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Margaret Laurence's Heart of a Stranger

by Nora Foster Stovel

For I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.[1]

Margaret Laurence's favourite biblical passage was from Exodus 23:9: "thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." She discovered this passage at the beginning of her "Innocent Voyage"[2] to Africa in 1950. Margaret, who had not had her husband's foresight to bring Tolstoy's *War and Peace* on the journey, found a Gideon Bible in a hotel en route to Africa and read the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses, for the first time. Laurence quotes this passage three times in her writing career: first in her 1963 travel memoir, *The Prophet's Camel Bell*, set in Somaliland; second, in her 1963 collection of short stories, *The Tomorrow-Tamer and Other Stories*, set in Ghana; and third, in her 1976 collection of travel essays *Heart of a Stranger*.[3] Exploring the three instances in which she quotes the passage can illuminate her perception of the "stranger," or "Other," and reveal the development of that perception.

In her foreword to *Heart of a Stranger* she explains the significance of the quoted Exodus passage in her own life, as it taught her to understand the "Other" and also her Self: "That verse from Exodus has always meant a great deal to me. I have spent a good many years of my adult life as a stranger in strange lands, in some cases as a resident, and in others as a traveller. I have met suspicion and mistrust at times, and I have also met with warmth and generosity. The process of trying to understand people of another culture is a fascinating and complex one, sometimes frustrating, never easy, but in the long run enormously rewarding." She adds, "my experience of other countries probably taught me more about myself and even my own land than it did about anything else. Living away from home gives a new perspective on home" (3). Her experience of strangers, or Others, in Africa influenced her perspective on herself, on Canada as a postcolonial nation, on Canada's Aboriginal peoples, and on women under patriarchy.[4]

Laurence greatly admired Olivier Mannoni's 1956 book, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, in which he identifies the rela-

tionship between Self and Other in a colonial situation as the "Prospero complex" (110), defining it in these words: "What the colonial in common with Prospero lacks is awareness of the world of Others, a world in which Others have to be respected" (108). Mannoni models his theory of colonialism on the patriarchal father-son or master-slave relationship of Prospero and Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, as "the European colonial" forsakes "the democratic attitude for paternalism and his faith in experience for Prospero's magic" (196). Such a symbiotic relationship allows the colonizer to feel superior and the colonized to feel secure in his dependence, for "colonization has always required the existence of the need for dependence" (85), resulting in a "dependence complex" (195), as Mannoni argues in his chapter titled "Dependence and Inferiority" (39). He explains, "the [African] in course of colonization transfers to his colonizer feelings of dependence the prototype of which is to be found in the affective bond between father and son" (158). In Mannoni's symbiotic theory, the colonized, relegated to infantilism and inferiority by the colonist, who may be assuaging his own feelings of inferiority through the dependence of the colonized, becomes dependent on the colonist and attempts to ape him. Philip Mason notes in his foreword to Mannoni's book, "To the spirit convinced of its own inferiority, the homage of a dependant is balm and honey and to surround oneself with dependants is perhaps the easiest way of appeasing an ego eager for reassurance" (11).

In her last book, *Dance on the Earth: A Memoir* (1989), Laurence affirms, "That book was a revelation. Mannoni said things about colonialism and the people who had been colonized that struck me deeply" (155). In *The Prophet's Camel Bell*, she claims that reading Mannoni following her sojourn in Africa inspired a "shock of recognition," as his theories endorsed her own observations and experience: "Among the most perceptive and undeniable insights are those of Mannoni," she asserts, "in whose study of the psychology of colonization every European who has ever lived in Africa cannot fail to see something of himself" (208, 249)—revealing "the secret empire of the heart" (251), as she terms it. When the colonized attempts independence as an individual or as a people, the colonizer is outraged. Mannoni explains, "we are perfectly happy if we can project the fantasies of our own unconscious on to the outside world, but if we suddenly find that these creatures are not pure projections but real beings with claims to liberty, we consider it outrageous, however modest their claims" (117). This view is particularly pertinent to Laurence's situation in Somaliland and Ghana, where both peoples were working towards independence, and

her comments on colonialism in her African nonfiction and her portrayal of colonialism in her fiction illustrate his theories effectively.

The first time Laurence quoted Exodus was in *The Prophet's Camel Bell*: she recalls "the verse that remained with me most of all, when at last and for the first time I was myself a stranger in a strange land, and was sometimes given hostile words and was also given, once, food and shelter in a time of actual need, by tribesmen who had little enough for themselves—*Thou shalt not oppress a stranger, for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt*" (18). Being a stranger helped her understand others, but her situation in Somaliland was highly anomalous.

