Jewish Baba, the young Canadian. The exchange of women's wisdom that Laurence has made central to her memoir is dramatized; Chaika Wiseman's all purpose aphorism bears the enigmatic wisdom of old world folk knowledge "*It is from nature.*" These spiritual words reconcile the existence of seemingly antagonistic forces to a holistic natural order of Earth, our home. "the river terrifying and wonderful/ as the voice out of the wind." This notion of home is much larger than a family residence, a nation, or even a place in time; "home encompasses that tribe / in which we now / astonished somewhat / bemused amused / find ourselves the elders / wisewoman". The indefinite article that proceeds 'river' and 'children' affirms an ecofeminist responsibility for all rivers and every child on earth. To poison one river or harm one child, is to damage the tribe. A sign of this accountability is the birthday "landmark", --50 years on earth; just as the watermark of a river signifies its course. The eternal movement of water, Laurence's river symbol, introduces revisioning that links Margaret and Adele to all the women from the dawn of time who have survived to become elders.

Memoir is autobiography, but its generic posture allows a more selective recall that sidesteps the chronological imperative that drives traditional autobiography. A decade later, Laurence might have had the example of more experimental life-writing by women and minorities that would have made the 'memoir' title unnecessary, but she chose this

form as one that allowed her to make elliptical time changes and focus on the stories she wished to foreground. The tone of the memoir is honest, but it is obvious that she made a personal and artistic decision to present a hopeful overview that inevitably left details of her life under erasure. The confessional writing that has been popularized by a growing number of feminist writers might simply not have appealed, or the time left to her writing was simply unequal to the demands of a more complex form. Laurence's treatment of the tragic early deaths, her separation from Jack, and her difficult years as a single parent, is free of sentimentality and self pity.

"For Lorne" is the only truly tragic note; the story of a far cousin is a poetic retelling of "Horses of the Night" from A Bird in the House. This relationship is remembered in fiction and poetry but is absent from the prose memoir. Lorne is the distant cousin, loved from the perspective of childhood; one whose dreams and stories commanded a place in her imaginative world. He is also the archetypal young man, with no financial or social support, thrown into the sterile regime of the wartime army, overseas. Every dream is defeated. His natural inclinations are perverted in the service of some monologic ideal of patriarchal violence, and he is returned to the homeland, a shadow man, to live out a monochromatic life between the "greyplace" and failed attempts to reintegrate with a society in which he was always marginal. Laurence's poetic revision appropriates an archaic device of oral composition; compounds create an epic frame on which to place her memories: "greyplace" "landplace" "knownplace" "homeplace" "wildfields" "wierdfields" "wildplaces" establish a context for explaining Lorne's Depression-War madness as "that grendel . . . in your mindcave". "For Lorne" marks a stylistic departure from the occasional poems in AFTERWORDS; although

Laurence includes a metapoetic apology "I'm no poet/ but . . . / you wouldn't mind/ jagged edges/" (257-262).

This lyric with its narrative base had serious potential as a Prairie Long Poem. Within the 'true' story is a possible version that "might have happened"; a palimpsestic kernel story that contains the classic prairie metanarrative. Silent men with their impossible dreams of graceful horses and a responsive God are stranded on "feckless farms . . . loser lands", beside wives "soon done in" by the isolation (258). This story, a trace within the 'real' one, haunted Laurence as a writer and a woman compelling her to inscribe it in her short fiction and in this poem. The authentic prairie metanarrative concealed within the writer's memory seemed to encourage the balance and counterpoint that Laurence describes, in "A Conversation" with Robert Kroetsch, as the point "where one, in a sense, divides oneself". A phenomenon Kroetsch elaborates as "the doppelganger thing. You meet yourself in another form" (27).

The long prairie poem, that might have grown from "FOR LORNE" echoes in "VIA RAIL VIA MEMORY". The 'next year' people with their eyes straining to the prairie horizon are immortalized in the first lines of Laurence's poem:

the train is always moving
west
for us always west
for my people west
is the direction
our lives take
west is here in us (275)

'west' is not a proper noun deictic but a state of mind; a unique orientation to the earth on which we dance.

