

caitaires du quartier Rosemont, situé au centre de l'île de Montréal.

L'équation de départ est simple: dans la grande ville de Montréal, plus les personnes sont âgées, plus elles sont locataires, plus elles sont des femmes... très souvent seules et très souvent pauvres. Pour toutes ces raisons, les personnes âgées sont d'une grande vulnérabilité dans leurs désirs et besoins de logement. L'objectif général de l'enquête de Paquin, Aubin et Boivin est de faire ressortir les principaux problèmes de logement des personnes âgées locataires (75 ans et plus) résidant sur le territoire desservi par le Comité Logement Rosemont.

La méthodologie utilisée est celle de l'entrevue avec questionnaire. L'entrevue se déroulait en français seulement. Les auteures reconnaissent que cela les a empêchées d'obtenir un portrait adéquat des conditions de logement des personnes âgées appartenant aux minorités allophones du quartier. Peut-on leur en faire vraiment grief, lorsque l'on sait que l'enquête a été financée à même les maigres ressources d'un projet de développement de l'emploi du Gouvernement du Canada?!

Des 61 répondants de l'enquête, 43 sont des femmes et parmi elles, plus des trois quarts vivent seules et sous le seuil de la pauvreté. Hormis ces données, toutefois, le rapport ne présente ni résultats, ni analyse de la position spécifique des femmes âgées face au logement. Mais ils peuvent être réinterprétés à lumière de la situation de pauvreté et de solitude qui est le lot de la majorité d'entre elles. Ajoutons que même les données d'ordre général, ici, ne sont pas dénuées d'intérêt: nous ne savons encore que peu de chose sur les conditions de logement de nos aînées.

Les résultats de l'enquête sont organisés autour de quatre thèmes centraux. Tout d'abord, on retrouve celui de l'adéquation du lieu physique aux besoins des personnes interrogées. La qualité du logement, sa salubrité, sa sécurité sont examinées, ainsi que les problèmes d'utilisation liés à la perte de mobilité entraînée par le vieillissement. Le second thème est celui des ressources personnelles et collectives dont disposent les personnes âgées: le degré de support naturel disponible, la familiarité du voisinage, les services reçus et désirés par la population-échantillon y sont rapportés et discutés. Le chapitre suivant traite des relations propriétaires/locataires et du poids des coûts de loyer dans le budget de

ces derniers (33 pour cent paient plus de 40 pour cent de leur revenu pour se loger). Enfin, au quatrième chapitre, la population-échantillon est interrogée sur ses déménagements passés et futurs, car l'on sait qu'un environnement familier et stable est un facteur important en regard de la qualité de vie des gens âgés.

Après avoir identifié ainsi les principaux problèmes rencontrés par la population âgée du quartier Rosemont, il est heureux que les auteures aient conservé assez d'énergie pour avancer quelques éléments concrets de solution. Ceux-ci sont empreints d'une volonté de respecter la diversité des désirs et des besoins des personnes âgées, tout en refusant toute intervention à incidence discriminatoire envers cette catégorie de la population, ou qui risquerait de se réaliser au détriment des autres groupes de locataires. Pour ces raisons, les auteures privilégient plutôt un assortiment de mesures à saveur universelle, telles le contrôle des loyers, une protection des locataires contre les manoeuvres spéculatives des "gentrificateurs", l'instauration d'une subvention de type "supplément au loyer" pour les faibles revenus, ainsi que le développement d'adaptations architecturales convenant à la fois aux personnes âgées et aux personnes handicapées (pose de rampes de bain, par exemple, ou encore abaissement des armoires).

De plus, des modifications et améliorations substantielles sont souhaitées au sein des programmes de services de maintien à domicile du Ministère de la santé et des services sociaux, afin de les remettre sur la voie de leur mission initiale: celle de permettre aux personnes âgées de rester, aussi longtemps qu'elles le désirent, chez elles, dans leur quartier, en sécurité. Le rapport se termine sur un appel à la concertation des différents intervenants, gouvernementaux et communautaires... sans oublier les personnes âgées elles-mêmes.