During the period 1951-57, which she termed her "seven-years' love affair with a continent" ("TYS" 18), a year in Somalia and five in Ghana, Laurence was indeed the stranger. Once in Somaliland, when she was in the garden in slacks, she noticed Somali women gawking at her. She understood enough Somali to comprehend what they were saying: "Is it a man or a woman?" one asks, and another answers, "Allah knows. Some strange beast" (*PCB* 56). "Never again did I wear slacks in Somaliland," she declares, "not even in the desert evenings when the mosquitoes were thick as porridge, not even in the mornings when the hordes of glue-footed flies descended" (*PCB* 56). In *The Prophet's Camel Bell* she describes many similar incidents that made her acutely aware of the differences in outlook between westerners and the Somali people, and between her Self and the African Other. She realizes, "they looked at me from their own eyes, not mine" (*PCB* 34-35). Similarly, Mannoni sees "colonial situations as primarily the results of misunderstanding, of mutual incomprehension" (31), in which the other remains a stranger.

RELUCTANT MEMSAHIB: "I STILL WORE MY MILITANT LIBERALISM LIKE A HEART ON MY SLEEVE."

Married to Jack Laurence, an engineer in the employ of the Department of Public Works, Margaret was a reluctant memsahib—"a concept I hated and despised" (*DE* 143). She asserts in *The Prophet's Camel Bell*, "I found the sahib-type English so detestable that I always imagined that if I ever wrote a book about Somaliland, it would give me tremendous joy to deliver a withering blast of invective in their direction" (*PCB* 226). And she did, both in person, when her rebellious comments drove colonial "dinosaurs" (*DE* 153) right out of the Hargeisa Club, and later in print in *The Prophet's Camel Bell*. She writes, "I believed that the overwhelming majority of Englishmen in colonies could properly be classified as imperialists, and

my feeling about imperialism was very simple—I was against it" (*PCB* 25), as she demonstrates clearly in *This Side Jordan*. She adds, "I had been born and had grown up in a country that was once a colony, a country that many people believed still to be suffering from a colonial outlook, and like most Canadians I took umbrage swiftly at a certain type of English who felt they had a divinely bestowed superiority over the lesser breeds without the law" (*PCB* 25). Here she connects Canadians and Africans as post-colonial peoples who had both borne the yoke of British imperialism.

Laurence sympathizes with the "Other," particularly those subjugated by colonial rule —the so-called "lesser breeds." Her empathy with African peoples, especially Somali and Ghanaian peoples, who were both planning independence while Laurence lived among them—is manifested in two *Heart of a Stranger* essays. "The Poem and the Spear" celebrates Somali leader Mahammed 'Abdille Hasan, known to the Somalis as the "Sayyid," or Lord, and to the British as "The Mad Mullah" (32) because he led the Dervishes in their revolt against the English, using "the strangest of all military weapons—poetry" (*HS* 31).[5] Laurence celebrates this "early nationalist leader" (*HS* 32) both for the brilliance of his poetry *and* for his idealistic leadership. This 1964 essay demonstrates Laurence's sympathy with the Somali people faced with an imperialist invader equipped with technologically superior weaponry, as well as her usual passionate partisanship for the valiant but vanquished underdog. Her partisanship with Canada's Aboriginal peoples, especially the Métis of her native Manitoba, is manifested in her *Heart of a Stranger* essay "Man of Our People," which celebrates Gabriel Dumont as a leader and "a genuinely heroic person" (Sullivan 77). In a cancelled section from her introduction to "Man of Our People," she writes, we "must hear native peoples' voices, for they speak [...] of the soul-searing injustices done to them" (*HS* 222).[6]

Laurence writes sympathetically about African peoples in her five African texts and about Canada's Métis in her five Manawaka texts, where she publicizes crimes committed against these peoples. She condemns female genital mutilation, enslavement, and child prostitution in *The Prophet's Camel Bell* and dramatizes them in her Ghanaian novel *This Side Jordan* (1961) and in *The Tomorrow-Tamer* (1963). Later, in her Canadian fiction, she critiques Aboriginal stereotyping, specifically Vanessa MacLeod's prejudiced perception in "The Loons" (1970) of Piquette Tonnerre, the Indigene whose tragic fate is revisited in *The Diviners* (1974). These fictional texts include problematic episodes that, although differing dramatically, nevertheless share a troubling element—the use of the suffering of the racial Other to catalyze the epiphanies of her white protagonist. While

considerable attention has been devoted to her portrayal of the Tonnerre family in her Manawaka cycle, less has been paid to her portrayal of African characters or to the connections between her African and Canadian works.

