

Rwandan genocide can also contribute to our understanding of Nazi thinking. As Mamdani notes, “[w]e may agree that genocidal violence cannot be understood as rational; yet, we need to understand it as thinkable” (463). Those who think that the Holocaust cannot be understood might ask themselves what theory underlies that assumption. Those who think that what must be said about the Holocaust has already been said will likely change their minds after reading this collection. For, while the “chronology of the major events of the Holocaust” (19) has been established, the “meaning and implications of the events remain open . . . we cannot ‘know’ the Holocaust once and for all” (19). Although Theodor W. Adorno writes, “All post-Auschwitz culture, including its urgent critique, is garbage” (286), we know from other excerpts included here that Adorno’s thinking about “poetry after Auschwitz” changed. *The Holocaust: Theoretical Readings* compels us to recognize that the Holocaust “will accrue diverse and sometimes contradictory meanings, will intersect with non-European and non-Jewish histories, and will be reframed in other intellectual traditions—as in fact has happened all along” (19). As Andreas Huyssen notes, the question “is not whether to forget or to remember, but rather how to remember” (384). How to remember is always a question inflected by theory; how to remember without “slipping into historical relativism” (19) is another.

Adrienne Kertzer

James King. *The Life of Margaret Laurence*. Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 1997. pp. 457. \$34.95 hb.

When biographer James King—author of *William Blake: His Life, The Last Modern: A Life of Herbert Read*, and *Virginia Woolf*—turned his talents to Canadian subjects, beginning with author Margaret Laurence and continuing with publisher Jack McClelland and writer Farley Mowat, some Canadian literature specialists were concerned that King was not qualified to address such a Canadian icon. King pursued his subject with his usual efficiency, however, interviewing friends, relatives, and teachers of Laurence (including her high school English teacher, Mildred Musgrove), even tracking down Barbadian novelist George Lamming, with whom King asserts that Laurence had a brief romance. His list of acknowledgments to “the friends of Margaret Laurence who opened their doors, their memories, and, quite often, their hearts to me” (xiii) reads like a Who’s Who of Canadian letters. The result is a wealth of information invaluable for any student of Laurence’s work and far exceed-

ing what was available in the only preexisting biography: Joan Hind-Smith's useful, but necessarily limited, study, *Three Voices: The Lives of Margaret Laurence, Gabrielle Roy, Frederick Philip Grove* (1975).

This text is a mine of personal information augmented with assiduous research conducted into archives by King and his two able—primarily those at McMaster University, where most of Laurence's manuscripts are housed and where Dr. King is University Professor. These findings include letters to friends, family, and other writers. As we know from the three valuable collections of Laurence's letters published in recent years—John Lennox's *Margaret Laurence-Al Purdy, A Friendship in Letters: Selected Correspondence*, John Lennox and Ruth Panofsky's *Selected Letters of Margaret Laurence and Adele Wiseman*, and J.A. Wainwright's *A Very Large Soul: Selected Letters from Margaret Laurence to Canadian Writers*—compiling archival research on Laurence is no mean feat: Laurence was an inveterate correspondent, writing thousands of letters, especially in later years when her creative well had run dry. In addition, King and his assistants research, and quote from, correspondence between Laurence and other Canadian personages, such as Jack McClelland, Gordon Elliott, and Jane Rule, as well as letters discreetly omitted by the aforementioned editions on the grounds that they intruded on the correspondents' right to privacy.

King's own industry was aided by Laurence's children, who not only approved his manuscript prior to publication, but who also made available to him material never before seen, including her copious notes and drafts for "Dance on the Earth," the last novel that she tried, and failed, to write, and the eight journals that she kept during the last year of her life, right up to the moment of her suicide. All these materials provide King with privileged insight into the author's later life, when she was struggling with degenerating health and diminished capacities, and as her "gift" deserted her and her writing career ground to a halt.

Additional information is made available in appendices, including "Dance on the Earth (the novel)," a note on King's sources, endnotes, and a detailed index. The endnotes are particularly deft: each note is introduced by a tag or phrase that identify sources meticulously, making it useful for Laurence scholars to pursue his sources.

Physically, the book is a delight to handle: it is printed in a legible font on good paper, the text is extremely readable. Punctuated by photographs that help the reader to visualize Laurence and her environs at the time—provided by Laurence's children, daughter Jocelyn and son David, himself a photographer—the book is enjoyable to read. The dust jacket features two images of Laurence: a formal photograph of the author (taken in England in 1964))

looking rather formidable, and an engaging informal snapshot, provided by her children, of a smiling Margaret perched on a rock by the seashore. These photographs frame the two sides of the writer revealed in the autobiography: the author and the woman.

King divides his study into three parts, aptly titled “Peggy,” “Margaret” and “Margaret Laurence”—“from the willowy beauty of Neepawa, to the young, wifely Peggy, to the determined writer, Margaret, and, finally to the stout dowager of Lakefield, Margaret Laurence, the celebrity” (xix). His discussion of her traumatic childhood as Jean Margaret Wemyss, including the death of her mother and father before she was ten years old, is well developed in order to account for the problems experienced by the adult Margaret. King demonstrates considerable insight into the tensions Laurence felt between her conflicting roles as writer and wife, mother and author, as well as the “woman’s struggle to find—and define—herself in a male-centred world” (xx). Subdivided into twenty sequential chapters, punctuated by illuminating illustrations, the narrative follows the author’s life in a chronological fashion, and explores these conflicts in considerable depth.

