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## Review of *Critical Spaces: Margaret Laurence and Janet Frame* By Lorna M. Irvine

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*Critical Spaces: Margaret Laurence and Janet Frame.* By Lorna M. Irvine. Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1995. Introduction, works consulted, index. xv + 131 pp. \$54.95.

In *Critical Spaces*, Lorna M. Irvine presents a complex body of material in clear prose and organizes that material in an accessible manner. Irvine not only examines the critical reaction to the fiction of Canadian Margaret Laurence and New Zealander Janet Frame but also reflects on the ways the writers' work and the response to it mirror the growing nationalism in the two countries.

The introduction explains the reasons for linking Laurence and Frame. Once establishing the legitimacy of her approach by indicating various similarities in career and reception, if not in style and subject matter, Irvine covers in 100 pages the abundant, international criticism on the two novelists. The first chapter, "Establishing a Base," investigates early reviews and critiques of the fiction—sometimes negative and cautious approaches that make fascinating reading in light of the critical response to follow.

The next chapter, "Emerging Critical Voices," covers the 1960s and early 1970s, when both Frame and Laurence were at the height of their creative achievement; but the emerging criticism was often hesitant and unsure. Irvine observes here that "criticism and creative work do not necessarily move at the same pace." "Maturing Opinions" notes how Canada and New Zealand embrace their now internationally acclaimed writers, discusses interviews with Laurence and Frame, summarizes the critical assessment of new novels, and introduces fresh directions in criticism.

The following chapters, "Critical Variety" and "Politics and Fiction," comprise the heart of the book, both in length and depth, as Irvine presents an objective, succinct, and intelligent reading of the growing complexity in the way critics approach the two writers' fiction. Through this careful tracing of theoretical application (such as postcolonialism, feminism, structuralism, and postmodernism),

Irvine has not only served her immediate subjects effectively but has also provided a kind of informal history of the growth of critical sophistication from the 1980s to 1993, the cut-off date for the book's coverage.

Bibliographies of both authors' publications are included. Especially valuable is the extensive and impressive "Works Consulted in Chronological Order," which lists criticism, reviews, and interviews with the writers.

In the "Epilogue," Irvine contends that "what keeps literature alive is the continual rethinking and revisioning of its meaning." The forty or so years of reaction to Laurence's and Frame's work, which *Critical Spaces* explores, certainly prove the truth of this statement. It will be interesting to see what happens during the next four decades.

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