In her essay "The Very Best Intentions" in *Heart of a Stranger*, Laurence claims to have had the best of intentions toward Africans, wearing "my militant liberalism like a heart on my sleeve" (*HS* 24). Certainly, we do not doubt her good intentions. As we have seen, she opposed imperialism and empathized with colonialism's victims. But Laurence's use of the suffering of racial "Others" to trigger the self-awareness of her white western protagonists is problematic in both her African and Canadian texts: notably in her first, African, novel *This Side Jordan*; in "The Rain Child" in her African collection of short stories *The Tomorrow-Tamer;* and in "The Loons" in her Canadian collection *A Bird in the House*, the three texts on which this essay will focus. By tracing her portrayal of self and other, we can observe a development in her empathetic stance.

THIS SIDE JORDAN: "THE SCARS HAD OPENED WHEN HE SAVAGED HER."

This Side Jordan is an excellent illustration of Mannoni's theories. The white male protagonist, Johnnie Kestoe, is a prime example of what Mannoni terms "the colonial vocation" (108). An accountant with the British firm Allkirk, Moore & Bright during the "Africanization" process—whereby Europeans are replaced by Africans as the Gold Coast moves towards independence as the Republic of Ghana—he interviews students of Futura Academy's history teacher, Nathaniel Amegbe, the sympathetic African male protagonist. Mannoni argues, "The only *useful* psychology is one which will enable the administrator to understand himself in relation to the native" (170), but Kestoe is incapable of such psychology. Consequently, conflict develops between these antagonists, especially when Amegbe's colleague, Lamptey, persuades him to take bribes from unqualified students for recommending them for jobs with Kestoe's company. Mannoni explains, "The typical colonials of to-day are […] Crusoes or Prosperos beginning to have doubts about themselves" (170-71). He adds, "The negro, then, is the white man's fear of himself" (200), suggesting Freud's theory of Projection or the Jungian Shadow.

In the striking opening scene of *This Side Jordan*, Laurence writes, "Johnnie Kestoe, who didn't like Africans, was dancing the highlife with an African girl" (1). The scene takes place at the "Weekend In Wyoming" nightclub, under the jealous eyes of his pregnant wife Miranda and his

partner Charity Donkor's escort Victor Edusei. Kestoe has felt a "curious itch of desire" (4) to have sex with an African woman, to indulge a "disgust that beckoned almost as much as it repelled" (11). He has been tempted by "Saleh's serpent-eyed daughter, [who] laugh[ed] at his unacknowledged desire" (228), and by the "small wife" of his cook Whiskey (134- 5). Mannoni explains, "The 'colonial' is not looking for profit only; he is also greedy for certain other—psychological—satisfactions, and that is much more dangerous" (32). Finally, Kestoe indulges this urge, arranging to have sex with a prostitute at the Weekend In Wyoming. The girl, a young virgin, is offered as "a human sacrifice" (227) by the "Highlife Boy Lamptey" (212) to deflect Kestoe's anger from Lamptey's friend, "Wise-Boy" (213), Nathaniel Amegbe.

Kestoe is antagonistic to Amegbe, to whom Miranda has shown sympathy. As Mannoni explains, "The 'inferior being' always serves as scapegoat; our own evil intentions can be projected on to him" (106), for "The racialist apprehends racial differences emotionally; he is conscious of belonging to a particular race, and in another person he sees the race before he sees the man. For him, the race overshadows the individual; the meaning of race itself is left intellectually vague, which is why it can be adapted to suit all emotional needs; in the European it is made to satisfy the overriding need for compensation" (120). Kestoe seeks "compensation" in possessing the girl intended by Lamptey for Amegbe. While Kestoe embodies Mannoni's description of the colonist as "a man who uses his economic superiority simply for the pleasure of enslaving another man" (204), Amegbe illustrates his theory of the colonized: "The complexes of the 'assimilated' drive them to seek the company of Europeans, but they are never received by them as equals" (75).

Laurence describes the scene graphically as a sacrifice: "She lay spreadeagled, sheep-like, waiting for the knife. […] Her slight spasm of fear excited him. She was a continent and he an invader, wanting both to possess and to destroy" (231). The trope of the land as female and the invader as male, or of colonialism as the rape of a culture, is a familiar one that Laurence also employs in "The Drummer of All the World," where Matthew, the son of an English missionary, says of making love to the African girl, Afua, "Possessing her, I possessed all earth" (*TT* 12).[7] Kestoe is dismayed when "Emerald," as she is named by Joe-boy, bleeds copiously after coitus. The narrator explains, "Among certain peoples, the clitoridectomy was performed at puberty. By a bush surgeon—some fetish priestess perhaps. Some of them were said to use the long wicked acacia thorns as

needles. The wounds often became infected and did not heal for a long time" (233).