Au-delà des chiffres et des résultats de l'enquête, ce dernier effort de formulation de solutions et de réflexion sur leur implication pratique constitue sans doute le moment le plus intéressant de ce rapport. Par là, les auteures nous rappellent qu'il est de notre devoir de dépasser la production de connaissances pour trouver, enfin *les moyens d'agir*.

Le rapport de Paquin, Aubin et Boivin peut être commandé à l'adresse suivante: Comité Logement Rosemont, 5095 9^{ème} avenue, Montréal, Québec H1Y 2J3.

DANCE ON THE EARTH

Margaret Laurence. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989

Clara Thomas

Standing outside the Longhouse Bookstore on a late October evening, I was taking my brand new copy of *Dance on the Earth* out of its plastic wrapper, my eyes suddenly foggy at seeing it finally, a young Margaret I never knew on its front cover, our familiar Margaret friend on its back. A young man approached me, looked at the book in my hand and said, "It's too bad she's gone." He did not look like a reader: unkempt hair and a lot of it, yesterday's beard, a beaten-up Bluejay cap, decidedly worn jeans. "I saw her once," he said. "She was at a church down the street, I went to hear her." I had been moved to have in my hand at last Margaret's final work, about which she had talked to me so often and with such joy. I was even more moved by the words of the young man, spoken with a respect that was almost awe. Three years after her death her magic is still strong. She was the most beloved woman in our history.

Dance on the Earth is her particular gift to women, to her daughter, her nieces and her friends. Its text is a tribute to her own mother, Verna Simpson Wemyss, to Margaret Simpson Wemyss, the aunt who became her beloved "Mum" and to Jack's mother, Elsie Frye Laurence. It also celebrates her own life and, most importantly,



it communicates her enduring faith in all life and her intense feeling of responsibility for its preservation and enhancing. She talked of the book a good deal while she was writing it, always with joy that she was being given a chance to write what was, in a very real way her "Testament to Women." On the day that she found her title in "Lord of the Dance," a hymn that she particularly loved, she was especially joyful. And on the day, in July of 1986, when she finished her first draft, she was jubilant. A month later, almost to the day, she was in hospital, diagnosed as terminally ill.

As her daughter Jocelyn writes in the Preface, the decision that she should edit the book had already been made; that, too, gave Margaret joy. No one can read that Preface without being moved by Margaret's sheer guts in revising and re-revising during the Fall of 1986. And the contribution of her friend, Joan Johnston, who typed as fast as Margaret could tape, was crucial. *Dance on the Earth* is a team production; as Jocelyn tells, us its final stages had to be done after Margaret's death. She was just about to come to Lakefield in January of 1987 to spend the entire month with her mother in a final editing of the manuscript. Margaret had eagerly anticipated that time of closeness with Jocelyn, but sadly it was not to be. Margaret died on January 7.

Part 1, "Forwards," really a considerable essay, clearly sets forth the book's direction and its subject matter: Alma Lutkenhaus' sculpture, 'Crucified Woman,' "represents the anguish of the ages, the repression, the injustice, the pain that has been inflicted upon women, both physically and emotionally. 'Crucified Woman' also speaks to me of the comfort and help I have known from my mothers and the unconditional love I feel for my own children." With the fiction writer's instinct for the apt background, visually and metaphorically, the text of Part 2, called "Verna Simpson Wemyss," moves immediately into the Simpson kitchen, and Margaret herself, a young child, dragging her new tricycle up the back stairs to show her mother, in bed with the kidney infection that caused her death after only a week's illness.

Verna was the third of the four Simpson girls. Ruby, Margaret, Verna and Velma. Ruby and Velma became nurses, Margaret a teacher; Verna, talented musically,

remained at home, marrying Robert Wemyss after he had returned from World War I and taken up his work in his father's law office. Of necessity, Part 2 is brief because Margaret had only that one memory of her mother and very little additional information. But it gives us family background for both the Simpsons and the Wemyss and most important, a feeling for the Manitoba small town ambience into which she was born and which, decades later, was creatively transformed into Manawaka. It communicates the affection and respect that Margaret felt for all her forebears and memorializes both the love and the loss that Margaret felt throughout her life: "I mourn that



young mother of mine still, and always will. Yet she passed on marvels to me. Humour, music, although my music has been made with words. She danced on the earth in the time that was given to her. Danced laughter, danced youth, danced love, danced hope in a child. She passed on her dance to me."

