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## Introduction The Prairie Fiction Of Margaret Laurence (1926,1987)

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# INTRODUCTION

## THE PRAIRIE FICTION OF MARGARET LAURENCE (1926-1987)

I first read Margaret Laurence in secondary school in Gibbons, Alberta, a place similar in many ways to Margaret Laurence's hometown of Neepawa, Manitoba, the place she called Manawaka in her fiction and about which she wrote so much. I continued to read and to study Laurence as an undergraduate at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. Later, I dragged along my dog-eared copies of *A Stone Angel*, *A Jest of God*, *The Fire-Dwellers*, and (my favorite) *The Diviners* as my life's journey took me to Ottawa, Ontario; Boulder, Colorado; Vancouver, British Columbia; and most recently, Lincoln, Nebraska.

The idea for this special issue of the *Quarterly* came out of a conference entitled "Margaret Laurence and Her Times" hosted by the University of Manitoba, St. John's College, and the University of Winnipeg in 1997. The conference was organized by Barbara Kelcey, Barbara Huber, and Jack Bumsted. Many of the participants in that conference assisted us in the preparation of this special issue as authors, book reviewers, and manuscript readers. Thank you, one and all.

Wes Mantooth, in "The 'Album' Songs of Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*," breaks new ground by arguing that the music included in *The Diviners* is an important part of the novel

as well as an important part of Laurence's artistic vision. Debra Dudek, in "Poetic Redress: Her Body, Her House in *The Fire-Dwellers*," also sheds new light on Laurence's prairie fiction, examining Laurence's female characters as a reflection of the larger Canadian struggle for identity within colonial cultures and structures.

When I studied Margaret Laurence at the University of Alberta many years ago, I did so with a freshly minted professor named Nora Foster Stovel. Thus, it was with some trepidation that I awaited her submission for this issue. Thank goodness when "'A Town of the Mind': Margaret Laurence's Mythical Microcosm of Manawaka" arrived it proved to be an insightful and highly reflective piece on the symbolism and transformations of place in Laurence's prairie fiction. Finally, Lyall Powers, in "Margaret Laurence's Long Journey Home," provides us with a personal essay that is part criticism, part loving remembrance of the woman he knew as both friend and colleague until her death in 1987.

I hope you enjoy this issue as much I enjoyed producing it. For me it was also a long (but joyous) journey home.

CHARLENE PORSILD  
Editor



*Canadian novelist Margaret Laurence at her home in Lakefield, Ontario, ca. 1985. Photograph by Doug Boulton, Village of Wellington, Ontario, K0K 3L0, Canada.*