In *The Prophet's Camel Bell*, Laurence explains further: "Somali girls underwent some operation at puberty. [...] The operation was either a removal of the clitoris, or a partial sewing together of the labia, or perhaps both. But whatever was done, apparently a great many women had considerable pain with menstruation and intercourse, and the birth of their children was frequently complicated by infection" (75). When Somali women begged Margaret to give them something to help their pain, she thought "the lunatic audacity of shoving a mild pill at their total situation was more than I could stomach" (76). Humbled by her helplessness, torn between her desire to assist the women and her fear of imperialist intervention, she felt paralyzed and replied, "I have nothing to give you. Nothing" (76). But she did not do nothing: she publicized female genital mutilation in *This Side Jordan*.

Laurence concludes the graphic scene in the novel by explaining, "The scars had opened when he savaged her" (233). "Savaged" is a strong word, and an ironic one, for Johnnie has viewed "Emerald" as the "savage Other," but it is he who reenacts Europe's rape of Africa on her body.[8] These scars represent, metaphorically, the wounds inflicted by imperialism and by a misogynist culture. Repellant as Laurence portrays him to be, Kestoe is not the only villain here: the greater evil is the situation that allows a young virgin to be sold into prostitution, as Laurence makes clear. Emerald's hemorrhage, the emblem of "the clot of blood on a dirty quilt" (232), recalls "the clot of blood on a dirty quilt" (59) that signaled the death of Johnnie's Irish mother, Mary, in a London slum as a result of a self-inflicted abortion. Even the prostitute's name, "Emerald," reflected in her green cloth, recalls not only the forests of the north where she was sold into slavery, but also the Emerald Isle from which the Kestoes hail.

This connection with his childhood trauma inspires an epiphanic realization that brings the girl to life for him, individualizing her in his eyes: "She was herself and *no other*. She was someone, a woman who belonged somewhere and who for some reason of her own had been forced to seek him here in this evil-smelling cell, and through him, indignity and pain" (233, my italics). Kestoe had viewed the girl from a colonial perspective, but she defeats his expectations, evading the stereotype to emerge as a living individual. In her précis of *This Side Jordan*, Laurence explains, "Johnnie, out of a desire to hurt as well as a long-hidden curiosity, violates a young African girl, only to discover at last, through her, their common

humanity."[9] Through recognizing the Other as a real person, Kestoe realizes his own selfhood.

After this indelible scene, a redemptive moment is achieved, as the girl reaches out her hand and touches his, smiling to reassure him, and he takes her hand and spreads her green cloth gently over her damaged body in a gesture of atonement. This episode concludes with Johnnie parking alone by a lagoon and sobbing as he has not done for nearly twenty years, finally released into mourning for his mother.[10] While Laurence publicizes several crimes against women here—enslavement, child prostitution, genital mutilation, and rape—her exploitation of the young African virgin's "indignity and pain" to effect her white western hero's epiphany may seem like another sacrifice.

Although Laurence claims in *Dance on the Earth*, as noted previously, that she read Mannoni *after* living in Africa and *after* composing her fictions set in Africa, the parallels between *Prospero and Caliban* and *This Side Jordan* are so striking that one wonders if her memory misleads her. The fact that she names the central female character "Miranda" suggests that she had *The Tempest*, Mannoni's model for his "Prospero Complex," in mind. Perhaps, if she had composed the novel even later, she might have made Miranda, arguably the Laurence figure in the novel, the central sympathetic consciousness of the work. Certainly Laurence, initially influenced by the "Great Tradition" of predominantly male authors—including Joyce Cary, whose *Mr. Johnson* she greatly admired—expressed regret in her memoir that she had chosen a male protagonist: "How long, how regrettably long, it took me to find my true voice as a woman writer" (5), she laments: "In my first novel, *This Side Jordan* [...] I described the birth of Miranda Kestoe's child from the point of view of Johnnie Kestoe, the child's father. How could I have done? How could I have been so stupid, so self-doubting?" (5). Subsequently, all the protagonists of her Canadian novels are female, and her subsequent fictions demonstrate the lessons she learned from Mannoni and from living in and writing about Africa.

"THE RAIN CHILD": "THE STRANGER IS LIKE PASSING WATER IN THE DRAIN."

"The Rain Child," locus of Laurence's second quotation from Exodus, is a transitional story between *This Side Jordan* and "The Loons"—both more subtle and more complex, involving, not an adult white male and an adolescent African virgin, but two African children, Ruth and Ayesha.[11] Moreover, it features a female narrator. The child of an African doctor and his African wife, but born and raised in England, hence a "child of the rain"

