

industrialized mass society and conveying a picture of working-class life in the big cities of the Weimar Republic.

The novel starts out with Franz Biberkopf being released from prison and returning to his fellows in the Alexanderplatz area: His reaction at the prison gate—only hesitantly does he step away from the safe gate out into the city and its many streets—indicates his fear of not being able to stay out of trouble in the future; yet, he is determined to return to his working-class neighborhood and never again get in trouble with the law. This is what the book is all about: the constant struggle and being overwhelmed by fate. Biberkopf's good intentions are boycotted again and again, and in over six hundred pages the reader experiences how fate tosses "our man" around. At the end the author tells us that "the old world must crumble" and that while "for one the road goes straight, for another it goes to the side" (635). Franz Biberkopf tries very hard to lead a decent life, yet he stumbles again and again in a scary, dangerous, and rapidly changing world that seems to be determined by fate, which tyrannizes Biberkopf.

At the end of the novel, Doebelin comments on Biberkopf's destiny and the society in which he lives. His story is embedded in a modern, hectic society that overwhelms and dominates people whose only choice is to trudge along. The novel provides the reader with a deep insight into life in the mass society of the Weimar Republic.

Margaret Laurence

Long Drums and Cannons: Nigerian Dramatists and Novelists, 1952–1966

ed. Nora Foster Stovel

Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001. Pp. lxiii+270. \$29.95

Reviewed by Laura Strong Davis

Margaret Laurence's *Long Drums and Cannons* is an important book of criticism that takes up the work of Nigerian writers such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and John Pepper Clark. As Douglas Killam and Nora Foster Stovel explain in their forward and introduction to the new edition, respectively, *Long Drums and Cannons* is the first full-length study of Nigerian literature. As such, it seeks to demonstrate, as Laurence herself puts it in the preface to her work, "that Nigerian prose writing in English has now reached a point where it must be recognized as a significant part of world literature" (13). The book was first published in 1968, but at that time it did not sell out and was rarely reviewed. Focus on its publication was, perhaps, overtaken by the eruption of the Nigerian civil war. In a note written in January of 1968 and added to her preface for the book, Laurence states that Nigerian writing might "provide some clues to the present tragic situation" (13). She also points to the cruel irony that

the title of the book was taken from a poem written by Christopher Okigbo, a Nigerian writer who was killed in the war (13). In light of this note, the book clearly must be read in the historical context of having been produced during a significant and tragic time in Nigerian history.

The new edition of *Long Drums and Cannons* makes available a thorough introduction to Nigerian literature and places the text in historical context. In addition, it provides those interested in the writing of Margaret Laurence with an important work that has been out of print for over thirty years. Significantly, the new edition is a scholarly one that includes not only Laurence's original text, but also important essays on topics relevant to it. The foreword by the well-known Africanist scholar Douglas Killam takes up Laurence's interest in Nigerian literature, argues that Laurence was acutely aware of the intersections between literature and politics, and calls Laurence a "forerunner of 'cultural studies'" (viii). The preface by Laurence scholar Christian Riegel points to Laurence's anti-imperialist beliefs, stating that her admirable understanding of Nigerian literature "is a testament to her struggle to break free from the paternalistic attitudes of European imperialism" (xii). Abdul-Rasheed Na'Allah's "Nigerian Literature Then and Now" is an especially commendable addition to the book. Na'Allah praises Laurence's work and argues that "No other book written by a Western author about African literature has surpassed Laurence in returning modern African literature to African culture" (lvii). Importantly, he also discusses the history of Nigerian literature, pointing out how long Nigerian literature in African languages has been in existence and explaining the presence of popular Nigerian written literature such as the Onitsha market pamphlets (lx). Na'Allah's essay offers the reader a larger context through which to understand Laurence's analysis of Nigerian literature in English.

Nora Foster Stovel's thorough introduction to the new edition, "Talking Drums and Dancing Masks," takes up Laurence's African experience and corpus of African writing. Stovel argues that Laurence gained insight into African literature not only through her experiences in Africa but also through her experiences in England. "Residing in England from 1962 to 1972," Stovel states, Laurence was able to take advantage of the cultural opportunities in London" (xxi). Those opportunities included the 1965 Commonwealth Festival where she saw plays by Soyinka and Clark (xxi). Stovel also takes up the publication history of *Long Drums and Cannons*. She explains that the study was only published in England and America, and speculates that the places of publication might have something to do with the fact that the text did not receive the critical attention it deserved. "The critics who reviewed it most enthusiastically," she notes, "were Canadian" (xxiv). Finally, Stovel draws important connections between the aspects of writing Laurence praises in Nigerian literature and aspects of Laurence's own work. This new introduction functions as a guide for understanding not only the text at hand but also the context out of which it and Laurence's other African and Canadian writing comes.

The new edition of *Long Drums and Cannons* is equipped with appendices that are particularly useful for the student reader. Bibliographical and biographical information on the Nigerian writers Laurence discusses provides a useful starting point for those who wish to research such writers further. A history of the civil war in Nigeria and a discussion of the ethnic groups discussed in the text offer a framework through which to better understand Laurence's text. Laurence's text itself, of course, is very well organized and clearly written. Laurence prefaces each section with a brief discussion of the author at hand and then gives a meticulous introduction to and analysis of that author's major texts. She writes from the perspective of a practicing writer rather than a literary critic, focusing on how various authors bring characters to life and are particularly in tune with the rhythms of idiom and speech. Laurence offers the most praise, perhaps, to Chinua Achebe, whom she admired greatly. Achebe, Laurence notes, is "one of the best novelists now writing in any country in the English language" (89). The new edition of *Long Drums and Cannons* is an excellent contribution to Laurence scholarship and an important introduction to Nigerian literature written in English. Scholars of Canadian and African literature alike will benefit from this valuable new text.

Alan D. Hodder and Robert Meagher, eds.

The Epic Voice

Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002. Pp. 157. US \$54.95. US \$15.00

Reviewed by Arnd Bohm

Readers of the *IFR* might raise several questions about *The Epic Voice*. Is it a book? Does it deal with fiction? And does it have anything new to offer? On the first question, there is the editors' suggestion that the anthology is "both a monograph and a veritable 'course-in-a-book'" (1). The main substance of the book are five essays that began as lectures and seminars presented at Hampshire College in the context of an interdisciplinary colloquium offered annually on different topics to students. One can only envy undergraduates fortunate enough to have heard five scholars present cutting-edge research in such an engaging way. Each of the scholars is a recognized authority on the texts they discuss clearly and provocatively: John Maier on *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Robert Alter on the biblical story of David, Stanley Lamborido on *The Odyssey*, Wendy Doniger on *The Ramayana*, and Tomás Ó Cathasaigh on *Táin Bó Cúailnge (The Cattle-Raid of Cooley)*. The selection of texts reflects the needs of the occasion, namely, to introduce undergraduates to key founding texts of the respective cultures, rather than submitting to a rigid genre classification. Not everyone will agree that David is an epic hero comparable to Odysseus or that the cluster of variants gathered around the figure of Gilgamesh constitute one coherent epic. Nevertheless, the notion of an "epic voice" proves convincing. All these texts