More than that, in Part 1 Margaret establishes what will be a major technique throughout the memoirs. She, the narrator, is very much present in her text, digressing from her family story at will to write of her own present concerns. When she speaks of her own birth and that of her children, for instance, she moves on to talk of her support of Caral, The Canadian Abortion Rights Action League: "I am pro-choice because there are times when abortion is the least damaging course.... I have never met a woman who has had an abortion flippantly or easily without searching her heart and her soul." When she speaks of her mother's music she moves to a discussion of women's diffi-

culties in combining a profession with marriage and family. The freedom and informality of these digressions heighten an already strong illusion in the text — we hear the sound of Margaret's voice as if she were in conversation with us, moving from subject to subject, sometimes with leisurely ease, sometimes with an urgency born of deep and troubled commitment.

Part 3, "Margaret Simpson Wemyss," centres on the aunt who came home from her teaching job in Calgary to look after Margaret when her mother died. She and Robert Wemyss married a year later. Margaret's brother, Bob, was born in 1933, and Robert died of pneumonia in 1935. The next year grandmother Simpson died and Margaret and her two children moved into the "Big House" with her father. This is the house of Margaret's teenage, familiar to all of her readers through the stories of *A Bird in the House*. Although Grandfather Simpson was just as unyielding and just as frightening to her as was Grandfather Connor to Vanessa, these memoirs are concerned with the minutiae of dailiness, not the drama of fiction; "Perhaps I make this sound as though my childhood years were rife with medieval plague, death, right, left and centre. It wasn't like that at all, of course. I remember a lot of very happy things." The details of playhouse, of reading, of the beginnings of writing, of prized friends, loving relatives and being loved by them — these are the material of the memoirs and these were all woven into the fabric of Margaret's maturing spirit.

Woven into them too are the recurrent motifs with which the book began, her concern for all women and her abhorrence of violence: "I am not by nature a revolutionary but rather a natural-born reformer. I realize that if I had been born a black woman in South Africa, I would feel differently about my passionate belief in non-violence. I have never resolved this and I think I never will. Some of my ambivalence goes back to the seemingly trivial, but to me important, time in my childhood when the boys next door seemed very cruel." Margaret's beloved "Mum" is ostensibly the centre of this section, but in reality the two Margarets are equally foregrounded. Through the years in Nepawa "Mum" brought up her family, looked after her father, cultivated her vital interest in books, and encouraged young Margaret; beside her we see young Mar-

garet growing, rebelling, marrying, travelling, beginning her writing career, and finally coming back with her two young children to care for her "Mum" when she, now living with Aunt Ruby in Victoria, is dealing gallantly with terminal cancer.

Part 4, "Elsie Frye Laurence," commemorates Jack's mother, a writer of fiction herself and always an encouraging influence on Margaret's work. Her first novel, submitted to an English publisher while she was working as a governess in Moscow, was published without her knowledge in 1916, at a time when she had returned to England but was in the throes of emigrating to Canada with her mother and sister. When Margaret and Jack separated in 1962, she was virtually the only one on either side of the family who supported Margaret in her decision — she understood the agonizing triple demands of mother, wife and writer, and had herself contemplated leaving her husband in order to follow her writing vocation. Small wonder that Margaret's gratitude was everlasting, or that her memory inspires a digression on Virginia Woolf and a comparison that comes down staunchly in Elsie Frye Laurence's favour: "Woolf's novels, so immaculate and fastidious in the use of words, are also immaculate and fastidious in ways that most people's lives are not... Elsie was in fact a pioneer in the area of Canadian women's writing, in the area of women writers' needs, although I don't think she ever realized quite the effect her efforts had on the generations to come."