(121), Ruth Quansah arrives at the Eburaso Girls' School in Ghana aged fifteen as a stranger in a strange land—like the biblical Ruth. Thoroughly Anglicized, she thinks it "great fun […] coming to Africa like this" (109), establishing that she views Africa from the outside. Frustrated by her inability to understand young Ayesha's Twi, the language of Ghana, she slaps the child's face.[12] The sensual Kwaale, who is at home in Africa and who resents Ruth as a privileged newcomer, reports the incident to the English teacher, Violet Nedden. Kwaale quotes the Ghanaian proverb, "The stranger is like passing water in the drain" (114). Violet Nedden, the narrator and possible Laurence figure, counters with the verse from Exodus: "Thou shalt not oppress a stranger, for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (114). Fully "at home" neither in England nor in Africa, Ruth is indeed a stranger. Violet later explains to Ruth, "[Ayesha] must have been stolen, you see, or sold when she was very young. She has not been able to tell us much. But the Nigerian police traced her back to several slave-dealers. When they discovered her she was being used as a child prostitute. She was very injured when she came to us here" (117). She adds, "There are many like her, I'm afraid, who are not found or heard about" (117)—many like "Emerald," another girl sold into slavery and prostitution.

As Laurence explains in *The Prophet's Camel Bell*, "For many men and women, princes and commoners from the distant forests and from the lands as far away as the Niger, Somaliland was the end of a bitter journey and the beginning of a lifetime of bondage, for here the Arab slave routes had emerged at the sea, and from there the dhow-loads of slaves had once been shipped across the Gulf of Aden to be sold in the flesh markets of Arabia" (13). Violet laments "my small Ayesha, whose childhood lay beaten and lost somewhere in the shanties and brothels of Takoradi or Kumasi, the airless upper rooms of palm-wine bars in Lagos or Kaduna" (130). Far more sympathy is expressed for the victimized Ayesha in this story than for the ravished Emerald in the earlier novel.

Ruth, like the reader, reacts with "naïve horror" at "the existence of cruelty" (117) in Africa. Indeed, this shocking revelation leads Ruth to turn her back on Africa and on her own origins. She befriends the adolescent English boy, David Mackie, who allows her to continue to view Africa as an outsider: "David was showing Africa to her as she wanted to be shown it—from the outside" (124), the narrator Violet Nedden observes. Together, they examine the specimens in his menagerie, suggesting their perception of Africans as less than human. Informing her that his mother forbids their meeting because African girls mature early, he reassures, "I

know you're not the ordinary kind of African. You're almost—almost like a—like us" (129). Ruth retorts angrily, "No, I'm not! I'm not like you at all. I won't be!" (129). Thus, she rejects her English upbringing, leaving her homeless, in effect. As Laurence notes in *The Prophet's Camel Bell*, the worst thing is to be an exile in one's own land (168). Doubly exiled, Ruth belongs in neither culture.

Ayesha was born in Somalia. In *The Prophet's Camel Bell* Laurence describes her friendship with eight-year-old Asha, a child prostitute in the *jes*, or "tea-shop-cum-brothel" (156) situated beside Jack's camp, in which the Laurences were the only westerners and Margaret the only woman. "The *jes* provides amenities of one kind and another" (157), Laurence explains, so Jack allots them a ration of water, thereby making the Laurences to some extent complicit in Asha's exploitation, as Laurence believed. Called by the Somali word that means literally "a small opening" (157), Asha sits silent at Margaret's feet while she writes in her hut: "We did not talk much, Asha and I, for I did not know what to say to her. I never asked her about her life. My knowledge of Somali was too limited, and who would I get to translate?" (157). At sundown, when Jack's men finish work and repair to the *jes* for refreshment, Asha leaves quietly, murmuring, "*Nabad gelyo*. [...] May you enter peace" (157). Margaret is unable to return the traditional response, "*nabad diino* [...] the peace of faith" (157). Dismayed by Asha's plight, she feels helpless, as she did in the face of the pain of the mutilated Somali matrons. She hesitates to meddle, fearing that interference might exacerbate Asha's situation: "I did not know what to do. [...] So, whether out of wisdom or cowardice, I did nothing" (157-58). "In this part of the world," Jack had advised her, "you have to learn that, if you can't change something, you might as well not worry about it" (20). She recalls, "Asha's half-wild half-timid face with its ancient eyes will remain with me always, a reproach and a question" (*PCB* 158). The vision of the child haunted her, and Asha is reborn as Ayesha in "The Rain Child."[13]

Laurence's portrayal of both African girls in "The Rain Child," like her portrayal of Asha in *The Prophet's Camel Bell*, is highly empathetic. In both, she drew readers' attention to the outrages inflicted on female children in Africa without depicting disturbing scenes. Moreover, Ruth's slap is a far cry from Kestoe's rape; by comparing the two African fictions, we can observe Laurence freeing herself from the masculine tradition that she laments imitating in *Dance on the Earth*, and writing as a female author more empathetically about women.

"THE LOONS": "[A]S AN INDIAN, PIQUETTE WAS A DEAD LOSS."

