

Margaret Laurence

Heart of a Stranger

ed. Nora Foster Stovel

Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2003. Xxxiii+236. \$29.95

Reviewed by Laura Strong Davis

Nora Foster Stovel's new edition of Margaret Laurence's *Heart of a Stranger* is an excellent and long-awaited reissue of Laurence's important collection of travel essays. As Stovel points out in her introduction to the new edition, *Heart of a Stranger* has received very little attention from critics. Such neglect might be due to the fact that the book was originally published in 1976, and has now been out of print for several years. The essays in the collection, however, are as relevant today as they were when Laurence wrote them. *Heart of a Stranger*, as Stovel explains, is important because it chronicles Laurence's travels to places such as Egypt, Scotland, and Greece. It is also important, Stovel argues, because it reveals Laurence's life journey and sheds light on her fiction. Significantly, the collection addresses contemporary issues such as American imperialism and development of the so-called Third World. Through *Heart of a Stranger*, Laurence's voice reaches across the decades to tell us about herself, her fiction, and the plight of a Western woman traveler in the twentieth century.

This new edition of the text is a carefully documented, well-researched, and expanded version of the original. Stovel's thorough introduction, "Heart of a Traveler: Margaret Laurence's Life Journey," is an admirable contextualization and critical discussion of the text. The author highlights the text as a "Canadian writer's response to other countries and cultures before post-colonial theory ... became current" (xii). In so doing, she emphasizes how apt Laurence's work is to today's postcolonial and developing world. Importantly, acknowledging Laurence's statement that travel, for her, meant "both those voyages which are outer and those voyages which are inner," Stovel also emphasizes the essays in the collection as exemplary spiritual as well as geographical journeys. She rightly perceives Laurence's life journey as a circular one—a journey away from but ultimately back to the home and the self. Finally, Stovel's introduction sets out to explain how *Heart of a Stranger* is important to the corpus of Laurence's work as a whole. Providing important details about Laurence's life and how it is woven into her fiction, Stovel notes that Laurence's writing, as Laurence herself states, is "rooted firmly in some soil, some place, some outer and inner territory" (9). That inner and outer territory essentially comes to life in Laurence's African writing and in the Manawaka series.

New to this edition are three important works by Laurence, which follow the essays of *Heart of a Stranger* as appendices. They include an essay called "Tribalism as Us Versus Them," and two Somali poems that Laurence translated into English, "A Gaby in h" and "To a Faithless Friend." This edition also includes a detailed set of annotated notes and an index, useful additions to this

important text. As Stovel explains in an annotated note to “Tribalism as Us Versus Them,” “the appearance of the typescript” in the York University Archives suggests that the piece was meant to be included in *Heart of a Stranger* (225). The content of the piece also suggests as much. So often in these essays, Laurence draws connections—as she does in “Tribalism as Us Versus Them”—between the world she experiences when she is away, and the world that is her home.

The essays in *Heart of a Stranger* are important not only because they give us insight into Laurence’s own worldview, but also because they have a political bent. The essays foreground Laurence’s journey to other places and also her journey to discover her own political position in relation to such places. The collection brings together Laurence’s Canadian and African interests. For example, Laurence wrote the essay entitled “The Poem and the Spear” after she wrote her first Canadian novel, *The Stone Angel*, demonstrating that her African concerns continued well into her writing of the Manawaka series. Like the essay entitled “Man of Our People,” which takes up the colonization of First Nations in Canada, “The Poem and the Spear” exemplifies Laurence’s anti-imperial stance. Laurence expresses her concern not only with the history of the colonization of the Métis in Canada, but also with the ongoing subordination of indigenous people.

Stovel’s edition makes available Laurence’s major essays and foregrounds them as both personal and political. While reading Laurence’s essays in *Heart of a Stranger*, one realizes how relevant they are to today’s world. The voice of Laurence, like the voice of Gabriel, indeed has something to tell us today: about the importance of ending the exploitation of peoples; about the importance of cross-cultural understanding; about the importance of anti-imperialist practice. The voice of Laurence is also an individual one—a voice that depicts the position of a Canadian woman traveler who is acutely aware of her privileged position in foreign lands. The text is a valuable contribution to Laurence’s corpus of work, and it is significant that it is in print once again.

W. J. Leatherbarrow, ed.
The Cambridge Companion to Dostoevskii
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Pp. xvi+244. \$65.00 \$23.99
Reviewed by Allan Reid

There is a great deal of justification and rationalization in W. J. Leatherbarrow’s introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Dostoevskii*. He spends several pages arguing for the need for such a “companion,” and for the relevance of Dostoevskii. There are references to comments about Dostoevskii’s