In Part 5, one third of the entire book in length, Margaret gives us her memoir of herself. In an anecdotal, always honest, often funny series of vignettes of her life and times from the birth of her children onwards, we are invited to share in the making of Margaret Laurence, writer and activist. The young girl who had hidden away in the disused stable-loft to write her stories, who had felt so disadvantaged in being female that her first poems were submitted to United College's *Manitoban* under the pseudonym "Steve Lancaster," gradually became the woman whose vocation was so strong that she had to follow it, alone: "Loneliness was an almost constant part of my life, but I had always been a lonely person. The presence of my children meant that, in the deepest sense, loneliness could never be a real threat." There is no self-pity in her ru-

minations, and there is always honesty: "I should add, with gratitude, that in the early years of my children's lives, I didn't have to earn a living. Young mothers today may share parenting more fully, but they also have to contribute to the family income."

The darkness and the light were always very close for Margaret. Laughter and joy came easily to her, but so did acute pain, for her friends as readily as for herself. Her houses gave her much joy, first Elmcot, and she tells something of its development into a wayside inn for travelling Canadians, young and old, then "the Shack" on the Otonabee, and finally the Lakefield house, decorated to her heart's desire and settled into in 1974, and thereafter a focus for her life's varied activities. But she could not rise above and never recovered from the damage that the book-banners did her, though she pays tribute to the wonderful support that was forthcoming each time from hundreds of unknown correspondents as well as from her dear friends. Her last decade was a time of ever increasing activism in the many causes that demanded and received her support, and her memoirs ring, finally, with a statement of faith in the spirit of men and women everywhere that infuses all of her writing.

"Afterwords," the final section, is a kind of scrapbook of poetry that she loved to write for her friends and family on special occasions, but never thought of publishing, and articles that she thought were particularly apt to her central concerns. These pieces she picked with great care, and this part of her memoir was very dear to her as she told me many times. Individually they shine with her intensity of love and conviction; collectively they are a fitting coda to the exceptional life of a woman who had passionate convictions and the courage to live their meaning:

Life has become so dangerous and so complex that it frightens me to know a few fallible, and indeed often ignorant and unimaginative, so-called leaders have it in their power to blow us all to bits.

We do have to keep on, in every way we can, saying, "This must not happen." ... The struggle is not lost. I believe we have to live, as long as we live, in the expectation and hope of changing the world for the better.... And, with all our doubts, with all our flaws, with all our problems, I believe that we will carry on, with God's help.

THE WOMAN AND THE LYRE: Woman Writers in Classical Greece and Rome

Jane McIntosh Snyder. Carbondale and Edwardsville, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989

Johanna H. Stuckey

Ever since the invention of writing around 3000 B.C.E. in ancient Sumer, there must have been women authors. As some scholars suggest, writing may have been invented by a priestess (or priestesses) in a Mesopotamian temple complex. Certainly the Mesopotamian patron of writing was Goddess Nidaba, the scribe of the divine world. And what seems to be the earliest poem ever recorded is a hymn to Goddess Inanna, the work of Enheduanna, a Mesopotamian high priestess. Unfortunately, most female voices from ancient times seem irretrievably lost to us, partly because of the hazards of text transmission and the general depredations of time, but also, as Jane McIntosh Snyder points out, because of "the kinds of prejudicial attitudes to which women writers of any time or place have usually been subjected."

In the *Woman and the Lyre* Snyder pulls together all that we now know about twenty women writers from ancient Greece and Rome. She makes clear that, although we know of others (and there must have been many more), "some cannot really be evaluated because so little of their work has survived." Even the twenty she discusses, Sappho included, are represented at best by "a small portion of what [they] actually wrote" and at worst by nothing but "a reported title or two."

Of the book's six chapters, the first is devoted to Sappho of Lesbos and the second to women poets of fifth-century Greece — Myrtis, Korinna, Praxilla, and Telesilla. The third discusses female poets of Hellenistic Greece — Anyte, Nossis, Moero, and Erinna. The author devotes one chapter to women philosophers of Hellenistic and Roman times — women like Leontion, Hipparchia, Theano, and the great Hypatia — a meagre remainder of sixty-five whose names are known. Another chapter examines women writers in Rome and their successors under Christianity. A concluding chapter treats recurring themes and topics and shows