The linguistic compounds, that appeared in the article "The Shack" accompanied the first articulation of a mature earth centred spirituality and these fused nouns are conspicuous throughout Dance On The Earth whenever Laurence speaks from the subject position of the wise elder of the tribe:

The fields of fall greengold
 nearly ready for harvest
 and wind-fingers ruffling
 wheat oats barley
 as though the fields
 are the goddess's hair (275)

The seasons, nature a mere hyphen away from the human, and women's earliest dominion in the fields of the goddess creator, is represented in lilting language. The poetic scene painting is replaced with a jagged edge "sounds swell eh?" inserting the idiomatic 'eh?' that divines the prairie born from other mortals. Laurence recognizes the malevolent side of the dual natured goddess "I knew that same tender wind / could turn destroyer" (275) and the synchronic irony of language "for those young farmers now/ who don't know/ *Relief's* other meaning/ their parents knew" (275 / 276).

The semiotics of difference, alive in phonetic puns, reflect the paradoxical fusion of time, space, nature and the human:

I wasn't fooled
 even from the safety of a train
 because a train
 of consequences binds me
 like long-ago binder twine
 twining lives and land together (275)

If there is a graphic sign that operates like the prairie orality of "eh?" to signal the authentic presence of the prairie born person, it is "binder twine". Like the "openness of sky" and "damn tough trees" (276), "binder-twine" has linguistic power to function

for initiates as a cultural symbol that goes beyond the mundane to the archetypal. "VIA RAIL VIA MEMORY" honours the prairie landscape that the American travellers misread as absence and lack. The mysterious process, by which the writer uses the power that resides in language to name herself and her tribe into being, is manifest in this poem, and it recalls the shamanic performance on behalf of the community that distinguish Soyinka's Fourth Stage.

To challenge the void, speak the hidden names of words that hold significance for their culture, writers in a new world must have models. In "The Lovely Treachery of Words", Kroetsch explains the importance of cultural recognition; "to understand ourselves becomes impossible if we do not see images of ourselves in the mirror--be that mirror theatre or literature or historical writing" (6). "WHEN YOU WERE FIVE AND I WAS FOURTEEN" is an occasional piece written to celebrate another half century mark, the 50th anniversary of Quill & Quire. Laurence summarizes the reading experience of many young Canadian girls in the 40's and well into the 50's and 60's. She read what was available: "adventure stories (the boys got to do all the most exciting things) that told us the British Empire was the best thing in the world"; a double absence, of literature with gender or geographical relevance. However, Marg Wemyss, "an early evangelist for Canadian writing", brooded over Quill & Quire reviews of new Canadian books for the "newly hatched" Neepawa library (284-286). The discovery of books, such as Ross's For Me and My House, written out of her land and in the idiom of the prairies, was a revelation for Laurence. At that moment of youthful recognition, the novels that Laurence would write in her maturity became possible.

"A FABLE -- FOR THE WHALING FLEETS" is an allegorical fantasy predicated upon profound ecofeminist belief. It is a teaching story in the tradition of Native American sacred tales that conceive of life as a circle, cycle or dance in which every creature has a vital place. Laurence's work with Somali oral literature had perfected a talent and natural 'ear' for oral literature, and in "A FABLE" she becomes the storyteller creating the illusion of a voiced performance with simple syntax, repetition and rhythmic breath line sentences. Beginning with the magical verb "Imagine", Laurence deconstructs the logic of domination by inverting the order of nature and language. "Humankind" are positioned as whales and man kind are "sky creatures" who "hunt humanity with the death sticks." Like the imperialists who caused the first stage ecological revolutions all over the globe, the sky creatures conceive of 'humankind' and the world that contains them as 'other'. Laurence locates the evil of the sky creatures in a failure of imagination, just as she did with the leaders of the nuclear arms race. (291 / 292)

