

MARGARET LAURENCE: A Celebration

Guest Edited by Clara Thomas

Editorial

Starting to put this issue together was not an easy task for any of us. Like Margaret's river our feelings were flowing both ways; sad in our loss, knowing we wouldn't see her again, but great joy as we realized how many people were happy to help celebrate her life and work.

I've taught Margaret's novels since she first published and her women—Morag, Vanessa, Rachel, Hagar—and especially Stacey—are comfortable friends I've known well. But each time I read the books with a new group of students their response stuns and delights me.

For instance, I read Stacey's story [*The Fire-Dwellers*] with a group of women who are in a bridging class. They are all ages, from many different ethnic backgrounds. They come to school at night in a local library, and put behind them the factory, the kitchen or the office. They get out their book and we share Margaret's work. Most of these women began to read novels as part of the academic requirement that might get them into University—a goal many of them share and that makes them nervous. But once into the story about Stacey they forget the 'requirements' hovering over them. Stacey becomes as real to them as the woman sitting next to them in class. She is their sister, neighbour, friend—in fact she has a nasty way of getting under the skin and becoming a part of themselves. They get angry with her, they berate her, they laugh

with her and some of them even cry over her—especially when she gets too close.

When Margaret was sick we wrote to her telling her how we felt about Stacey—about her bargaining with God and how each of us played that game. So putting this issue of the journal together with this sort of experience behind it gives special meaning to everything that is collected. And we have many, many people to thank for their contributions.

But before I do that I want to say 'Au revoir' to a charter member of our editorial staff. Jeanne Maranda has been with *les cahiers* since our first issue in the Fall of 1978. She has supplied us with the French copy for 29 issues—that's a lot of material. Jeanne has distributed *les cahiers* in Quebec and collected subscriptions at francophone events across the country. So how can we say 'thank you' adequately for such commitment and support? I won't even try—but good luck with your new degree in Women's Studies and your new job as Quebec representative for *Media Watch*. Merci pour tout, bonne chance—à la prochaine fois...

Every issue has a 'fairy godmother', a special person without whom the issue would not exist. Our Guest Editor Clara Thomas was that person for us. Her energy and ideas were difficult to keep up with, but she kept us going. She turned her hand to everything from fund raising, to getting art work and photographs; from

plundering archives to chivvying old friends for new material. And our Literary Editor Maria Jacobs has brought together one of the best collections of fiction and poetry that *CWS/cf* has ever published. A special thanks to our cover artist, Alice Olsen Williams, who lent us three of her beautiful quilts to photograph—and to John Dawson who did the camera work for us; to Ruth Arnold, who lent us a copy of the *Prayer* [which appears on p. 5] that she designed and hand printed [unfortunately, it did not photograph well: we could use only her Star of David illustration]; and, of course, to all our contributors, who responded so positively to our requests for material. Very early on in our preparations for this issue, it became clear that everyone was delighted to share in this celebration of Margaret's life and work. The generous financial support of the Three Guineas Foundation, Anna Porter and Isabel Bassett helped us to make the issue truly celebratory in scope and format.

The staff of *CWS/cf* never get thanked but they are the people who do the day-to-day grind of keeping a journal going. So Liz, Fran, Elaine, Patricia and Michelle: THANKS.

The incredible feature of this issue, for me, is the joy the work itself generated—that's a rare thing. Perhaps she is shedding some of her grace on us fools.

— *Shelagh Wilkinson*