Although Laurence's Canadian texts are clearly very different from her African works, they nevertheless demonstrate intriguing commonalities.[14] As Barbara Pell asserts in "The African and Canadian Heroines: From Bondage to Grace," "Laurence's Canadian heroines were born in Africa" (46). Clearly, Laurence's perception of the pain endured by Africa's colonized peoples sensitized her to the damage suffered by Canada's Aboriginal peoples.

In the Manawaka saga all the members of the Tonnerre family are depicted as suffering and dying, thus catalyzing the epiphany of the white female protagonists—from Piquette in "The Loons," through her sister Valentine in *The Fire-Dwellers*, to Jules in *The Diviners.* Valentine Tonnerre helps liberate Stacey, heroine of *The Fire-Dwellers*, from her delusion about her husband's boss, Thor Thorlakson, whom she reveals to be Neepawa's abused Vernon Winkler. Val tells Stacey she's going on a long trip—"The last one" (242). Jules informs Morag in *The Diviners*, "She died of booze and speed, on the streets of Vancouver. As a whore" (456). Jules, Morag's lover and the father of her daughter Pique, also suffers and dies in *The Diviners*. Morag uses him to free herself from her marriage to Dr. Brooke Skelton, a caricature of a colonialist scarred by his upbringing under the British Raj. In a cancelled sentence from the typescript of *The Diviners*, Morag wonders whether she had the affair just to get material for a new novel. Morag gives Jules the Tonnerre hunting knife (457) with which, stricken with cancer, he cuts his own throat. Even her daughter, Pique, suffers when passersby hurl rocks and the name "halfbreed" at her (446). Pique must suffer so her mother can write, as her goodbye note, stuck in Morag's typewriter, begins a new novel for Morag, who has been experiencing writer's block (11). In "The Tonnerre Family: Mirrors of Suffering," Leslie Monkman, naming four texts that "focus primarily on the impact of the dispossessed native on a twentieth-century white protagonist," affirms, "The three generations of the Tonnerre family peopling the Manawaka fiction of Margaret Laurence function within this latter pattern, bringing to this series of works images of suffering and death, acceptance and endurance, that are integrally related to the experience of each of Laurence's heroines" (143). The relationship between Vanessa MacLeod and Piquette Tonnerre in "The Loons" offers a vivid example.

While the relationship between the two Canadian girls is different from that between the two African girls, there are parallels. Although Vanessa does not injure Piquette physically, she injures her psychologically.

Piquette, having lost her mother at an early age and having been hospitalized with tuberculosis of the leg that has left her with a permanent limp, has suffered considerable pain. By imposing stereotyped images of Indians on Piquette, Vanessa adds insult to injury. She perceives Piquette as a romanticized version of literary stereotypes of Indians, such as Longfellow's *Hiawatha*, an example from the American Romantic era. As Thomas King writes in "You're Not the Indian I Had in Mind," "Romantics imagined their Indian as dying" (33). Terry Goldie explains in *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures*, the idea is to form "the indigene into an historical artifact, a remnant of a golden age" (17). Vanessa confides, "my new awareness that Piquette sprang from the people of Big Bear and Poundmaker, of Tecumseh, of the Iroquois who had eaten Father Brebeuf's heart—all this gave her an instant attraction in my eyes" (112).

Vanessa romanticizes Piquette: "It seemed to me that Piquette must be in some way a daughter of the forest, a kind of junior prophetess of the wilds, who might impart to me, if I took the right approach, some of the secrets which she undoubtedly knew—where the whippoor-will made her nest, how the coyote reared her young, or whatever it was that it said in Hiawatha" (112). When Vanessa prompts, "I bet you know a lot about the woods and all that, eh?" Piquette retorts, "If you mean where my old man, and me, and all them live, you better shut up, by Jesus, you hear?" (113). When Vanessa tries to interest her in the loons, Piquette responds, "Who gives a good goddamn?" (114). Piquette's rebuff deflates Vanessa's romantic conception. As Laurence explains in "Time and the Narrative Voice," "The eleven-year-old Vanessa sees the Métis girl, Piquette Tonnerrre, in terms of romanticized notions of Indians, and is hurt when Piquette does not respond in the expected way" (159-60). Vanessa concludes, "as an Indian, Piquette was a dead loss" (114)—an ironic statement, for Piquette's demise is indeed a tragic loss.

When teenage Vanessa meets Piquette years later in the Regal café, Piquette announces that she's going to marry a tall blond "English fella" named Alvin Gerald Cummings, the stereotypical Other. Vanessa records, "Her defiant face, momentarily, became unguarded and unmasked," and in that moment, Vanessa reports, "I saw her. I really did see her, for the first and only time in all the years we had both lived in the same town" (117). After the sentence, "She had been forced to seek the things she so bitterly rejected" (117), Laurence excised the following sentences from her typescript: "Both the rejection and the deliberate seeking—on her part or on anyone's—seemed warped. How had she failed so deeply—and how had

we?"[15] The last lines stress that the real failure is society's. Later still, Vanessa learns of Piquette's cruel fate.