Laurence distinguishes the songs of humankind from the languages of the sky people with an emphasis that replicates Walter Ong's theory of primitive oral culture's bi-cameral consciousness. The songs convey empathy and touch the heart while the languages of the sky people have evolved for "complex and subtle use." The annihilation of species, waste, desecration by violence and greed, the failure to see the 'other' as equal are strategies of the sky people, who like many patriarchal cultures in our world, ignore the voices that speak from the margins (291 / 292). The fable is a lesson story that seeks to warn by invagination, a method described in N. Scott Momaday's Foreword to The Native Stories From KEEPERS of the EARTH; "In my story I

determine you; for a moment--the duration of the story, your reason for being is the story itself; for the sake of the story, you are. In my story I create a state of being in which you are involved" (viii).

Fables, science fiction by ecofeminist writers such as Ursula Le Guin, Marge Piercy and Monique Wittig or magic realism from Third World nations are texts that, like founding myths, challenge ontological borders. Laurence's Fable predicts a "terrifying time" to come when "God will mourn" (292). This brief prose experiment tempts us to imagine what a Laurence novel grounded in this ecofeminist spirituality would have said to us; Alice Walker's post colonial voice and ecofeminist reverence for the ecological as spiritual suggests a possible direction. This reflection by the heroine of The Color Purple would not have been out of place in a monologue by Morag Gunn: "I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it" (203).

Feminist critics deplore the lack of authentic images of women's love for one another. Carol Heilbrun, in Writing A Woman's Life identifies Audre Lourde's work as one of the first occasions of authenticity:

By the time of *The Cancer Journal*, Lourde, writing of illness, woman as victim and survivor, and the sole saving grace of female friendship, speaks across race, national or class boundaries for what is now *her* generation of women. Female friendship has been given its first and most compelling text by black women writers of this generation. (75)

However, Laurence was born a decade before Lourde and her memoir could surely be called a 'compelling text' that honours the gifts of 'mothers' as the most powerful influence on her life. In the final selection in Dance On The Earth, the coda of AFTERWORDS, Laurence recapitulates her life in the poem "FOR MY SISTERS". The epigram is from PSALMS:39:12 "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry;

hold not thy peace at my tears, for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were" (293). The PSALM is reconstructed by a woman's voice; the poem teaches women how to read beyond the gendered language that signifies patriarchal ownership of the sacred.

The signifiers for Laurence are neither singular "thy" nor are they transcendental "O Lord"; they are immanent and known to her as the significant women who blessed her with "a saving grace". Laurence, a woman who had no sister, in a relational or legal sense, speaks of a sororial solidarity:

reaching for a time at times
 All in a heartspace remaining
 My life's time
 And others unknown but known
 To be in all lands (293)

She remembers the lives of "Unheroic heroines" in a radical hagiography:

saintly we aren't
 We can be mean we can snarl and do
 From tiredness anger at fates and powers
 Damage to us and ours (293)

The dance of language, the metonymic chain of signifiers expands in dynamic movement by the juxtaposition of synonyms that defy context to limit their energy. "But life's trying / And yet life is trying." Laurence puts words into crisis: "mean / means" "born / bear" "choice / chosen" "giving / gifting" "fond / found" "saver / saviour / savourers" and we must read with care; "*(do you read me? you read me?)*" (247). One stanza is devoted to each of three sisters whom we recognize, in the light of her memoirs, as Mona "lifelong sister", Adele "Families one another's / Vocations one another's", and Jocelyn "The woman who is most close / Is the woman I birthed". The validity of patriarchal naming is interrogated and found wanting. (29)

"Can one be mother sister both / Daughter sister?" The sister relationship, that flows "in currents of laughter pain / Torrents of hope/ Flowing both ways" like the river of life, circle of time, is all inclusive. "My son, so much beloved / No difference of caring", David Laurence is embraced by the feminine term that evolves in an ethic of mutuality to which gender is unimportant; "Son Daughter Daughter Son / I love both best." His difference is absorbed as "My necessary lack" and their relationship reflects the maternal osmosis characteristic of the bonds between Laurence and her mothers, "I know you know" (296). The feminine lack, so vital to Freud's thesis, is redeemed as a boundless opening for beginnings that generate an unending fullness, through time.

