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Laurence divine

Erina Ingrassia

Upon entering a filled-to-capacity Curtis Lecture Hall, Margaret Laurence was neither mobbed nor audibly acknowledged. Her presence seemed as natural as her writing: constant, strong, and enduring.

Sponsored by the York Women's Centre, all proceeds from the reading by Margaret Laurence were contributed towards the True Davidson Collection Fund: a project started to finance additions to York Canadian Literature collection in her honour, so that it may become an important resource centre for Canadian Studies.

Laurence read excerpts from *The Stone Angel* and *The Diviners*.

"Look ahead into the past, and back into the future, until the silence.

How far could anyone see into the river? Not far. Near shore, in the shallows, the water was clear, and there were the clean and broken clamshells of creatures now dead..."

The Diviners

After her readings, Laurence answered questions posed by members of her attentive audience. Hands quivering as she pulled out a cigarette, she recalled the days of the

depression in Neepawa when books just could not be afforded. "I read everything I could find



Bryon Johnson

She referred to her novel *A Bird in the House* as containing many of her childhood experiences in Neepawa.

The issue of censorship in Canadian literature in the education system brought forth a strong negative response from June Callwood, who commented it is a reactionary issue. "Censorship is really a sad thing, and something many people feel strongly about. Really, we can't do anything about the invisible censor."

Laurence's book, *The Diviners*, has been censored from courses in Canadian Secondary Schools since 1973. Visibly upset by the mention of this particular censorship, Laurence shrugged her shoulders in resignation. No appeal can be made to the invisible censor.

Laurence is the founding chairman of the Honourary Writer's Union and a winner of two Governor General awards. However, despite her achievements, there is something distinctly humble in her disposition. When Laurence was asked whether she considered herself to be first a woman, an author, or a nationalist, the audience waited to see if this mystery of her character might be revealed. After a short pause Laurence replied, "I think of myself as a woman from Neepawa, Manitoba."

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