In her essay, "On 'The Loons,'" Laurence records, "When I was young, fires in winter among the collection of destitute shacks at the foot of the hill, in the valley below town, were tragically common. Years later, when I lived in Vancouver, I used to read in the newspapers about fires destroying the flimsy shanties of native peoples. Something about that fire, and the terrible and unnecessary waste of lives, must have almost obsessed me, for that event came into my fiction twice more after the short story—a relatively brief reference in my novel *The Fire-Dwellers*, and a long scene and many other references in my novel *The Diviners*" (806).[16] Clearly, Laurence was deeply disturbed by the loss of life caused by the conditions in which some Aboriginal people lived.

Piquette's death with her children in a fire at the Tonnerre shack, a horrific scene that is revisited in *The Diviners* (296), is deeply disturbing to Vanessa *and* to the heroine of *The Diviners*. After editor Lachlan MacLachlan assigns Vanessa's classmate Morag Gunn to report on the fire for the *Manawaka Banner* in *The Diviners*, Morag weeps "as though pain were the only condition of human life" in "*Memorybank Movie: Down in the Valley, Act III*" (176). She thinks, "Burnt wood. *Bois-Brulés*" (175). Years later, Morag uses the term *Bois-Brulés* in recounting the tragedy to Jules, triggering his anger and his grief.

Although Laurence ironizes Vanessa's romanticized stereotyping of Piquette, the death of the girl with her infants when she was drunk on "home brew" (118)—"stoned out of her head with home-brew" (454), as Jules tells Pique in *The Diviners*—not only perpetuates the stereotype of the drunken Indian, but also employs her tragic death to trigger Vanessa's recognition of Piquette's individuality as a Métis woman in relation to her own sense of self—just as Emerald's suffering triggers Johnnie Kestoe's realization of her individuality. In "Time and the Narrative Voice" Laurence explains, "It is only when Vanessa hears of Piquette's death that she realizes that she, too, like the entire town, is in part responsible. But the harm and alienation started a long way back […]" (160). As Peter Easingwood observes in his essay "Semi-Autobiographical Fiction and Revisionary Realism in *A Bird in the House*," "In this story, this enlargement of experience occurs only in the narrator's retrospective view of her relationship with the unlucky Métis girl" (23). Recently, Aboriginal Canadian writers have critiqued what they see as Laurence's exploitation of Piquette's disturbing fate. Janice Acoose, for example, in her essay on Maria Campbell's 1973 memoir, *Halfbreed*, comments, "she does not die

a victim of Canadian society's racism and sexism, like Margaret Laurence's beaten-down Piquette Tonnerre" (150).

Just as colonialism, not Johnnie Kestoe alone, is the greater evil that Laurence exposes in the rape of Emerald, however, so racism, not the child Vanessa, is the underlying evil she publicizes in "The Loons." For readers who would condemn Laurence for depicting disturbing material, we should recall her sympathy towards Canada's Aboriginal peoples and her desire to raise awareness about their mistreatment and misfortunes. We should also remember, in relation to her Canadian and African fiction, the historical fact that she was writing out of her own time: writers from Conrad to Cary, who were read initially as anti-racist, have been viewed more recently as racist by postcolonial critics, such as Chinua Achebe in his essay "Images of Africa: Racism in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness.'" Does superimposing subsequent theoretical perspectives on earlier writers violate their historical integrity? Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak illustrates such theoretical revolutions in her 1999 *Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* in this anecdote: "In 1982, a conference with the title 'Europe and Its Others' was proposed [....] I suggested an alternative title: 'Europe as an Other.' It is a sign of the amount of work done in the last decade and a half that this title would be perfectly appropriate today" (199). Laurence addresses such considerations in *Dance on the Earth* and *Heart of a Stranger.*

CONCLUSION: "THE SECRET EMPIRE OF THE HEART"

In her final book *Dance on the Earth* Laurence writes, "I found it exciting that African writers were producing what I thought I and many Canadian writers were producing: a truly non-colonial literature" (185). Colonialist attitudes prevailed, however, as she acknowledges in *The Prophet's Camel Bell*: "Yet something of the real world did impinge upon our consciousness, and portions of the secret empire of the heart had to be discarded, one by one" (251). By discarding these sections of the secret empire of the heart through writing her texts set in Africa, Laurence became a "truly non-colonial" writer in her Canadian books.