The final stanza, the last words of the book of Laurence's life writing are addressed to her daughter. The knotty patriarchal logic of blood relationships secured by surnames is undone: "My daughter, woman as I am, / You who have no sisters / Have many and close, as I have." The Mosaic code that claims God as father, sanctions filial naming, but it remains merely a linguistic tactic that conceals a basic insecurity about paternity. Laurence alters the message of Psalms:39:12 to compensate for an originary lack "You are my sister-sojourner here / As all my mothers were / And in memory remain." Gone is the alienation of the exile, the distance that separates the earthly man as stranger to some transcendental 'thee'; Laurence offers the human warmth and immediacy of dancers in a circle/cycle on earth. The sojourner, perpetually wandering "as all my fathers were" is partnered as "sister-sojourner" and linked to the ancestors. This poem, written less than a year before her death, exits the textual space with words of benediction and prophesy "And in memory remain" (296). The story teller leaves us but

the listener has become part of the story that she will tell to others, so the dance goes on.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The popularity of the Manawaka novels of Margaret Laurence created a phenomena in Canadian literature that was unprecedented and unequalled. The 1964 hat trick publication of The Prophet's Camel Bell, The Tomorrow Tamer and The Stone Angel was a unique sign that bestowed upon a Canadian author, residing in Britain, a rare mystique--international acceptance. The critical acclaim won by The Stone Angel secured its place on Canadian reading lists and each new novel in the Manawaka cycle was greeted with an almost universal enthusiasm. Even more remarkable, Laurence's novels were as popular with the 'general' reading public as they were with university based readers. A Life magazine review of A Jest of God caught the attention of Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward who recognized the aesthetic and market potential of a text that would resonate within the discourses of North American culture. The film transplanted Rachel from Manawaka to New England without damage to the narrative because the book was never simply a regional novel but a much deeper exploration of cultural stereotypes that broke the silence imposed on women in our culture. Other Canadian authors achieved similar but partial success: Robertson Davies was popular in Britain and Canada, Richler's St. Urbain Jewish mellieu made a successful translation to film, and Margaret Atwood's novels received a less populist but staunch readership in off-campus feminist book clubs. However, Laurence's novels were known and loved across international, gender, ethnic, social and the insidious literary lines that separate high from low art.

In Laurence's fiction, thematic critics found an opportunity to elaborate touchstones of balance, coherence, and universality, into closed systems of signification, while others invoked myth, archetype, Jungian, Freudian or Biblical symbols to orchestrate elaborate hierarchies of meaning. The critics that Frank Davey describes in Canadian Literary Power as following the 'Thematics' were "vague humanists" writing a type of criticism "in which "our" writers could be seen to pass balanced judgments in humane texts which were not only 'Canadian' but reflected the values of a larger 'civilized' world" (266). The Manawaka novels provided endless opportunity for such critical intervention that celebrated the survival of human beings with dignity in a chaotic universe. These books arrived at a time and place in Canadian literary history where they fit an ideological centre in which they were at once self-sufficient and self-confirming.

The four works that have been central to this discussion, the 'not-novels' in ambivalent genres do not share the esteemed position of the canonical Manawaka work. Read in the margins by the few interested folk who hoped to find in them some illumination of the 'great' writing which shared their writing space, they attracted only obligatory mention. Unruly and illegitimate, the quasi-translation, travel/autobiography, book of essays and memoir, confound genre and celebrate the potential for texts 'lost' in historical process to be re-read and re-evaluated. By valorizing the neglected work to a position at the centre of this thesis, the issues of canonicity, centre and margin, perceived hierarchies and the power of critical discourses, are raised. The texts contain traces of a narrative that evolves on the boundaries where cultural power and meaning contest to displace the logocentric security that assured the acceptance of her fiction.

These texts are radical and ironic and indicate that what seemed to be complete and closed in Laurence study is again a site of dynamic possibilities.

