

One is tempted to address the issue of nuclear weapons directly through one's (in my case) fiction. I find that hard. What I find easier and more possible is to address the issue in writing articles, talks, lectures, and so on. In that way I can address the issue directly. Artists

cannot really write didactic prose in novels. I cannot write novels that preach, but what I can do is to affirm my whole life-view through the characters in my books. I think that in all my writing, a very strong kind of celebration of life itself comes through.

And so it did. Margaret Laurence's celebration of life was an instruction in the ways of peace.

Metta Spencer is a sociology professor at the University of Toronto and Editor of Peace Magazine.

MIRIAM WADDINGTON

A Fable For Everywoman

When she was a child
she killed her mother
and married her father;
later as a young woman
she poisoned her lovers;
was it her fault they died?

Disillusioned with men
she entered a university
and gave herself to books;
gradually the books
piled up and grew tall
against the windows,
they begot children
upon her dwarfs and
hunchbacks and a single
willowy girl with blue eyes.

When she was middle-aged
her waist thickened and
her behind flattened from
sitting so much in libraries,
she began not to sleep well
and to have recurrent nightmares,
she dreamed the willowy one
was poisoning the sherry
or lurking on the balcony
among the disused summer
furniture and dying aloe
plants or else she was waiting
to meet her on the stairs
so she could push her
headlong down.

One day she went downtown
secretly to buy a bus ticket
to Vancouver but when she
got to the bus station all
the good seats were taken;
most of the time she sat beside
bushy-haired seventeen year old
girls and their pale babies
or else men in big black hats
who smelled under the armpits
squeezed in beside her while
lady policeman types overflowed
from their seats in flowered
pants which they washed out
every night in hotel rooms.

The journey to the coast
took longer than she expected
she bought a lot of sandwiches
in Winnipeg and they lasted
most of the way to Regina,
somewhere in Roger's Pass
they sold 7cent coffee
(10 cents if you took sugar)
then the bus went through
Crow's Nest Pass where all
the farmers were picketing
for lower freight rates.

Finally she got to Vancouver;
Gas Town was empty and rainy
and she hadn't really had
any adventures; what can you
expect with Jacques Cartier
dead in France and Captain
Vancouver busy charting Nootka
Sound (not that he was her
type anyway).

She took the ferry to Victoria
and found Emily Carr's boarding
house was under new management
and all her friends were dead
or living in retirement homes;
what was she to do? The best
thing was to go back to her
own city and make guarded peace
with the willowy daughter.

Then she would do her best
to become invisible for the years
that remained to her; she would
haunt the libraries and read all
their books, she would take notes
and do a lot of zexxing, she would
eat her lunches on benches downtown
or at McDonald's where they gave
old women free coffee.

After all her travels
she would end up with this
small wisdom: how to find
warm places and free coffee.