Africa taught Laurence to know her Self through knowing the Other. As a young woman from a small Canadian prairie town, she constructed her adult subjectivity in response to her observations of the African Other.[17] She begins her "Innocent Voyage," in *The Prophet's Camel Bell*, thus: "And in your excitement at the trip, the last thing in the world that would occur to you is that the strangest glimpses you may have of any creature in the distant lands will be those you catch of yourself" (10). Critics have

affirmed her Somali memoir as a spiritual odyssey, with Barbara Pell observing that "The Prophet's Camel Bell is less a travelogue than a story of spiritual growth [...]" (37), and Patricia Morley noting that "The quest for self-knowledge provides a subtext for the book" (52). In her unpublished essay "Half War, Half Peace," Laurence affirms, "It was really Africa which taught me to look at myself."[18]

Of her African works Laurence acknowledges, "They were written by an outsider who experienced a seven years' love affair with a continent but who in the end had to remain in precisely that relationship, for it could never become the close involvement of family" ("TYS"18). She writes in the first essay in *Heart of a Stranger*, "I always knew that one day I would have to stop writing about Africa and go back to my own people, my own place of belonging" (6). Laurence returned to her native Canada for her Manawaka fiction: in *The Stone Angel* (1964), Hagar Shipley is modeled on her grandparents' generation: "Her speech is their speech, and her gods their gods" (*HS* 7). But she brought with her the habit of portraying the suffering of the racial Other, especially the victimization of the female Other, from her African texts to her Canadian books, with increasing empathy.

In her texts, Laurence reveals the interconnection between comprehension of Self and Other. Mannoni explains the critical connection between knowing one's Self and understanding the Other: "It is as difficult to see something of one's self in all men as it is to accept oneself completely as one is. For this reason I became preoccupied with my search for an understanding of my own self, as being an essential preliminary for all research in the sphere of colonial affairs" (34). This interrelationship is a two-way process: just as we must know ourselves before we can comprehend the Other, so empathizing with the Other enables us to understand our selves. We see that dual process in Laurence's writings.

And yet, ultimately, we can never fully comprehend the heart of a stranger, including the strange heart within. In *The Diviners* Laurence quotes this sentence from the Burial of the Dead: "*For I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were*" (426).

Notes

1 Laurence quotes this sentence from Psalm 39 in "The Order for the Burial of the Dead" in *The Book of Common Prayer* in *The Diviners* (426).

2 "Innocent Voyage" is the title of the first chapter of *The Prophet's Camel Bell* (1963).

3 After some debate with her publisher, Jack McClelland, Laurence realized that *Heart of a Stranger* was the perfect title for her collection of nineteen travel essays.

4 I argue this in *Divining Margaret Laurence: A Study of Her Complete Writings* (2008).
5 Although this lengthy essay was written in 1964, it was never published until it was collected in *Heart of a Stranger* in 1976.
6 "Man of Our People" was originally published in *Canadian Forum* for December 1975 under the title "Man of Honour," Laurence's review essay on George Woodcock's 1975 study, *The Métis Chief and his Lost World*. The cancelled sections of this essay are published in the 2003 edition of *Heart of a Stranger*.
7 Anne McClintock opens *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* with Rider Haggard's map of King Solomon's mines in the anthropomorphic shape of a woman's body—a "conflation of the themes of gender, race and class" (4).
8 G.D. Killam comments in his introduction to the 1976 New Canadian Library edition of *This Side Jordan*, "Kestoe symbolically reenacts the rape of Africa" (xvii).
9 "This Side Jordan," Laurence's précis, is at McMaster University.
10 After his wife Miranda's baby is born, Johnnie asks her if they can name her Mary, after his mother.
11 "The Rain Child" was first published by Macmillan in *Winter's Tales* 8 (1962) 105-42.
12 In her essay "'A Place to Stand On': (Post)colonial Identity in *The Diviners* and 'The Rain Child,'" Karen McFarlane discusses the "complex process of defamiliarization with all aspects of culture—language, mythology, family, religion, cultural traditions—experienced by both characters" (227), namely Ruth Quansah and Violet Nedden.
13 Asha/Ayesha recalls Rider Haggard's Ayesha, pronounced Assha, in *She* (1887)—Carl Jung's example of the *anima* (*OCEL* 426)—and *Aissa Saved* (1932) by Joyce Cary.
14 I argue this in "'Canada Via Africa': *The Stone Angel* as the Missing Link Between Margaret Laurence's African and Canadian Writing."
15 The typescript of *A Bird in the House*, containing these sentences, is in box 2, files 3-13 at McMaster University. There is no indication as to why this passage was omitted.
16 The late Florence Henderson, former Curator of the Margaret Laurence Home in Neepawa, told me that fires among these shacks were regrettably frequent. These shacks have since been eliminated from Neepawa.
17 Although Terry Goldie declares in *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures*, "The Other is of interest only to the extent that it comments on the self" (11), that extreme attitude does not apply to Laurence.
18 "Half War, Half Peace" is an unpublished essay in the York University Archives.

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