Although Margaret Laurence was labeled “Canada’s most successful novelist” (434) by Joan Coldwell in *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, King asserts that “We never really knew her” (xviii): “Margaret Laurence was a person of many secrets. . . . but she carefully hid her dark side, in large part because she felt compelled to live up to the expectations of her many devoted admirers” (xxi). King reveals that “dark side”—the “Black Celt,” as Laurence puts it in her memoir (26)—by exploring “the extent of Margaret’s anguish and suffering, of her incredible insecurities, of the many ways in which she punished herself, of the loneliness and isolation in which she dwelt nearly all her life” (xx).

King’s biography forms an interesting contrast with Laurence’s posthumously-published account of her own life, *Dance on the Earth: A Memoir* (1989), a text that King labels “more apologia than autobiography” (xviii). Many reviewers and commentators were disappointed that Laurence left so many *lacunae*—blaming the failure of her marriage to Jack Laurence on a difference of opinion about *The Stone Angel*, for example. King calls the memoir “deliberately evasive” (xviii), and he concerns himself with filling its gaps. One of those gaps includes Laurence’s addictive personality. Although people close to Laurence were aware that she sometimes overindulged in alcohol, especially when, late in her life, her books were attacked by evangelists in what became known simply as “the Controversy,” the public was not fully aware of this fact and was shocked by King’s revelations. Does the reader need or want to know that the novelist labeled “Canada’s most beloved writer” by Clara

Thomas had to be dragged out of a car where she was clawing drunkenly at a friend's husband? On the other hand, King leaves *lacunae* of his own: complete as his account is, it does not offer much information about the living Laurences, particularly the author's husband and children, although he asserts that "Jack Laurence talked to me with great candour" (xiii).

King rightly claims that "The inner world of Margaret Laurence was intense and filled with drama, and her writings are intimately interconnected with her life" (xx). Packed as this biography is with information about Laurence's life, some readers thought it did not include enough information about her works. Although King claims, "In preparing this book, I have read virtually all the critical essays devoted to Laurence" (400), he refers to very few critical essays. He does emphasize, however, that "my readings of Margaret Laurence's writings are essentially my own and are influenced by the information I have gathered to write her life history" (400). He is right, for his reading of Laurence's fiction is that of a biographer rather than a critic. King quotes Laurence's observation to Gordon Elliott, "One's writing is not meant to be bound up with one's life, but only jerks believe this" (xx).

Planned to commemorate, or at least coincide with, the tenth anniversary of Laurence's death on January 5, 1987, King's biography brought back the pain of that loss for many of Laurence's friends and admirers. Labeled "suicide" by King, Laurence's death, from a self-administered overdose of sleeping pills, came as a shock to many. Laurence, diagnosed with terminal cancer in July 1986, met with her old friend Lois Wilson, the former Moderator of the United Church of Canada and later Chancellor of Lakehead University, to plan her funeral service. Dr. Wilson led a public service at Bloor Street United Church in Toronto the day after the private service had been held in Lakefield. As King states, "Few who were in attendance at Lakefield or Toronto realized that Margaret Laurence had chosen to take her own life in the face of terminal cancer" (xviii). Laurence's self-inflicted death on Epiphany Sunday was, however, in Dr. Wilson's own words to me, "an affirmative action." The sensationalism of the "suicide" (which is mentioned even in the blurb on the dust jacket) made headlines—leading Joan Coldwell to add this final sentence to her revised entry for Margaret Laurence in the 1997 edition of *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*. "The life of Margaret Laurence (1997) by James King, reveals Laurence, sick with cancer, preparing to take her own life, which she did" (635)—boosted Knopf of Canada's sales of the book, and inspired numerous interviews with the biographer. In a CBC television interview, Hannah Gartner asked, by way of conclusion, "If you could ask Margaret Laurence one question, what would it be?" King replied, "I would ask her if she could forgive me for writing this book."

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Nora Foster Stovel

Stephen Henighan, *When Words Deny the World: The Reshaping of Canadian Writing*. Erin: Porcupine's Quill, 2002.

Nations no longer seem to have walls, and while some theorists think this a good thing and call it postmodernism, others are less sanguine about the effects of Free Trade agreements and "globalization," a term now rather loosely used for neo-liberal economic policies, and carrying a tinge of paranoia. Stephen Henighan's informed and stimulating essays are polemics in the tradition of George Grant's *Lament for a Nation*. He relates what he reads as the non-appearance of a Great Tradition in the Canadian Novel to the advent of Free Trade and NAFTA, a slide from the historically distinct achievements of high nationalism in the Canadian literature of the 1960s into mere professionalism, the internationalization of the publishing industry, and an elision of the particularities of place and time that make Canada Canadian. This tone of lament in his critical essays is rather surprising because his fiction is about the exploration of Canada's links with Latin America, both as a destination for Canadian travelers and a source of Canadian immigrants.

Henighan's essays share an argument about the novel and nation in Canada as a connecting thread. Growing up as an insider/outsider whose Irish/American family immigrated to the Ottawa valley when he was five (what could be more typically Canadian?), he claims his imagination was gripped by the novel and nourished on foreign language traditions. A child of the Trudeau era, he believed a Canadian was someone who had inherited equally from the English-language and French-language traditions: the Anglo-American tradition, rooted in imperialism did not fit his Canadian experience. The loss of this bilingual consciousness within Canada owing to polarized political debates and legislation could be seen as a more significant loss for the country than the globalizing cultural trends he notes and dislikes. As a student in the United States, Henighan confirmed his Canadian differ-