Snow Angels and Monarch Butterflies: Margaret Laurence’s Children’s Fiction

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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, here an excerpt from this article:

Margaret Laurence is so famous for her Manawaka cycle of adult fiction—*The Stone Angel* (1964), *A Jest of God* (1966), *The Fire-Dwellers* (1969), *A Bird in the House* (1970), and *The Diviners* (1974)—that most people who read her work are not aware that she also published four books for children: *Jason’s Quest* in 1970, *Six Darn Cows* and *The Olden Days Coat* in 1979, and *The Christmas Birthday Story* in 1980. Strangely, her four children’s books have been virtually ignored by critics—strangely because her adult fiction is so much studied. Janet Lunn begins her 2001 essay, “To Find Refreshment in Writing Children’s Books: A Note on Margaret Laurence’s Writing for Children,” with this condemnation: “Margaret Laurence wrote four books for children. The only thing that is interesting about them is that she wrote them at all. They might be called a footnote to her adult fiction and criticism, but they are not really even that. They are irrelevant, not only to Laurence’s larger body of work, but to the larger body of literature for children in Canada” (145). I disagree with Lunn’s opinion: not only is Laurence’s children’s fiction relevant to her adult fiction, as I hope to demonstrate here, but it also makes a significant contribution to Canadian children’s literature.

Full Text:

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Jean Margaret Laurence, CC (née Wemyss) (18 July 1926 – 5 January 1987) was a Canadian novelist and short story writer, and is one of the major figures in Canadian literature. She was also a founder of the Writers’ Trust of Canada, a non-profit literary organization that seeks to encourage Canada’s writing community. Margaret Laurence was born Jean Margaret Wemyss in Neepawa, Manitoba, the daughter of solicitor Robert Wemyss and Verna Jean Simpson. She was known as “Peggy” during her childhood.