A Tree For Poverty is a courageous experiment that occurred by a curious collusion of history and accident. The presence of Margaret Laurence in Somalia in 1952 was accomplished by a misrepresentation; her femininity was erased by Jack's description of her as a self-sufficient pioneer and she was allowed to be an invisible non-participant in nation building. The absence she represented made her the ideal translator of what had hitherto been the literary silence of Somalia. The oral tradition was invalid as literature and Laurence's decision to inscribe it involved a struggle with the gestures of colonial, imperial and patriarchal discourses that permeated the site. Long before terms such as authority, appropriation, and naming raised our critical sensitivity to ideological exploitation, Laurence wrote with an awareness that her translation would carry a construction of herself within it that was stronger than any essence of Somali culture. The attempt to record an unstable oral medium in a language virtually unknown to her, was a heroic anthropological gamble by an amateur author. Contained within this gesture is Laurence's desire to probe the discontinuous and open site, to hear the other and report the sound of that voice. The translation that was not true translation was a border text in a deterritorialized language, the only language in which the 'other' can be recorded as they come to presence.

Laurence used the strategies of archaeologist and pioneer to clear the textual space for a representation of voices that would include her own. Interrogation, mapping and excavation inform the translation project; 'how to write in a new country', 'how to grow a town', how to probe apparent absence for authentic narrative, are post-modern

questions that Robert Kroetsch makes explicit in "Seed Catalogue" and their trace can be seen to motivate A Tree For Poverty. Naming the other, naming themselves through a fearless if unorthodox translation, worked out narrative problems and perfected Laurence's ear for voices that were inaudible to most Westerners. The short fiction of The Tomorrow Tamer and first novel, This Side Jordan were unusually successful for debut works; Laurence, enabled by her translation experience, could negotiate the multivocal culture of Ghana with a skill that has been compared to Chinua Achebe. Critical examination of A Tree For Poverty re-opens the textual sites of Laurence's African fiction, revives them for inclusion in courses of post-colonial study, and promises exciting and unexamined potential for postmodern and feminist reading strategies.

The Prophet's Camel Bell combined travel writing, autobiography, and cross cultural narrative; it described a personal experience that crossed cultural and generic borders. As autobiography, the book recorded less than two years of her life, as travel document it transversed only a small section of North Africa centred around the *balleh* projects. However, the cross cultural narrative enlarged and expanded on the slight observations she had allowed herself in the Introduction to A Tree For Poverty and her "I" witness was both character and author. Laurence, as engineer's wife, incidental to the empire building inhabited the margins of colonial Somalia. The collision of discourses of femininity, imperialism, reportage and fabulation that occur within the narrative produce a dialogic text that is fluid and postmodern. The contemporary genre of life writing admits a wider range of expression than was formerly acceptable in the autobiographical and Laurence's text might well find shelter under this heading. The

book is a collage of anecdote, anthropological reference, oral poetry, feminist observations, geographical description, and recapitulation of the popular colonial theories of Dr. D.O. Mannoni's Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization. Linear narrative is sacrificed to the rough symmetry of memory and associative logic links emotional reflections in an intuitive chronology. As a reconstruction from diary entries made while Laurence worked on her translation project, The Prophet's Camel Bell provides a context or graft to her unique experiment with Somalia oral tradition. Read in tandem, these texts inform one another and predict the course of her later fiction that would abandon traditional time lines and dialogue in favour of a multi-voiced analeptic construction. Surface realities were deceptive in the geography of the Haud where a desert landscape that seemed Biblical and eternal could transform in hours to an apocalyptic nightmare that erased landmarks and obliterated paths leading home. The arid wilderness, reminiscent of transcendent Biblical authority, became the surreal backdrop for chance encounters that deferred meaning. The codes, maps and handbooks that Laurence brought with her to Somalia were useless and a new type of navigation was demanded, one that required the decentralization of received binary oppositions and a radical openness to alternatives that celebrated contradiction and difference.

The serpentine and intuitive progress of the desert nomad is the model for the eternal traveller, the permanent exile that examines the disorder of modern civilization in Heart of a Stranger. The text was a desegregated site in which the strategy of cultural border crossing learned in Africa could integrate the founding places of her life with the mythic, banal or extra-ordinary. Cabbies and tourists are located in proximity to

pharaohs and visionaries. Tours and junkets are elevated to occasions for profound reflection while sites of immense importance to Western civilization suffer inversion. The carnivalization of cultural icons and beliefs is not a trivial entertainment; the text is serious and disruptive. Cultural codes are transposed in an algebra of deferred significance. Fresh meanings are interpolated, juxtaposed and detonated on new sites that suggest that the topography of the future must include unfamiliar zones and provisional realities in which margin and centre coalesce. Mythical characters surface, home places acquire transcendence, heroes transmigrate from earlier texts and conventional time conflate and deflate to accommodate an imaginative reality that seems more real than the chronological and historical. Heart of a Stranger, a miscellany of essays and travel pieces that was received as a benign and unassuming filler, provides a reader's key and compendium to the majestic Diviners. There is not a Laurence of minor forms and genres and another Laurence of the monumental fiction cycle; only one author whose discursive sites should have remained open to critical intervention and interpretation.

If the texts of naming, border crossing, and imaginative archaeology were misread as timid detours from the 'real' business of fiction, it is not surprising that Laurence's memoir Dance On The Earth received mostly sentimental applause. As a posthumous publication edited by her daughter, it was the last Laurence work and it was not fiction. Like the triad of troublesome non-fiction works, Dance On The Earth was not simply autobiography and its memoir status was decentred by the curious AFTERWORDS that contained some powerful political prose and haunting poems. Its open form denied the sense of closure that infects 'last words' and the fluid narrative rhythms reflect the

method of its oral composition connecting the prose memoir to the songs and poetry that follow. Laurence dismantled the hierarchical binaries that secured patriarchal, colonial, and logocentric systems of thought by writing from the margins in Somalia and as a perpetual exile in Heart Of A Stranger; in her memoir the traditional literary oppositions of prose and poetry overlap in playful anarchy. The linear time line of narrative is debunked and tenses escape from the rigidity of orthodox grammar. Lyrical fragments and renegade phrases interrupt sentence structure to destabilize the reader's prose expectations. Dance On The Earth provides a way of reading The Diviners that could free the text from the confines of the Manawaka Cycle and open it to readings informed by the contemporary feminist semiotics of Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous. The deep spirituality that is integrated with political and social activism in the memoir resolves the religious conflicts that tormented Laurence's fictional heroines. Hagar, Rachel, Stacey, and Morag seek the water places for revelation and renewal, talking back to a patriarchal God who hovers like a transcendental Jason Currie waiting for them to repent their feminine disobedience. Dance On The Earth articulates an ecofeminist philosophy that replaces the androcentric god with a nongendered spirit that is equally present in nature, human and non-human. This spirituality is political and confronts all systems that dominate by binary 'power-over' relationships and through the hegemonic dissemination of ideological hierarchical structures. The tragic erasure of marginal groups like the Métis, the Mad Mullah's band, and the Highland Scots recur in Laurence's work but the waking nuclear terrors of Stacey Cameron and the march of the Cameron men to war might also be re-read in the light of the informing ecofeminism that permeates Dance On The Earth.

A Tree For Poverty, The Prophet's Camel Bell, Heart of a Stranger, and Dance On the Earth may be resuscitated as literary criticism expands to include a wider range of theory than was previously acknowledged. With the emergence of critical theory classes that explore the range of potential strategies from structuralism to the postmodern, students, aware of the possibilities of feminist, psycho-analytical, semiotic and post-colonial readings, might search for texts that were impervious to new critical analysis. As these neglected works are made present as sites of intervention, they gain intertextual significance and can inseminate new textual production. New course designations such as post-colonial, life-writing, or female travel literature may come to share the curriculum with courses delimited by genre or chronology, opening reading lists to include previously homeless texts denigrated as minor or uncanonical. As shifts in literary focus open the literary field, the lost legacy of Margaret Laurence, that has been the focus of this thesis, will be recovered to accomplish a renaissance in Laurence study.

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